

***U.S. Department of Education***  
***2021 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program***

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

For Public Schools only: (Check all that apply) [ ] Title I      [X] Charter      [X] Magnet [ ] Choice

Name of Principal Dr Patrick Widhalm  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name Benjamin Franklin Magnet High School  
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 2001 Leon C. Simon Drive  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City New Orleans      State LA      Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 70122-3525

County Orleans

Telephone (504) 286-2600      Fax \_\_\_\_\_

Web site/URL https://www.bfhsla.org/      E-mail pwidhalm@bfhsla.org

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent\* Dr Henderson Lewis      E-mail henderson\_lewis@nolapublicschools.com  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Advocates for Academic Excellence in Education Tel. (504) 286-2600

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board  
President/Chairperson Ms Alea Cot  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

The original signed cover sheet only should be converted to a PDF file and uploaded via the online portal.

*\*Non-public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, leave blank.*

## **PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION**

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The electronic signature on the first page of this application (cover page) certify that each of the statements below, concerning the school’s eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education and National Blue Ribbon Schools requirements, are true and correct.

1. All nominated public schools must meet the state’s performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
2. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2021 in order to meet all eligibility requirements. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
3. The school configuration must include one or more of grades K-12. Schools located on the same campus (physical location and mailing address) must apply as an entire school (i.e. K-8; 6-12; K-12 school). Two (or more) schools located on separate campuses, must apply individually even if they have the same principal. A single school located on multiple campuses with one principal must apply as an entire school.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2015 and grades participating in statewide assessments must have been part of the school for at least the three years prior to September 2019.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 or 2020.
6. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. If irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state, the U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school’s application and/or rescind a school’s award.
7. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as “persistently dangerous” within the last two years.
8. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
9. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
10. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district, as a whole, has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution’s equal protection clause.
11. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

## PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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Data should be provided for the current school year (2020-2021) unless otherwise stated.

**DISTRICT** (Question 1 is not applicable to non-public schools.)

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 0 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 0 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 0 High schools
  - 1 K-12 schools
- 1 TOTAL

**SCHOOL** (To be completed by all schools. Only include demographic data for the nominated school, not the district.)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located. If unsure, refer to NCES database for correct category: <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/> (Find your school and check “Locale”)

- Urban (city or town)
- Suburban
- Rural

3. Number of students as of October 1, 2020 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent at the school. Include all students enrolled, in-person, participating in a hybrid model, or online only. If online schooling or other COVID-19 school issues make this difficult to obtain, provide the most accurate and up-to-date information available:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	0	0	0
1	0	0	0
2	0	0	0
3	0	0	0
4	0	0	0
5	0	0	0
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	114	149	263
10	101	155	256
11	101	145	246
12 or higher	100	153	253
<b>Total Students</b>	416	602	1018

\*Schools that house PreK programs should count preschool students **only** if the school administration is responsible for the program.

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 0.6 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 19.7 % Asian
  - 29.6 % Black or African American
  - 8.3 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0.1 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 35.3 % White
  - 6.4 % Two or more races
  - 100 % Total**

(Only these seven standard categories should be used to report the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.)

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2019 - 2020 school year: 1%

If the mobility rate is above 15%, please explain:

This rate should be calculated using the grid below. The answer to (6) is the mobility rate.

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	0
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	11
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	11
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	997
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.01
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	1

6. Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 0 %  
0 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 30 %

Total number students who qualify: 308

8. Students receiving special education services: 1 %

14 Total number of students served

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional conditions. All students receiving special education services should be reflected in the table below. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <u>1</u> Autism                  | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>1</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>4</u> Other Health Impaired                 |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>0</u> Specific Learning Disability          |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>6</u> Speech or Language Impairment         |
| <u>1</u> Hearing Impairment      | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>0</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>1</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 5

10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to the nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below. If your current staffing structure has shifted due to COVID-19 impacts and you are uncertain or unable to determine FTEs, provide an estimate.

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	21
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	57
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	1
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	0
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	8

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 18:1

12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

<b>Required Information</b>	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016
Daily student attendance	98%	99%	99%	98%	98%
High school graduation rate	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

13. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**

Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2020.

<b>Post-Secondary Status</b>	
Graduating class size	241
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	99%
Enrolled in a community college	0%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	0%
Joined the military or other public service	0%
Other	1%

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.

Yes  No

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award. 2015

15. In a couple of sentences, provide the school’s mission or vision statement.

The mission of Benjamin Franklin High School is to prepare students of high academic achievement to be successful in life.

16. Briefly describe how your school has been operating during the current 2020-2021 school year (e.g., open as usual, online only, a hybrid model, etc.)? If different grade levels in your building operate in different ways, include this. If the school began with one model and switched to another partially through the year, include this as well.

We began the year with virtual only instruction. In mid-October, students / parents had the option of coming to campus two days per week in order to receive instructional support from faculty, and to interact with other students. (All students continued to receive virtual instruction three days per week.) About 35% of the students opted for this hybrid model. Because of the post holiday surge in COVID cases, we joined other schools in the city starting virtual only in January. In mid-February, we again opened the hybrid option, and again about 35% of the students chose this option. Students / parents were given another opportunity to make the choice between virtual only and hybrid for the weeks between the end of Spring Break and the end of the semester. Approximately 60% are choosing hybrid will increase for this final six weeks.

17. **For public schools only**, if the school is a magnet, charter, or choice school, explain how students are chosen to attend.

Students may apply to enter Franklin as 9th, 10th, or 11th graders. No student is accepted for only their senior year. Once a student applies and submits three proofs of residency in the parish (county), they are schedule for a Saturday admissions test. The reading, language, and math portions of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills are administered. Students earn up to 30 points for each area based on their nationally-normed percentile. The student's current GPA is also worth up to 30 points. Admission is offered to any rising 9th or 10th grader who scores 88 total points or higher, and to any rising 11th graders who scores 108 points or higher. Tests are offered between October and March, and students who do not make sufficient points from

their first test are offered a second test opportunity. All students who score the minimum points are invited to enroll the following year. Because Franklin is on a college campus that has excess classrooms, we can lease additional classrooms and there is no lottery for seats. In the past ten years, the enrollment has increased from 658 to 1018.

## **PART III - SUMMARY**

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By several measures, Franklin has the most diverse student body in the City of New Orleans. This goes beyond demographic data and even into a family's neighborhood. For the past several years, we have students enrolled from every ZIP code in the city. However, from these many areas and backgrounds come one school community. Students unify around the challenging curriculum and rigor. They experience Franklin as a place not just to gain the academic skills and credentials to secure college admission, but also the personal skills necessary to continue success on a college campus. Club involvement is a vital component of the school's culture. There are more than 60 student-led clubs that allow students to build a network, develop leadership skills, and learn by advancing the club's purpose. As one would expect, there is a wide variety of club opportunities, but among them are Black Culture Club, Chinese Culture Club, East Asia Dance Club, German Club, French Club, Hispanic Culture Club, Jewish Culture Club, Middle Eastern Culture Club, South Asian Student Association, Turkish Club, and Urban Culture Step Club.

It is important to listen to students. In a 2015 strategic plan developed by the school's governing board, student stress was identified as a primary concern, along with the related issues of mental wellness and academic dishonesty. In the fall of 2016, an impromptu student forum brought to light a common source of stress: inconsistency among teachers, especially in the same subject area, of workload and communication. Additional meetings with students and teachers led to the development of a Homework Policy that provided clear guidelines around the purpose of homework. This policy became part of the student handbook, so that it is clear throughout the school community. Students can, and do, raise concerns about violations to the administration. Since then, the administration has been meeting as often as quarterly with the 16-member Student Council to hear and address a variety of issues and ideas. Policy changes have resulted from these meetings, including a new dress code policy that mitigates opportunities for bias. Another example is the modifications made two years ago in the graduation requirement of an individual research project. These projects had been in addition to a student's normal course load, and of course, teacher mentors were working outside of their normal load. All research had to be science-based. With the change, "research intensive" courses have been created in each department, including social studies, English, and arts. Students still complete individual research, but it is in the context of a course. A lower student enrollment cap recognizes the added work of teachers. Students may also enroll in Research in Science or Research in Social Science, which focus on necessary elements for successful research.

Since 2016, there has been a strategic focus on issues around systemic racism, bias, marginalization, and discrimination. Students have organized forums to discuss such topics, and part of the professional development plan for each year has included training. (The next step in this is teacher training on developing culturally competent curricula.) This year, a full-time Director of Human Resources and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion was added to the administrative staff, and in addition to providing her own input to teachers, staff, and students, she has organized a student DEI workgroup and manages complaints or concerns brought to her. Learning, and teaching, must take place in an environment that is safe and equitable for all races, ethnicities, and identities.

In another section of this application, instructional modifications resulting from COVID are presented. We also recognize the social loss that virtual learning has brought. Therefore, from the beginning of the year, we have encouraged the importance of clubs. Clubs have continued activity via Zoom. A virtual Club Fair early in the year introduced students, especially new students, to the wide array of clubs. Juniors and seniors prepared the videos and made very effective "pitches" for joining. After mid-October, clubs were offered the opportunity to meet on campus, following all safety protocols. Several service clubs, robotics, and the Society of Women Engineers did. In designing the return to on campus learning two days a week this semester, an extended lunch period was created. On nice weather days, this becomes another time when clubs can meet and students can socialize in several outdoor areas. (In bad weather, we divide the students on campus into two groups for indoor lunch.) When schools were closed last March, we volunteered our school as a "community feeding site" so that the cafeteria could prepare take-out meals for students on Free or Reduced Lunch. This has continued in this school year, and our cafeteria offers a free lunch to any student or teacher who requests it. We also allowed the athletic teams to practice and have limited competition, following regulations set by the Louisiana High School Athletic Association and a trainer from



the Ochsner Sports Medicine program at each practice and game. Volleyball, boys' and girls' soccer, and boys' and girls' basketball all made it to the state playoffs, and there was only one case of COVID transmission reported. One final example is from an initiative from the Student Council. While the school recognizes the academic, artistic, athletic, and service accomplishments of students, the Student Council came up with a way to recognize everyday "acts of kindness." Teachers and staff are encouraged to give a student "shout out" when they see a student do something to help another student. Monthly, a list of student "shout outs" is shared, and from the group, ten are randomly selected to receive a prize bag, which includes an Amazon gift card. This will certainly continue post-COVID.

Being a National Blue Ribbon School in past years is part of our messaging to potential students and families. We recognize that it is the highest honors a school can earn. To again be considered is an opportunity for us to see how we measure up to the high expectations of the U.S. Department of Education. We also celebrate being named a 2019 ESEA School of Distinction for our results in educational equity. We were also one of the first schools to earn the National Green Ribbon.

## **PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

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### **1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.**

The curriculum of Benjamin Franklin High School includes honors, gifted and Advanced Placement courses. All students must successfully complete four year of English, science, mathematics, and social studies, as well as three years of foreign language. Development of abstract reasoning and problem-solving skills are achieved through class discussion, technology-based activities, and performances and presentations, in addition to traditional teacher-centered instruction.

The English Department strives to create a genuine love of language through interaction with a variety of texts. All teachers incorporate a variety of authors, perspectives, and genres in the reading. Students develop an authentic writing style along with the ability to use rhetorical techniques effectively. We rely heavily on discussion formats and presentations to encourage connectivity and holistic thinking. All early course work, whether honors or gifted, is designed to prepare students for AP English Language and Composition as well as AP English Literature and Composition. Electives include Publications (Newspaper and Yearbook), African American Studies Research, and Creative Writing; students in Creative Writing produce the Riverbend Review, our award-winning literary magazine. This year, somewhat in response to the restrictions from COVID-19, and under the direction of a new Creative Writing teacher, several new web-based outlets were developed for student writing, artwork, and personal expression. These will continue, even as restrictions are lifted. English teachers also supervise student tutors in our Writing Lab; this year, the virtual Writing Lab specifically focused on giving seniors feedback and assistance with the college application essay writing process.

The Mathematics Department curriculum enhances and develops computational proficiency, problem-solving techniques, critical-thinking skills, and a conceptual understanding of the language and science of mathematics, through individualized instruction and a carefully coordinated sequential curriculum. Throughout all math courses, students are asked to engage with the material in multiple ways, including situational modeling and collaborative challenge-based learning. Students are instructed on technology aides including graphing calculators, modeling software, and data analysis tools. In addition to the core curriculum, students can explore many aspects of STEM through various electives in Computer Science, Engineering, and Statistics. Additionally, for advanced students who complete Calculus, we offer Linear Algebra and Differential Equations. Students can further expand their course choices by taking courses at the University of New Orleans campus. Many of these new course offerings are a direct result of our goal to meet students' passions and educational desires. All of our programs are supported by Math Lab, our student run peer tutoring center.

The Science Department makes extensive use of laboratory facilities and state-of-the-art technology. Local experts and university facilities are utilized to pursue research goals. A bridge is built between science and mathematics through statistical data analysis, computer applications, and quantitative explanations for natural phenomena. Recently, the science curriculum sequence was changed to Physics, Chemistry, Biology, and a science elective. Elective options include Climate and Meteorology, AP Biology, AP Chemistry, AP Environmental Science, and AP Physics C: Mechanics. All ninth graders take Physics using inquiry-based learning.

Social studies courses, including a diverse offering of AP history classes, broaden student understanding of themselves, their society, and the world in which they live. Students explore our past and present in a developmental sequence that prepares them to be creative, active participants in the social dynamics of their time. Along with the English teachers, social studies teachers are evaluating their course design and content in order to ensure cultural competency. All social studies courses require research and integrate current events into curricular materials, often relying on primary source materials. Elective social studies courses are expanding and currently include AP Micro and Macro Economics, Psychology, Sociology, Twentieth Century History Honors, Russian History Honors, Greek and Roman History Honors, Women's Studies, Introduction to Philosophy, Ethics, History of American Music, and Independent Research & Analysis. All students are encouraged to take the AP exam at the end of the course including ninth graders taking AP Human Geography.

Two years ago, the graduation requirement of an Individual Research Project was modified. Recognizing the fact that these projects required both students and teachers to work outside of and in addition to the regular course load, research was moved into the expectations of specifically designed classes. It was also recognized that research should not just be in the sciences but also the social sciences. There are now “research intensive” courses in each core curriculum area. These classes are capped at 16 in order to recognize the additional mentoring done by teachers. Students may also enroll in Research in Science or Research in Social Science to learn general research skills and to complete their projects. Many students compete in the local science fair with several each year moving further in the state, national, and even international science fairs. These competitions provide students with opportunities to do original research as well as national recognition, awards, and scholarship dollars.

All teachers use pre- and post-tests to track student improvement in their classes and evaluate changes to curriculum. School-level analysis of ACT, PSAT, LEAP and AP tests are compiled annually to reflect on school course sequencing, curriculum, teaching assignments, and best practices in instruction.

The change to virtual learning brought on by the pandemic resulted in a significant change to the delivery of courses. For a number of years, the school has used a Modified Block schedule with four periods each day and course instruction alternating on “A and B Days.” This was especially advantageous for Advanced Placement classes, with instruction all year culminating in the May exams. In planning for the 2020-2021 school year, it was determined that a 4x4 Block schedule, in which students take four classes each semester rather than eight year-long, would be preferable because it would help students maintain focus and likely minimize the added stress from all of the societal changes brought on by COVID-19. Teachers are already scheduling spring AP review sessions for those students who had an AP course in the fall.

Because all high schools in our district began the year all-virtual, the instructional design provided Zoom instruction with the teacher and class on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Tuesday and Thursday were designed as “work days” when students independently completed projects, labs, and other assignments. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, faculty were available for office hours.

In mid-October, high schools were expected to offer at least two days of on-campus instruction, and a hybrid model was created and offered. Only about 35% of the students opted for the hybrid model. In order to maintain consistent and equitable instruction for all students, faculty continued to provide primary instruction in Zoom classes on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Students who opted for all-virtual continued to work on asynchronous assignments on Tuesday and Thursday. Those students who opted for hybrid came to the campus for added support in the material being taught via Zoom with their teachers or a proctor.

#### **1a. For secondary schools (middle and/or high school grades):**

Benjamin Franklin High School has built its college prep curriculum through the successful teaching of Advanced Placement courses. On average, 557 students take 1,033 tests each May, with at least 82% earning a score of 3, 4, or 5. Currently, there are 28 AP courses, with AP levels available in each department, except P.E. Dual Enrollment courses are offered in math, social studies, and visual arts through the University of New Orleans, and a new partnership for awarding articulated credits is in the works with University of Holy Cross, also in New Orleans. This is the second year for us to participate in STEM Pathways with Louisiana State University. There is more information about the STEM Pathways program in Section 2, Other Curriculum Areas.

Students also are able to participate in nationally normed programs, such as First Robotics and the Society of Women Engineers. Last year’s robotics team qualified for the World Competition, with their sights set there again this year. The Student to Scientist program was designed by two seniors three years ago and is now funded by a local foundation to recognize and encourage high school females in Louisiana and Mississippi. The top prize is a \$40,000 scholarship for graduate work in the sciences. All three of these student-led organizations have active outreach programs for area middle schools.

## **1b. For schools that offer preschool for three- and/or four-year old students:**

### **2. Other Curriculum Areas:**

The arts engage the imagination, foster flexible ways of thinking, develop disciplined effort, build self-confidence, and instill respect for other cultures. They enrich our students' lives through self-expression and study of world art. One credit of fine arts is required for graduation, but many students pursue multiple years of the discipline. Choices include AP Art History, AP Studio Art, Talented in Art and Theatre, Studio Art, Media Arts (with a dual enrollment option), Instrumental Music (band and orchestra), AP Music Theory, and Music in Media.

Physical Education/Health includes activities in volleyball, basketball, golf, hockey, physical/motor fitness, cabbage ball, soccer, and track and field. Level III and IV are for student-athletes and include weight training in addition to practice in their specialized sport(s). All students take health, a separate semester-long class that focuses on wellness through exercise, weight control, nutrition, cardiorespiratory conditioning, basic physiology, stress control, and making healthy choices in and out of school.

The World Language Department offers four years of instruction in Chinese, French, German, Latin, and Spanish. Courses develop listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills, using both traditional and online learning tools. Students in Advanced Placement French, Latin, Spanish, and German also study literature in its original language. Global learning with travel to many parts of the world and student exchange programs are now options for all students. Three credits must be earned in foreign language, two of which must be in the same language.

LSU STEM Pathways Certification provides our students with the opportunity to enroll in a progression of up to eight standards-based STEM courses in order to attain industry credentials, an LSU certificate, and/or dual enrollment credit. The instruction model is project- and inquiry- based, and our faculty are trained by LSU to deliver the content. There are four pathways: Biomedical Sciences, Computing, Digital Media and Arts, and Pre-engineering.

In many of these courses, learning prior to the pandemic already involved online and computer- based tools, and teachers have collaborated and learned new tools to ensure effective virtual instruction. P.E. teachers have found success by having students keep fitness logs and using fitness goals as a way to help students cope with stress by having time each day for outdoor activity. Zoom classes introduce new fitness concepts, such as Tabata, and then allow students to practice the skills and movements in their rooms. The teachers also have included meditation and stress-reduction exercises at the start of the Zoom class.

### **3. Academic Supports:**

Recognition by the Louisiana Department of Education as the Top Equity Honoree high school each year since initiating the data analysis as part of School Performance Scores is an endorsement of the work done by faculty and students. The data used for this distinction measures student growth on the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) from eighth grade to 11th grade. Assessments are in English, Algebra I, Geometry, Biology, and U.S. History. Each year, our ninth grade class represents 60 or more different public, parochial, and private middle schools in the city, so we consider being named a Top Equity Honoree as one validation of the work done to bring students to a common platform for academic success.

Ninth Grade Seminar is one significant component of that success. Now in its third year, Ninth Grade Seminar is a pass/fail course to which all ninth grade students are assigned. The class meets for 20 to 30 minutes with the teacher, working from a common curriculum that teaches self-management and study skills, stresses the importance of making good choices, acquaints new students with campus resources and personnel, and provides an extended orientation to campus life.

The remaining 60 minutes of the class time is used as a study hall. However, the seminar teacher will call individual students to their desk and review the student's progress or struggle in their any classes. Two years ago, students who scored in the lower quartile of the admissions test (Iowa Test of Basic Skills) in the math portion were grouped together in seminars. A math teacher was assigned to that seminar and could use the study period of the class to reinforce concepts with which students were struggling. This year, the same process was applied for students who scored low on the ELA portion of the Iowa Test.

The school has long had a strong peer-tutoring program that pairs seniors and juniors who were particularly successful in a subject area with students who can benefit from one-on-one tutoring. These tutoring sessions are on campus and in the close vicinity of a teacher or staff member. When the restrictions of COVID-19 moved all instruction to virtual, four teachers in the science department created a Zoom-based tutoring program targeted to ninth grade students in physics. These tutors were trained in using online teaching tools and were monitored in their Zoom tutoring sessions. On-campus math and writing labs provide a place for tutors, with teacher monitoring, to provide assistance throughout the day. This too has adapted to the virtual setting.

The school also provided a subscription to Paper, an online 24/7 tutoring service with a commitment to academic equity and success. It has been well-received by the students who use it.

The school has provided Chromebooks and hotspots to students without personal technology or internet access for the past five years. When the school moved to virtual instruction, faculty and staff worked with our IT Department to make sure all students had the technology, access, and IT support they needed to succeed in the virtual classroom. We also have given students the option of coming to the campus to access their Zoom classes. This not only provides students with reliable internet access and a quiet place in which to work, but also it has also helped some parents by providing supervision during the day. When a student was falling behind in their work, the student's counselor added this offer to their list of supports available.

The school employs a full-time Special Education Coordinator and a 504 Coordinator. They manage the requests, demonstrated needs, and accommodations for Individual Education Plans and Individual Assistance Plans. In Louisiana, Gifted and Talented Services are considered a part of SPED. Each year, we test and identify approximately 25% of our new students as qualifying for Gifted and Talented Services. As stated earlier, Gifted and Talented is one of the course tracks in the curriculum.

As part of the use of assessments and proper placement for academic success, entering students can place into levels of math or foreign language beyond Geometry and Algebra I or a level I language. This also helps if a student brings a level I credit from eighth grade but may not be prepared for what is in level II. Retaking a level I math or foreign language can provide a better foundation for later success.

Finally, through the school's development office, we have provided direct financial support, school supplies, and meals for approximately 200 of our families. This kind of support existed prior to the pandemic, but the economic challenges for families during this pandemic have resulted in a significant increase in ways to assist.

## **PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE**

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### **1. Engaging Students:**

Students and parents typically chose Franklin for their high school experience because of the quality and depth of the curriculum and instruction and for college preparation. The school's reputation is also an advantage for college admissions. Students enroll from almost every public K-8 school in the city, and each year, approximately 28% of new students enroll from private and parochial schools. By just a few months into their "Franklin experience," students and parents begin to talk about the social and emotional growth that comes from being in such a diverse community with opportunities that meet students where their interests lie. This is accomplished through more than 60 student-led clubs that range from interest groups and academic clubs, to service clubs and competition clubs. Athletics and the arts, beyond the curriculum, are also key to the school community. There are open-call theater productions, including musicals, and open online digital publications for creative wiring and visual art. The Student Council, with four officers from each class, has become a student advocacy council, and meets quarterly with the administration to present concerns and ideas gathered in forums and surveys.

School closure was met with an equal amount of brainstorming, planning, and evaluating for engaging the student community and for enhancing student learning. In August, each club used Flipgrid to create a virtual club fair. While Google Classrooms have been used by clubs in the past as a way to communicate with their members, the clubs' Google Classrooms took on greater functionality as a way to keep members informed and connected. Parent communication highlighted club opportunities under articles about keeping their child engaged.

As we are now in a less-restrictive environment, the Student Council and school's activities coordinator are working on ways to hold milestone events for juniors and seniors in a safe yet meaningful way. Last year, the Class of 2020 had a "drive-through graduation." Students and families drove through a parking lot, greeted by many faculty and staff, and received their diplomas through their car windows while their accolades were read. Some families made the most of it by decorating cars and having multiple cars in their procession.

In developing the Zoom instructional plan, teachers use breakout rooms and group projects to help students connect with each other and build relationships. The school's four counselors have actively contacted and worked with students. As always, counselors monitor grades and have set virtual meetings with students to address concerns. Assemblies for juniors, seniors, and their parents to discuss the college application process and financing have been replaced by webinars and Zoom meetings with students. The social worker sends mental health surveys to all students and works with or assigns students to grade-level counselors when a need for support is expressed. Through a partnership with the counseling center of a local university, students as well as faculty have had access to mental health support, free of charge. Meetings with 504 and IDEA students have continued, via Zoom, and in some cases, an addendum for services in the virtual setting has been provided.

### **2. Engaging Families and Community:**

At three points from the initial school closure through this year, the administration has held webinars for parents. The discussions included the instructional plan, safety protocols, and support for their children. Two of these webinars preceded times in September and December when parents were given the choice of their child staying all-virtual or changing to the hybrid model in order to discuss the plans and respond to questions. Emails also have been used multiple times to share information, and the school maintains this information, along with Frequently Asked Questions, on its website.

For the past several years, there has been little interest in a traditional parents' organization. However, this year, two parents have stepped up and worked with the school to create well-attended Zoom meetings. Topics have ranged from what new parents need to know to opportunities for creative outlets throughout the city. (Perhaps the convenience of Zoom is a key to meetings in the future.) A parent representative also was

elected to the school's governing board. A parent advisory board for Special Education has been formed.

Because New Orleans is now a district of all charter schools, there have been special challenges and opportunities for district leaders. At one point, weekly meetings were set by the district in order to encourage information and sharing. These meetings included school leaders, chief financial officers, and nurses. Franklin is a member of the National Consortium of Secondary STEM School and has benefited from their monthly "Consortium Connects" meetings that allow members of our administration to talk with counterparts in schools nationwide. On March 25 and 26, we were able to participate in the NCSSS Student Mental Health and Wellness Seminars, which included a Franklin student on a panel discussion.

Through our school's grants writer, we have benefited from Donors Choose and other grants that have allowed us to have additional technology for Zoom teaching, extra Chromebooks and hotspots as students needed, and even school supplies and a food pantry to assist our families. Alumni, parents, and friends also donated more than \$64,000 this year to purchase supplies and pantry items. In all, we have directly assisted 200 families. We also received a grant from a local family foundation that allows students, parents, and staff to receive free counseling. They are providing mental health webinars for the school community and will be providing a mental health counseling intern next year.

### **3. Creating Professional Culture:**

When the decision was to close schools on March 13, 2020, we delayed the start of virtual learning by one week in order to give faculty the opportunity to transition their semester's remaining content to virtual learning, as well as to deal with personal matters. In June and July, department chairs were hired to meet weekly and further refine content and delivery. It was also determined that the school would change from Modified Block scheduling to traditional Block scheduling. In Modified Block, a teacher would have six different courses and a planning period each day. Switching to Block schedule reduced teachers' course loads, including grading, to three courses and a planning period each day.

Professional development included the school's four-year plan for implementing a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion plan, but regular "Give One - Get One" Zoom meetings allowed teachers to share what they were learning about teaching on a virtual platform. The administration also set "office hours" when teachers could drop in to ask questions, from procedural to pedagogical. Four administrators also visited teachers' Zoom classes, both for formal observations and for drop-in feedback.

When the option was made in mid-October to allow students on campus two days per week, we as an administration decided to keep new instructional content limited to the three days of Zoom instruction and for the two days of on-campus learning to be instructional support. This not only kept teachers in one set of lesson plans but also avoided creating a two-track system for student learning. (The majority of students chose to remain in virtual instruction.) Teachers with any of the CDC-approved underlying conditions were provided with the accommodation of both instruction and support being virtual. If teachers did not have technology to teach from home, it was provided. This included laptops, hotspots, and document cameras. The school also purchased licenses for virtual labs.

Two years ago, a program was begun to recognize department and school-wide Teachers of the Year. This program will continue, in spite of the pandemic perhaps in even more recognition of their work. Last year, teachers were able to apply for Advancement Awards, which will also continue. One award is given for \$5,000 and up to five awards are given at \$1,000 each.

### **4. School Leadership:**

The role of the administration is to meet all aspects of the school's performance, accountability, and resource allocation that leads to maximizing student learning and achievement, especially through the work of teachers and staff. There is a Head of School who works closely with seven directors: Academic Assistant Principal; Operations Assistant Principal; Chief Financial Officer; Director of Human Resources and Diversity, Equity, Inclusion; Director of Admissions; and Director of Development. An Academic Advancement Coordinator and SPED Coordinator play key roles, as well. There is a Leadership Team

made up of eight department chairs, the union president, and two at-large teachers that meets every other week.

Each of these individuals is essential in developing all of the COVID-related plans and actions, from instructional plans and evaluations to safety and wellness. Among the school-specific policies that have developed during COVID are a modification to the Retention Policy that sets requirements for students to remain at the school; optional testing for students at the end of each semester; a policy around work-from-home; implementation of federal relief policies; and implementation of changes in Department of Education policies.

## **5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:**

The work of understanding and achieving equity and cultural competency began three years ago with teacher and staff training on systemic racism and has progressed each year. Two years ago, the focus was on understanding bias, and this year it has been on learning how to recognize and address personal bias in instruction and interactions. This year, a Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion was added to the administration. This resulted in a DEI policy and process whereby students or adults could report policy violations; it has done a great deal to affirm the school's commitment. The DEI Director works with a student workgroup and provides weekly messages to faculty and staff. We also developed and are actuating a DEI Action Plan.

Both English and social studies began the year with modifications in the curriculum and supporting material in order to reflect a more inclusive and culturally diverse content. Last month, a curriculum trainer worked with the Science Department to explain how these principles work in non-humanities areas. In June, faculty are being invited, and paid, to participate in a two-day workshop on cultural competency in all levels of all curricula.

There is also a goal of having the diversity among teachers reflect the diversity of the student body. A change in the hiring process has made some progress, along with a partnership with a local Historically Black University to bring interns from their education program into our classrooms.

The school supports student activism in March for Our Lives, Black Lives Matter, and environmental issues.

Recently, the school was identified by the district / charter authorizer as a facility named for an individual who violated one of their new policy criteria not to name a building after a slave owner, confederate official, or segregationist. They are currently reviewing whether or not Benjamin Franklin's name will be allowed to stay on our district-owned facility. The school's governing board will consider its own process in the April meeting on using Benjamin Franklin's name as our charter name. We are encouraging alumni, current students, families, faculty, and staff to provide input both to the district in its work to determine a facility/ building name and to our board in its consideration of our charter name. As one would expect, there are diverse viewpoints. However, the administration considers this as a very visible and dramatic way to deal with the vestiges of enslavement, racism, and white supremacy in the City of New Orleans.



## **PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

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When the governor announced on March 13, 2020, that schools would shift to virtual instruction in response to the COVID pandemic, we knew we needed to bring our Leadership Team, composed of department chairs and administrators, together to draft a plan that would be practical, flexible, and effective for our community.

As we started planning for the 2020-2021 school year, we again knew that we needed teachers to guide the decisions we made as a school, so during the summer we hired department chairs to develop, question, review, and explore possibilities for virtual learning. At the forefront of these discussions was the need for equity and consistency, and based on those two needs, we drafted an instructional plan that provided synchronous Zoom direct instruction three days a week with two days each week slated as asynchronous work days when students could complete assignments, practice skills, develop projects, and take assessments in order to reinforce and evaluate learning objectives. where students completed assignments, practiced skills, developed projects, and took assessments in order to reinforce and evaluate learning objectives.

When the option of allowing students to return to campus became available in mid-October, our Leadership Team again decided that maintaining consistency in a way that gave all students equal access to instruction was the best decision we could make for all students. We rejected the idea that students in a classroom could receive instruction while those who were required to stay virtual “tuned in” and passively participated. We rejected the idea that running concurrent classrooms was reasonable for teachers or effective for students. Instead, we maintained our model of holding Zoom classes three days a week and offered additional support and enrichment for students who chose to come to campus two days a week. Additionally, we offered students who did not have reliable internet or appropriate learning conditions the option of spending five days a week on campus, and our student support staff has extended this invitation to students who have demonstrated academic or emotional concerns throughout the year.

In prioritizing synchronous Zoom instruction three days a week for all students, we recognized the need for continuous professional development to strengthen our faculty’s virtual instruction. We held monthly “Bring One - Get One” professional development sessions, where teachers would bring an instructional strategy that was working, share their experience with the group, and leave with an instructional strategy to try. These collaborative sessions equipped faculty with new tools while also providing a sense of community. Our administration also piloted a coaching model when observing teachers this year to prioritize growth instead of using a scoring system to rate a static lesson.

We believe that the commitment to Zoom instruction, while no replacement for “normal,” has provided the most consistent and equitable learning opportunities for all students.