

***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) [X] Title I [ ] Charter [X] Magnet [ ] Choice

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

Official School Name North Houston Early College High School  
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 8001 Fulton Street Building C  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Houston State TX Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 77022-8501

County Harris County

Telephone (713) 696-6168 Fax (713) 696-6172

Web site/URL https://www.houstonisd.org/nhechs E-mail sbrooks3@houstonisd.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\* Mr. Millard House II E-mail superintendent@houstonisd.org  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Houston Independent School District Tel. (713) 556-6000

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. Patricia Allen  
(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.)

- Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
  - 189 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 43 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 51 High schools
  - 6 K-12 schools

289 TOTAL

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

- 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

- 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	56	61	117
10	47	79	126
11	58	77	135
12 or higher	50	57	107
<b>Total Students</b>	211	274	485

\*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 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 0.4 % Asian
  - 9.7 % Black or African American
  - 88.9 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 0.8 % White
  - 0.2 % 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	4
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	4
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	486
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	<.01
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	<1

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

Spanish, Arabic, Swahili, Vietnamese

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 14 %  
68 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 87 %

Total number students who qualify: 422

8. Students receiving special education services: 2 %  
9 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>0</u> Autism                  | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>0</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>0</u> Hearing Impairment      | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>1</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 1
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	4
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	23
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	0
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	5
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	3

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 21:1

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%	98%	98%	98%	97%
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	114
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	53%
Enrolled in a community college	12%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	8%
Found employment	15%
Joined the military or other public service	0%
Other	12%

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.

It is the North Houston Early College High School mission to deliver the highest quality educational experience by maintaining a college culture within a diverse, supportive, public high school.

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.

NHECHS began the 2020-2021 school year with a 100 percent virtual model for student learning during the first six weeks’ cycle. At the beginning of the second cycle, in mid-October, teachers worked on campus, and students opted for either virtual or in - person learning. As a result, NHECHS operated with a concurrent instructional model. Because of the need to align the high school schedule with that of the higher education partner, Houston Community College, NHECHS maintained an A/B, 90-minute block schedule with periods 1-4 on Mondays and Wednesdays, and periods 5-8 on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Each Monday – Thursday class is synchronous for 45 minutes and asynchronous for 45 minutes, allowing for small group instruction, tiered interventions, and student self-paced learning. On Fridays, students attend all 8 classes for a 40-minute block and one hour of asynchronous time at the end of the day for advocacy, one-on-one support, small group interventions, or schoolwide celebrations.

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

NHECHS is a Houston Independent School District magnet school. Families apply to the campus by a Phase I deadline, designated by the district, and are chosen through a lottery system. NHECHS is charged to ensure that the qualified and district applications received by Phase I are entered into the magnet lottery. Recruitment efforts target at-risk students, second language learners, and first-generation college-goers. English Learners (EL) and students of low socioeconomic status (SES) are given priority in the lottery

system to ensure equitable opportunity is afforded students who would benefit most from an early college program. Applicants with a sibling at NHECHS are also given priority selection.

## **PART III - SUMMARY**

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North Houston Early College High School (NHECHS) has been embedded in the Northline community and has remained a vital partner with the Houston Community College (HCC) system since the school's inception in 2008. The surrounding community of the campus consists of an interesting dichotomy of higher education, better living aspirations and poverty among a predominate population of Latinos (approximately 75%) followed by African Americans (approximately 19%) in the 77022 zip code. Aspirations of a better life are visible among the immediate surroundings of the school. There are burgeoning retail locations nearby, improving opportunities for employment. Many students work in these establishments, especially since the beginnings of the COVID-19 crisis, from the Walmart Supercenter, fast food restaurants, and franchise retailers to small businesses nearby. The HCC-Northline campus, on which NHECHS sits, serves as an academic hub and resource center for its area residents. College classes are available days, evenings, and weekends to accommodate the working families who require flexibility. Also, many adults, some of whom are parents to NHECHS students, take classes to earn their General Education Diploma (GED), improve their technology skills, hone their second language acquisition of English, and/or earn a certificate to increase their ability to meet competitive hiring demands.

The challenges of poverty are evident when one sees the Metro Train Station traffic alongside NHECHS and HCC, which transports some of the city's most vulnerable groups, specifically, homeless and mentally ill individuals. As a result, many parents opt to drive their children to school or allow them to ride the bus, ensuring their safety as they are dropped off immediately at the school's entrance. NHECHS opens its doors early to provide a safe space inside the building for students and maintains security upon their daily dismissal. Despite the challenges associated with low and compromised income, first-generation college participation, English learner (EL) representation, and social-emotional wellbeing due to COVID-19, the school and the community at large remain committed to NHECHS students' completion of both a high school diploma and an associate degree or up to two years of college credit during their high school tenure.

Even through two transitions in principal leadership since 2016, the resolve of NHECHS families and community stakeholders does not waiver. They continually support the goals to maintain high academic performance, low staff turnover, and commitment to the tenets of an early college high school. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, over 60 percent of the class of 2020 earned core completion (42 credit hours) or higher, supporting the principle that academic rigor, a supportive blended high school/college environment, combined with the opportunity to save time and money, can motivate high school students to work hard and ultimately overcome barriers to college success. Also, following the 2015 recognition as a National Blue Ribbon School, more doors opened for NHECHS. One year following the designation, a beautiful, three-story school building on the college campus was erected, thanks to the persistence of the community, from civic organizations to parents of students who attended NHECHS at the time. Middle school parents and counselors began to advocate for students early in the school year for information on the lottery and enrollment process at NHECHS. Though the building remains surrounded by a heavy transient, homeless population, and humble living conditions, the reputation as a top performing school attracts underserved families, new community partners, and offers of internship opportunities to NHECHS scholars.

NHECHS serves an increased number of families from a lower SES that still maintains a rich sense of pride, tradition, and family. Many students persevere despite challenges resulting from the pandemic and their family dynamic. Several have immigrant parents, are immigrants themselves, and have had to work to improve their English language proficiency and family living conditions. Students strive to balance academic imperatives and support to their household.

The unanticipated increase in student responsibilities poses academic and emotional challenges for many. Students who prefer to learn at school must remain at home and learn virtually while caring for siblings. They complete schooling for the day then leave for work. Consequently, they usually cannot attend afterschool and/or Saturday tutorials. Others have suffered as a result of the social isolation from their peers, causing NHECHS to have to increase its response to student needs with immediacy and urgency. The overall challenges associated with isolation from peers, disturbance to routines, increase in responsibility, and adjustments to new learning platforms have also led to increases in student requests for psychological



services. These needs are addressed through the campus social worker and referred counseling services.

Regarding the educational programming and its impact on students, NHECHS still offers a pathway to college success through advanced high school curricula, college course work and ongoing support from both institutions. Students can complete up to 60 hours of college credit courses while earning their Distinguished Level of Achievement high school diploma. This year, students could not physically attend classes or have in-person access to support services at the community college campus. Nonetheless, college instruction and support remain available through internal staff who serve dual credit teaching roles and online college libraries, tutoring, guidance, and tech services. Students have adapted and become highly tech savvy in order to adjust as the primary tool for learning is digital. NHECHS remains aware, however, of the fatigue associated with countless hours of computer use and the students' need to disconnect from technology and reconnect with peers periodically. Regular conversations with students and initiated calls/emails from parents help response teams (i.e., social worker, nurse, dean of students, etc.) meet the social and emotional needs as quickly as possible. Students recognize how much their NHECHS family cares for them, so fortunately, they and their parents are comfortable with reaching out to the supportive individuals and systems in place for the benefit of the whole student.

Notwithstanding the challenges mentioned, NHECHS remains committed to its Red Hawk traditions and standards. The annual Rose Ceremony, a student-led celebration that welcomes new students and honors faculty and staff, was still held this year. Freshman Orientation occurred virtually to acclimate new students to the NHECHS campus and overall academic program. Seniors attended their "sunrise" ceremony and initiated a big brother/sister mentorship for freshmen. To keep a sense of normalcy, NHECHS students continue to participate in monthly, virtual celebrations of student and staff achievements. Upperclassmen have been the leaders to uphold these traditions which preserve the sense of family. Notably, NHECHS students understand and value activities such as the aforementioned; therefore, they are relentless in being those who take ownership in keeping such practices alive.

Within the concurrent model of instruction, in-person and virtual, NHECHS applies the early college gold standard strategies, the Common Instructional Framework (CIF), content and language objectives and checks for understanding (CFU) to ensure mastery and address student misunderstandings in real time. Within the lesson cycle, teachers use classroom talk to provide space for students to articulate their thinking and develop the skill of justifying responses. Classroom talk allows for effective scaffolding, questioning, collaborative grouping and literacy groups. In addition, schoolwide, students engage in writing to learn, a strategy which provides students practice with organizing their thoughts and developing their college-level writing skills. Content and language objectives were introduced this year to support the increased EL population. The content objectives articulate what students learn; language objectives specify how students learn using one or more means of communication. The language objectives support the CIF strategies and provide extra focus on English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS). Lastly, teachers use high-impact e-tools and discussions on the virtual platform as a means to quickly determine student learning and correct misunderstandings in real time. With the abovementioned strategies, students improve critical thinking, academic discourse, and masterful writing skills.

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

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

The NHECHS core curriculum aligns with the standards of Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), Pre-Advanced Placement (PAP), and Advanced Placement (AP) requirements to support students' ability to successfully navigate dual credit course work at both the early college and HCC. Students begin taking core Pre AP and AP courses and elective dual credit courses as early as the first semester of 9th grade. Also, at the beginning of each school year, teachers complete a standards-based pacing calendar for each course and prepare the semester final assessment. The practice of identifying the curriculum, creating the assessment in advance, aligning and pacing instruction exists, so NHECHS teachers can strategically plan their lessons, and students can work toward mastery of the intended standards each semester.

The accelerated English program offers Pre AP English I, Pre AP English II, dual credit English 1301/1302, English 2322/2323 and Business English. The curriculum was chosen to accelerate learning, close gaps in background knowledge, and better prepare students for college-level work, scholarship essay-writing, and career-based, technical writing. Student foundational knowledge and skills in English are ascertained beginning with freshmen orientation. Incoming freshmen are exposed to college level texts and provided persuasive writing prompts to practice for the TSI exam. Teachers instruct students in the writing process, effective writing strategies, and provide feedback on student mastery in reading, text analysis, and persuasive writing. Anecdotal data, diagnostic scores from TSI and the district level BOY reading test are gathered and triangulated to determine gaps and ensure appropriate scheduling.

In recent years, data indicate more student challenges with reading; therefore, struggling readers are scheduled into a reading course and their core Pre AP English class. Course enrollment is also differentiated among the upper grades as needed. Upperclassmen who do not pass the TSI or equivalent assessment after repeated attempts are enrolled into English and Reading. They also receive interventions at least twice per week with the reading teacher for targeted practice in the college-level English language standards not yet mastered. Furthermore, after-school tutorials, tiered or small group instruction during class, and Saturday academic boot camps are available to those who require additional targeted support. Conversely, students who excel in English/Language Arts are enrolled early into college humanities courses and take freshman and sophomore college English classes taught by dual credit instructors at the upper grades. The goal remains that all students are successful in college English. Some simply require extra support to develop those skills.

The math curriculum accelerates learning and prepares students for the challenge of rigorous college-level course work. Incoming freshmen are first given the TSI assessment to determine eligibility for college-level math. The TSI, district BOY math test, and teacher-based math BOY are triangulated to determine placement into double-blocked math courses. Each year, an increasing number of incoming freshmen meet TSI math requirements and pass Algebra I. They and rising sophomores who have passed Algebra I and met the STAAR Algebra I EOC or TSI math eligibility score are scheduled into Pre AP Algebra II and Pre AP Geometry. The second semester, they are enrolled in College Algebra (Math 1314) which serves as a dual credit equivalent to the second semester of Pre AP Algebra II.

Those who have not taken Algebra I and demonstrate gaps in middle school math skills are scheduled into Pre AP Algebra I and Strategic Math, an intervention course that provides students more time to practice and hone their math skills through teacher support and a self-paced instructional software program. Those who meet the minimum TSI eligibility standard are only enrolled in a college level math course following completion of Algebra I. The core and support classes still reinforce foundational knowledge through CIF strategies and use of academic language. Additionally, students are required to maintain interactive notebooks and apply effective notetaking skills (i.e., Cornell, two-column or three-column notes) to better understand the content, write example problems, and communicate one's thinking process.

After successfully completing Pre AP Algebra II, scholars are scheduled into one or more of the following advanced classes: Pre-Calculus, Math 1316/2412 (dual credit Pre-Calculus), AP Calculus AB, AP Statistics. For those who struggle with advanced math curricula, teachers require participation in after-school tutorials

and differentiated, tiered group instruction during class. Prior to TSI retesting on a scheduled Saturday, students participate in TSI bootcamp practice the week of their test. The scholars who achieve high levels of mastery are encouraged to take additional college math courses and follow the Associate of Science degree plan, especially if courses align with their career interests.

The sequence of science courses is as follows: Pre AP Biology (9th or 10th); Pre AP Chemistry (10th or 11th); Pre AP Physics or AP Physics 1; a variety of advanced science course options for a fourth and/or fifth year of science. Student who arrive in 9th grade to NHECHS having completed Biology are enrolled in Chemistry. The advanced science options for high school courses are Anatomy and Physiology or Environmental Systems. Students who are not interested in science but who are completing their associate degree plan usually take one high school science and opt to take a non-science major course at HCC such as Biology 1308/1309 or Astronomy 1303/1304. Most scholars who are interested in completing the Associate of Science choose two of the following options from HCC: Biology 1406/1407; Astronomy 1403/1404 (lab-based); Chemistry 1411/1412. Those who possess limited interest in science classes are encouraged to complete the science course for non-science majors and one lab-based course which is required for completion of an Associate of Arts or an Associate of Science. All courses with the number four as the second digit are lab-based. Usually up to twenty-five students may enroll in lab-based courses; however, due to the pandemic, a compulsory capacity limit of nine per lab remains, placing a strain on the master schedule. Nonetheless, NHECHS students are still able to complete an associate degree by enrolling in and successfully completing the Astronomy 1403/1404 course work online. Students who complete 5 high school credits of math or science also receive a STEM endorsement on their high school transcript.

The sequence of social studies courses is as follows: AP Human Geography (9th); AP World History (10th); History 1301/1302 or AP U.S. History (11th); Government and Economics and dual credit Government and Economics at HCC (12th). The curriculum was chosen to provide early exposure to advanced informational texts, build background knowledge on global topics, prepare the students humanities-based college classes, and support responsible citizenship. The advanced level U.S. History courses also prepare students for meets or masters level achievement on the STAAR U.S. History EOC exam. Those who struggle with the breadth and depth of the content and academic language receive assistance through after-school tutorials and differentiated instruction in class. Scholars who excel in advanced-level social studies are encouraged to enroll their junior year in Government and/or Economics or the summer before their senior year.

So that students have the opportunity to earn college credit beyond the dual credit courses, NHECHS administers the AP exam to each student enrolled in an AP course.

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

To undergird NHECHS college-preparation and college readiness programming, NHECHS uses student data, backwards planning, and placement of students in Pre AP, AP and dual credit courses, leading scholars to successful matriculation in high school and completing up to the first two years of college course work. Upon admission, district-wide and campus-designed pre-assessments, and the results of the TSI college readiness exam, used by the higher education partner, HCC, are triangulated to determine student academic strengths and weaknesses. NHECHS uses these data points and the students' chosen high school endorsement to ensure appropriate scheduling into their high school and college classes. Additionally, students at all levels who have not met college readiness standards are periodically assessed in their tutorials, interventions, and remediation classes. Timely adjustments to instruction and/or supports are made according to receipt of mastery data from a variety of baseline and formative assessments.

The core classes in the NHECHS course catalog are strategically chosen to develop, as noted by David T. Conley, the key cognitive strategies, content knowledge, and academic behaviors for college readiness. Students are challenged regularly to read, write, speak, listen to peers, and think critically in all classes. Teachers use, at minimum, three CIF strategies daily, and, as a result, students become more adept at synthesizing information, embedding well-crafted rhetorical devices, and making assertions using valid evidence to support claims. In addition, the curriculum is carefully sequenced, building on and developing the discipline literacy skills of students who have struggled with academic language. As a result, the curriculum, course selections, and application of highly effective strategies have increased students' ability

to engage in academic discourse and publish works that meet post-secondary standards. Also, efforts of the academic program at NHECHS support increases in student knowledge, grit, and interpersonal communication, all essential skills that yield success in both college and career.

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

**2. Other Curriculum Areas:**

Fine Arts

To fulfill graduation requirements, students take one year of a fine arts course. NHECHS Fine Arts program consists of one area - vocal music. The following classes are offered: beginning choir, men's choir, women's choir, advanced choir, music theory, and voice, open to all grade levels. The vocal music curricula are aligned with the TEKS standards and provide opportunities for students to learn the fundamentals of music literacy (in beginning choir) and demonstrate mastery through performance and competition. More than 25 percent of the study body participates in choir classes each school year. To meet the fine arts elective requirement for an associate degree, students are also scheduled in a freshman-level Arts 1301 class at HCC. Approximately 90 percent of the students complete at least one dual credit art class.

Physical Education/Health

One credit of Physical Education (PE) and .5 credit of Health are required for high school graduation; therefore, 100 percent of students complete the minimum requirements. The PE classes offered at NHECHS consist of PE Foundations, Adventure/Outdoor Education, and Athletics. Both PE and Health are aligned with the TEKS and aim to encourage students to adopt a lifestyle of personal fitness and maintain lifelong healthy habits. The health course also includes the following content that supports becoming a health-literate adult: nutrition, hygiene, mindfulness, COVID-19, sex education, and responsible decision-making. Underclassmen who meet TSI reading and writing qualifying scores are scheduled in a dual credit health class (KINE 1304) to satisfy the graduation requirements for a high school diploma and the associate degree.

As a small campus, NHECHS has one PE/Health teacher, yet students remain interested in PE classes after completion of the required courses. Approximately 30 percent of the student body enrolls in PE classes each year. Students may opt to participate at their zoned school in ROTC, band, and organized sports to fulfill the PE requirements and personal interests.

Technology

NHECHS offers the following technology courses in Business Management and Administration: Business Information Systems (BUSIM), Principles of Business, Marketing, Entrepreneurship I and II. All classes are TEKS-aligned. Freshmen take Principles of Business and Marketing as their first dual credit classes; however, each technology class is open to all grade levels. Upon successful completion of BUSIM, students can earn a Microsoft Office Specialist certificate for mastery of Microsoft Excel, PowerPoint, and Word programs. Mostly 10th and 11th grade students participate in the TEKS-aligned Entrepreneurship courses. Students engage in project-based learning and conduct digital presentations of their work, applying soft skills that are highly sought by employers.

In the fall of 2020, NHECHS adopted a new career and technology pathway: Government and Public Administration, which has gained momentum in student interest due to the current national and global political climate. Students explore the foundations of governmental functions at the local, state, national and international levels and career opportunities within the states and abroad. They also participate in Model United Nations competitions and global social action projects. In the first year, 33 percent of the student body is enrolled in the first course sequence, Principles of Government.

Additionally, students from all grades who express an interest in computer science are scheduled into AP

Computer Science Principles. The course syllabus, as with all AP courses, is College Board (CB)-approved, which verifies the curriculum meets the post-secondary standards. Those with a continued interest may take other technology courses at the college.

### Languages Other Than English (LOTE)

The LOTE courses offered at NHECHS are Spanish I and II, Native Speakers I and II, and AP or dual credit Spanish for Native Speakers. The AP course is usually taken after completion of Spanish I and II or Native Speakers I and II. All classes are aligned with the TEKS standards. Spanish I and II support the basics of second language acquisition and the knowledge of culture for non-native speakers. Further in-depth study and literacy development occur in the advanced classes. The courses are open to all students in all grade levels. High school completion requirements include two years of the same foreign language, thus; all students take one or more classes of Spanish on campus.

Non-native speakers are enrolled in Spanish I in 9th grade and continue with Spanish II in the 10th grade. Because of campus demographics, many have already met their LOTE requirements for high school graduation in middle school and have taken the AP Spanish Language and Culture exam. Those who earn a 3 or higher on their AP Spanish exam can transfer up to 8 elective college credits to their college transcript.

### 3. Academic Supports:

NHECHS teachers employ various instructional strategies and supports based on student learning or academic behavior gaps, academic regression due to COVID-19, and/or other barriers to academic success. Schoolwide, NHECHS implements the following: high-yield, CIF strategies in all classes, content and language objectives, content support for special populations, extra time, college-readiness support, and use of common digital tools to assess student mastery and make timely adjustments to instruction. Also, all teachers offer extra time through tutorials after school once or twice weekly, late hour tutorials for working students, and Saturday boot camps to help students meet TSI baseline scores for eligibility to take college classes, recover credit, prepare for AP exams, and/or master TEKS as determined by assessment data. Achievement gaps, however, observed in special populations have required more specialized instruction and intervention.

Multiple layers of support during instruction are provided to special student groups who are struggling and who fall behind campus-wide scores on state assessments. Students who receive Section 504, Special Education, Limited English Proficiency (LEP), or Intervention Assistance Team (IAT) services are allotted extra time, resources, supplemental aids, and/or notetaking assistance as recommended by the Admissions Review and Dismissal (ARD), Section 504, IAT committees. In addition, students identified as struggling readers are double-blocked in Pre AP English and Reading as early as freshman year. Those in need of early math intervention are supported through Pre AP Algebra I and Strategic Math. Students with the intellectual acumen who lack the academic habits are supported to complete learning tasks in their advocacy classes and study labs.

When state assessment data revealed EL students continued to perform at a gap of 10 or more percentage points lower than their general population peers in English, it was determined that EL students required more time and opportunities to articulate their ideas in written and spoken form. Ninth and 10th grade teachers concentrated instructional efforts and interventions to the following: relentless writing to learn, assessing essay writing bi-weekly, and targeting EL students to engage in more classroom talk with peers and in small group instructional settings. In 2020-2021, teachers continue this practice and incorporate content and language objectives in lesson plan implementation, improving students' ability to further develop mastery of ELPS across content in speaking and writing. These strategies, applied with fidelity, increase student mastery of content knowledge and language proficiency.

Advocacy class also serves to help students demonstrate the academic behaviors and skills of a successful college student. Mid-day, each Monday through Thursday, lessons are facilitated by the advocacy teacher or designated student leaders so advisees practice goal setting, organization, note taking, studying, transcript auditing, college/scholarship application preparation, preparation for the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT) and the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), essay writing, and time management. Teachers scaffold time management by reviewing with students their weekly assignments. During advocacy time, students also navigate Naviance, a web-based college and career readiness program that connects student interests and strengths to post-secondary goals and career exploration. This year, due to virtual learning, advocacy teachers also schedule individual virtual conferences to maintain connections and gauge student progress.

Lastly, technology has been essential to supporting student success this year. Students are issued their own laptop, and teachers use common digital tools such as Pear Deck, Go Formative, Flip Grid, and HISD's Its Learning platform ("The Hub") so students quickly learn the digital resources and submit assignments without being overwhelmed by an overabundance of programs to navigate.

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

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

A common theme at NHECHS is the word family. Family denotes one of the most precious units a group of people can be a part of, and student success is attributed to the attention to the affective element of education, not just academics. The NHECHS family exists because of years of investment in building relationships, fostering a sense of trust, affirming students, and continuing a relentless pursuit of success for all. NHECHS students experience a sense of safety and belonging which they might not otherwise experience at a comprehensive school.

The NHECHS family environment promotes student academic, social, and emotional development. Students' mental and physical wellbeing are prioritized. Many have experienced increased anxiety, tremendous loss, and financial insecurity. The social worker and dean of students field referrals and are on site to provide timely social services and access to one-on-one or group counseling for students in crisis. Teachers provide both challenge and support to students to help them navigate their classes successfully and take advantage of interventions. Students access multiple avenues to reach out to faculty and staff: phone, email, in-person visits, Remind, online direct messaging. Allowing various modes of communication lessens barriers to student support. Students are also given opportunities to voice concerns and pitch ideas to peers and the school leadership. They work collaboratively with faculty to propose, promote, and implement plans that enrich the campus culture. Teachers model patience and positive interpersonal communication. As a result, students learn effective teamwork, conflict resolution strategies. Also, at NHECHS, the incidence of student disciplinary problems remains significantly low.

To serve the school and greater North Houston area, students volunteer often, tutoring peers and nearby elementary students, supporting community garden projects, donating blood, translating, giving away books, and working at area food distribution centers. This work allows students to develop empathy, improve their sense of self-worth, strengthen their social skills, and recognize the inherent value of all individuals.

Regular celebrations of student achievement are upheld. Administrators and staff make student-of-the-month surprise, socially distanced visits to the home of the celebrated student. NHECHS instituted student shout-outs, not only for high achieving students, but also for those who exhibit perseverance and resilience. Students, in turn, share their own shout-outs as part of the monthly virtual celebrations, to display their appreciation for the adults on campus. Modeling positive communication in the school microcosm proves helpful to improve students' sense of pride and appreciation of global citizenship.

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

The area of greatest concern to NHECHS parents during the pandemic is communication. In order to maintain confidence in NHECHS program, parents expect proactive and regular communication as information is funneled to the campus. Regular, outgoing communication to parents and community partners is shared primarily by the Title I parent engagement representative (PER) and the principal to ensure a consistent set of "point persons." To exercise transparency, NHECHS shares the school improvement plan and data, district information, important calendar items, school accomplishments, instructional and COVID-19 case updates via videoconferences, timely School Messenger callouts, mass emails and texts. All communication is provided in English and Spanish, and interpreters are readily available to translate when needed. The principal and PER facilitate regularly scheduled virtual meetings, allowing parents and community partners to stay informed and share feedback. Advocacy teachers also reach out to parents for matters unique to their student. Parents and students are shown how to navigate logging into high school and college information systems to monitor grades. The instructional technology team has posted the NHECHS master schedule with instant hyperlinks to classes, eliminating student struggles to log into their classes. By sharing these resources, parents are equipped to best support their child in the remote environment. Numerous house calls are also made for wellness checks and delivery of laptops, chargers and hot spots for students who need internet service.

Parents are partners at NHECHS. Some are members of local civic clubs, NHECHS Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), Site Based Decision Making Committee (SDMC), and Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC). Participation in the latter two committees is directly involved with making educational decisions to positively impact student achievement. Also, a parent, higher education representative, and business partner serve on the SDMC, meeting quarterly to stay abreast of campus needs, monitor progress towards school improvement goals (i.e., TSI, SAT, STAAR, attendance), and bring creative ideas to further support the school through financing scholarships, supporting academic programming, mentoring, or networking. The higher education representative works with the Dean of Students on master scheduling and outreach for academic/social-emotional support. As a result of ongoing and effective communication, student attendance has remained high for daily instruction (over 98 percent) and all testing administrations (over 95 percent).

The community partnerships are also essential. NHECHS leadership engages in the following to ensure a positive impact on students and school culture: hosting live and virtual community events (i.e., Halliburton Virtual STEM Conference for Girls, Young Men's Leadership Summit), partnering with a young girls' STEM non-profit organization to support and mentor at-risk youth, and soliciting tokens of appreciation (gift cards, treats) for teachers. Due to parent and community satisfaction with partnering efforts, NHECHS proudly shares its accomplishment of being named a Platinum Certified Family-Friendly School.

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

The professional culture at NHECHS is observed within a well-structured organizational system and commitment to high quality professional development. Each individual and department function is aligned to the school mission and vision. The responsibilities of every staff member are clearly defined at the beginning of the year and communicated to all stakeholders to ensure internal accountability, high productivity, and professionalism. An important protocol followed is one in which NHECHS faculty and staff respond to correspondence within 24 - 48 hours. Responsiveness to stakeholders communicates high quality customer service.

For early college faculty, professional development is formatted for internal and external teacher training. Teachers meet for approximately 90 minutes weekly during common planning time for grade level or content area professional learning community (PLC) meetings, facilitated by the dean of instruction and PLC leader. This time is allocated to reinforce quality instruction and augment teacher efficacy. Throughout the year, the PLC teams hone their craft as they address student needs, use structured conversations through National School Reform Faculty protocols, and participate in peer instructional rounds. The premise of these practices is that teachers, given clarity of purpose and the appropriate support, are equipped to make instructional decisions that benefit students.

External training is required of math, science, and AP teachers. AP teachers must submit a comprehensive syllabus for College Board approval and complete yearly trainings hosted by HISD and Rice University. Teachers of math and science participate in trainings led by the National Math and Science Initiative (NMSI). To safeguard the school's mission to provide the highest quality educational experience, NHECHS persists in focusing on rigorous instruction and teacher training.

Professional development is also improved by collaboration with other HISD early college partners. This year, due to the pandemic, the ECHS Collaborative PD days were removed; however, ECHS teachers and staff continue to reach out to one another regularly as all are faced with new experiences. This grassroots approach shows how invested faculty and staff are in continuous improvement.

Support staff training and teamwork contribute to the professional culture. Staff members attend skill-enhancing trainings, and the division of labor is clearly defined. A customer service approach is upheld, as staff understands that providing quality service to all stakeholders contributes to an exemplary school reputation and positive student outcomes.

Lastly, affective needs of the staff are met. The leadership team communicates weekly with faculty and staff on pertinent topics, maintains an open-door policy, circulates surveys, covers classes as needed, celebrates



faculty/staff-of-the-month, provides extra time for planning, and adheres to HISD protocols to keep NHECHS employees safe. Professional achievements of staff are recognized at scheduled staff meetings, on principal's weekly email notifications, and captured on video montages shared monthly.

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

The principal is the campus leader at NHECHS. She works closely with the leadership team consisting of a dean of instruction, dean of students, magnet coordinator, instructional specialist and the campus registrar. Roles and duties are clearly defined within the organizational structure, and all leaders' work is rooted in the focus on effective instructional practice, collegiality, efficiency and modeled professionalism. Each leader is considered an expert in his/her field and given autonomy to develop operating systems for his/her area of responsibility. The organizational structure includes a primary and secondary level of leadership: administration and teacher leaders, referred to as the instructional leadership team.

The instructional leadership team is also responsible for ensuring that the campus focus remains student-centered and results-oriented. The team is comprised of full-time teachers, valued by their peers due to their expertise, who have the capacity to model best practices and the desire to positively influence the instructional work. These teachers serve as department leads, grade level leads, the campus testing coordinator, and the intervention assistance team liaison. Meetings are held with the instructional leadership team monthly to review school programs and policies, evaluate achievement data to determine progress toward school improvement goals, make data-driven decisions, and offer suggestions to the administrative leadership team. The instructional leadership team supports the mission, vision, and overall school improvement goals.

All members of the leadership team coach and appraise teachers and/or support staff. They appraise in areas where their expertise can contribute to making the greatest impact on teacher efficacy and student outcomes. Performance is monitored through the Teacher Appraisal and Development System (TADS) or Modified Teacher Appraisal and Development System (M-TADS) for teachers who have performed effectively for a minimum of three years and Non-Teacher Appraisal System (NTAS) for support staff. NTAS feedback to staff is based on how well the professional best supports district and campus goals. Under the TADS coaching and development system, leaders observe classroom instructional practice regularly and provide formative and summative feedback on planning, instruction, and professional expectations. Written, formal observation feedback is always preceded by a conference and followed by a post-conference. Coaching is ongoing and differentiated based on the needs of each teacher. When patterns in grade level or content instructional practices are observed among the leadership team, information is shared at the next PLC meeting. The specific feedback is given to affirm best practices, offer reflection through coaching, and reinforce mission-focused values.

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

As an early college, NHECHS teachers are charged to prepare students for the rigor of college classes while simultaneously acknowledging and respecting the varied, multicultural perspectives inhabiting the classroom. NHECHS classes are a powerful conduit for learning, and evidence of culturally responsive teaching and learning are observed heavily in the humanities courses. In social studies and English classes, teachers expose learners to texts written by authors, about characters and topics which reflect the student populations served while still upholding high expectations of mastery of post-secondary reading and writing skills. Students read works through one or more of the following cultural lenses: race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic status, historical context, and intersectionality. The teachers' choices to include these diverse works and allow for student interactions surrounding these topics show respect for their students and all that they represent. The teachers ensure a culturally safe learning space where more than one perspective is shared to also enhance classroom talk, critical thought, and writing to learn.

Also, in order to support global citizenry, NHECHS clubs and organizations extend learning beyond the classroom. Students leverage leadership in their clubs/organizations to shed light on issues and participate in the process for change. Upon graduation, all must fulfill a minimum of 300 hours of community service. Students research a social issue, plan to address the need in a sustainable way and execute the plan. Students take independent study classes where they complete research, then projects, that make a positive impact. Also, many club participants have engaged in protests against police brutality, advocated for the rights of marginalized communities, participated in projects that build their awareness of policies, inequitable practices, and solutions to change the status quo. Faculty and staff have worked in solidarity with students and supported their efforts through social media posts and acknowledgments around campus.

To meet the needs of families, Communities in Schools (CIS), a social services program, is available on campus. Also, NHECHS advocated for and now receives free extended social services through the Memorial Hermann Health Centers for Schools, Burbank Clinic. As a Title I school, NHECHS knows firsthand the impact of poverty and limited resources. Many of the mental, economic, and physical health disparities are tackled through the free mental and physical healthcare services of these partnering institutions. The wraparound services include housing support, mental health counseling, immunizations, physicals, nutrition counseling, and dental services. The school nurse and PER work in tandem to help parents eliminate social barriers to college. NHECHS works diligently to meet student needs through the classroom and its strategic partnerships.

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

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There is a popular adage in organizations that stresses the importance of getting people on the bus in the right seat to describe the way to move an organization forward towards positive outcomes. One could extend this analogy to say in order to continuously increase effectiveness and make a significant impact on student learning, NHECHS must get the right people on the bus in the right seat, keep them on the bus, and ensure the bus is moving in the right direction. As a result, the most significant contribution to student achievement is that NHECHS prioritizes its human resources through hiring, retaining, and building capacity amongst the right people in order to ensure school improvement. Creating and maintaining a culture to attract the best educators are pivotal to the work of increasing educational opportunities for NHECHS students.

Recruiting, hiring, and retaining highly effective teachers is a strategic process, and the principal does not make the hiring decisions in isolation. An interview panel is regularly comprised of the principal, administrative leaders, and a department leader. The panel first identifies the optimal profile of the individual to be hired and formulates specific questions that will elicit insightful responses for the panel. The interviewing panel could then determine if the candidate would be a “best fit” for NHECHS campus.

Following district orientation, NHECHS ensures its new faculty and staff understand the history, mission, vision, goals of the organization via the Campus Induction Coach (CIC), and each new member is supported throughout the year to learn and implement the “NHECHS Way” of teaching and serving students.

Each role requires a level of exceptional knowledge, talent, and ownership of this work. Once the right individuals are in place, with the principal at the helm, supporting, cheering and guiding, the best outcomes result for children. The principal consistently communicates and collaborates. Those who lead, lead with excellence. Those who teach, master the art and science of teaching while building strong relationships. Those who serve parents directly take initiative to ensure all needs are met to enroll, communicate academic progress, and provide needed resources. Even when the team falls short of its goals, NHECHS looks at data honestly, reflects, and plans again. The NHECHS motto of “no shortcuts, no excuses” denotes that each does what is required with full commitment. As a result, NHECHS has received yearly recognition by Texas Education Agency for closing academic gaps and producing high student achievement on state assessments, has graduated 100 percent of its seniors for years, has maintained a high percentage of students earning associate degrees, and meets or exceeds expectations on college, career, and military readiness indicators.