

**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 [ ] Magnet [ ] Choice

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

Official School Name Porter Elementary School  
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 517 Via Avenida  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Mesquite State TX Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 75150-3176

County Dallas County

Telephone (972) 290-4000 Fax (972) 290-4004

Web site/URL https://porterelementary.mesquiteisd.org/ E-mail lenglert@mesquiteisd.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. David Vroonland E-mail DVroonland@mesquiteisd.org  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Mesquite Independent School District Tel. (972) 288-6411

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 Mr Eddie Rose  
(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):
- 33 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 10 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 5 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 48 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	8	8	16
K	20	25	45
1	26	27	53
2	23	33	56
3	31	38	69
4	24	29	53
5	46	41	87
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	178	201	379

\*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
  - 5 % Asian
  - 18 % Black or African American
  - 65 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 12 % White
  - 0 % 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: 9%

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	13
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	24
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	37
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	423
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.09
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	9

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

Spanish, Arabic, Vietnamese, Burmese, Malayalam, Punjabi, Nepali

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 52 %  
197 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 75 %

Total number students who qualify: 285

8. Students receiving special education services: 12 %  
44 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>3</u> Autism                  | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>7</u> Other Health Impaired                 |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>11</u> Specific Learning Disability         |
| <u>2</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>16</u> Speech or Language Impairment        |
| <u>2</u> Hearing Impairment      | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>2</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: 13
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	2
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	22
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	11
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	7
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	2

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 17:1

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%	97%	97%	98%	97%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

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	0
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	0%
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	0%

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.

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

The mission at Porter Elementary is, "Grow every student." Porter accomplishes this through the vision, "Every child. Every need. Whatever it takes."

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.

When Porter began the 2020-2021 school year in August, the district chose to have the first four weeks of school completed virtually. Teachers received intensive, specific training through district-created technology modules before returning in August to ensure the Learn Anywhere platform could be effectively implemented. Through the Learn Anywhere model, teachers reported to campus each day and safely collaborated with their teaching teams to create meaningful, engaging instruction. This model provided consistency for virtual learning expectations. Teachers took into consideration the individual needs of students, especially in light of the global pandemic and the hardships families were facing. One of the main focuses was to welcome students back in the most normal way possible, creating and sustaining the school culture through a screen while they were home learning virtually. After the four weeks of virtual learning were completed, families were given the educational choice of joining the Virtual Learning Academy (VLA) or returning for Face-to-Face instruction (F2F). Following that choice, Porter had approximately 250 students return F2F and 150 choose to stay VLA. Teachers were now tasked to teach both groups of students and ensure equity of education for all. With that in mind, grade levels created systems to best meet the needs of their students. Pre-K through 3rd grade held daily check-in times at least three times a day for students to receive instructions and facilitate learning for the VLA students. At the same time, F2F students were receiving instruction as well. For 4th and 5th grade, teachers pivoted to change class rosters so that VLA could be in the same “classroom” while F2F students were grouped in a different classroom. Departmentalized teachers rotated between the groups to provide instruction to

both sets of students. During this time, VLA students were provided with the exact same level of instruction as F2F. As the year progresses and families have a choice of educational setting each grading period, teachers modify and adjust instruction to meet the needs of all students. Currently, teachers are hybrid teaching both VLA and F2F simultaneously. As of now, Porter has 47 virtual learners. Teachers are constantly finding new ways to engage and facilitate collaboration between F2F and VLA students.

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

## **PART III - SUMMARY**

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At Porter Elementary, every child has a name and a story. As a campus, the staff seeks to understand and recognize the diverse stories students bring with them. Teachers constantly strive to build relationships with every student and their stakeholders to ensure all receive the best education possible. Porter embraces student culture and provides a safe environment for them to share their experiences and individuality. By building relationships with students, one can unlock their passions and interests. Connecting their interests to academic standards promotes positive engagement and allows students to take ownership of their learning.

Mesquite ISD encompasses an area of approximately 60 square miles along either side of Interstate 635 in east Dallas County. It draws from the communities of Mesquite, Garland, and Balch Springs as well as areas of Dallas. The district serves more than 38,000 students on 49 campuses.

G.R. Porter Elementary School was completed in 1979 as the 17th campus in Mesquite ISD. The school was named for Gil Porter, a Mesquite businessman and former Mesquite ISD School Board member. Gil and his wife, Elma Porter worked side-by-side at Porter Drug Store in downtown Mesquite for many years. He became deeply involved in the Mesquite community after taking an interest in shaping young people who worked or gathered at his drug store's soda fountain. He served for 15 years on the Board as secretary and president. Traditionally each year, Mr. Porter's son will return to campus, thanking the staff for their service and honoring his father's name.

Porter is a Title 1 campus, which carries implications teachers must consider. To reach high levels of academic engagement and achievement, teachers must first meet students where they are. All campus staff members, including teachers, administrators and support personnel, focus on meeting students' basic needs. One can often hear teachers ask students, "Have you eaten breakfast?" or "Do you need a snack?" to get the day started. When thinking about students, they are not seen as statistics or numbers on a page; instead, students are seen to have a name and a story that is still being written. With that in mind, teachers provide students with opportunities for new experiences and help build background knowledge, allowing students to access more of the curriculum.

Over the past five years, the bilingual population has grown to make up over half of the total student population. Porter values and celebrates what these families mean to the campus. Teachers strive to meet the needs of English Language Learners' (ELLs) through intentional literacy instruction while appreciating their unique ability to speak two languages. The same instructional strategies used to meet ELLs' needs also positively impact the entire student population.

Porter Elementary emphasizes the need to relate to one another as a family. As a family, teachers do not allow labels to segment student groups. Instead, teachers constantly find ways to increase collaboration and appreciation for differences. When students can work with others who may be different, they increase their capacity for empathy and see new perspectives. Porter embraces students as "our students" and fight for all children to reach their full potential. Any arbitrary limits placed on students by society due to background, socioeconomic status or family experiences diminish because all staff members have a stake in seeing Porter students achieve.

Along with academic achievement, staff members want Porter students to be productive citizens who positively impact the world. To help students develop socially and emotionally, a group of teachers studied and implemented a successful "House System" four years ago. All students and staff members belong to one of four houses--each with its own unique symbol, slogan and positive trait. The House System is a campus-wide positive behavior support that unifies the entire student population and staff. Recognition of positive behaviors encouraged all students to take ownership of their behavior and significantly decreased the need for administrative intervention for negative behaviors.

An essential strength of the school family is the teachers who believe in and support all students, not just the students within their classrooms. A commitment and passion for collaboration create innovative ways to

meet the diverse student population's needs. Porter's school culture supports an environment that allows vulnerability to seek help in growing all students. This year, teachers are particularly devoted to meeting the intensive challenges of hybrid teaching, a national educational issue. Their relentless pursuit for excellence and growth for all students never wavers, even amid the constant changes and challenges a global pandemic presents--all because Porter knows all students have a name and a story.

Students depend on Porter to provide educational opportunities that will enable them to have choices about their future, no matter their circumstances. It is a privilege to have Porter Elementary be a part of students' stories, and Porter hopes to empower them to design their unique path.

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

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

When considering core curriculum, decisions are made based on what is best for students at Porter Elementary. In response to professional development within Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), teachers derived essential standards from the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for reading and math that vertically align from pre-K through 5th grade. While following the district-provided scope and sequence, teachers focus, assess and intervene on essential TEKS. The intentionality of covering these essential TEKS prepares students to access the broader curriculum.

Teachers deliver effective Tier 1 instruction through engaging experiences in which academic standards come to life. When students make connections to academic concepts, they are more likely to master the skill. Teachers hold students accountable through high expectations. Students will reach the expectations set for them, high or low, so it is expected that students give nothing less than their best each day. Not only do high expectations drive decisions within the classroom, but differentiation also provides students with what they need when they need it. By offering choices, students have a voice in what they learn and how they learn it. Further, teachers meet the needs of all students, providing intervention or extension when necessary.

Following Mesquite ISD's early literacy initiative, Porter's goal is to have all students reading on grade level by third grade. Porter has an early literacy specialist who facilitates professional development around growing readers and writers, especially pre-K through 3rd grade. Daily intentional, guided reading instruction in those grade levels is a key component of this effort. Teachers also use guided reading to close student educational gaps in 4th and 5th grade. Teachers remove arbitrary limits and differentiate instruction to grow students, preparing them for the next grade level and beyond.

Within the school's academic focus, students are pushed to read at or above grade level through English language arts and reading. A school-wide effort to enhance students' love of reading through various challenges and competitions complements the teachers' instructional focus on foundational, vocabulary and specific comprehension skills. Students often read while waiting for restroom breaks or in the cafeteria line, demonstrating that Porter builds passionate readers. The curriculum provides cohesive opportunities for students to read and write within and across genres, allowing students to transfer learning across the two contents. Porter believes literacy is the foundation for success in all other subjects and encourages lifelong learning.

To develop students' mathematics proficiency, teachers concentrate on essential TEKS. These essentials include problem-solving within real-world situations, understanding place value, analyzing graphs and data tables, and manipulating numbers through critical thinking. To address mathematical needs, teachers build confidence in students by encouraging them to take risks and learn from their mistakes. When possible, teachers create hands-on learning experiences that allow students to be active participants in their learning.

Teachers integrate the core curriculum area of science instruction with comprehension skills. Again, science lessons are rooted primarily in essential TEKS, but teachers want to grow students' strengths even more to ensure mastery of necessary standards. Especially in 5th grade, lessons are hands on, and students perform experiments to help grasp abstract concepts. Students are excited about scientific learning, increasing motivation and retention of concepts.

Within the social studies curriculum, teachers strive to grow productive citizens who will positively contribute to our community. Teachers create engaging lessons that allow their students to experience history through interactive, meaningful activities. Teachers also integrate reading comprehension skills within the social studies curriculum to support cross-curricular connections.

The thread that holds the core curriculum together includes formative and summative assessments. Grade-level PLCs create formative assessments that cover the essential TEKS taught within that week. These are aligned to state assessments to ensure rigor and equity for all students. Teachers use assessments regularly to drive instructional decisions. Formative assessments allow teachers to provide immediate feedback so that

students learn from their mistakes and do not continue with the same misunderstandings. This proactive practice enables teachers to close gaps more effectively and efficiently. Teachers do not wait for summative assessments to tell them what their students are not mastering; they continuously monitor student learning to ensure all students grow. Through the campus-wide intervention called Power Hour, teachers use data from formative assessments to plan and facilitate acceleration designed to meet specific student needs. Power Hour interventions allow students to participate in small group instruction designed to close knowledge gaps.

The district summative assessment is a more comprehensive view of student mastery of grade-level TEKS. After each district assessment, campus leadership and grade-level teams review data. Teachers come to data meetings prepared to share their intervention plans and reflections on specific learning standards. The committee discusses ways to address individual student needs, whether physical, emotional or academic. By celebrating student growth, no matter how small, Porter is one step closer to achieving their mission to grow every student.

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

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

Porter Elementary provides bilingual pre-kindergarten for 4-year-olds. This academic school year, the pre-K program shifted to a full-day instructional setting. The core curriculum aligns with the pre-kindergarten guidelines covering 10 domains: social emotional development, language and communication, emergent literacy reading and writing, mathematics, science, social studies, fine arts, physical development, and health and technology. It ensures students receive the necessary instruction to be kindergarten-ready and sets a positive tone for their educational careers.

Students receive literacy instruction within the core curriculum that includes word wall, story time, and small groups focused on reading and writing. They also receive math small-group instruction and participate in calendar math. As supported by research, students participate in purposeful play to reinforce and extend their learning. They are included in the House System and feel a sense of belonging at Porter.

To adapt to meet students' needs during the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers created individual buckets of materials for students to use and explore during the nationwide school closure. Since returning F2F, the use of separate sets of materials and activities for students continues. For instance, the station activities used in the classroom are created for individual use instead of sharing. This safety precaution creates a unique challenge because students are expected to build their oral language skills and learn to share supplies kindly within this grade level.

The impact of the pre-K program is far reaching, especially within the realm of literacy. Using small-group instruction and guided reading, the teacher ensures that students hear books read multiple times a day, enriching their vocabulary and background knowledge. These practices are closing the vocabulary gap for these students.

By the time pre-K students enter kindergarten, they have already experienced a year of school and have learned many critical social and emotional skills. This solid foundation prepares them to learn new academic concepts.

**2. Other Curriculum Areas:**

Additional subject areas support the core curriculum and help students develop their stories. Students enjoy physical education, music, library and art at specific times during the week. In physical education (PE) class, students learn the importance of staying healthy and keeping active. In grades pre-K through 2, students receive physical education daily, while 3rd through 5th grades attend PE three times a week. The PE class delivers TEKS appropriate to each grade level, focusing on body movement, physical awareness, and

sportsmanship. The music instruction is rigorous and specific to grade levels, building and deepening students' understanding from kindergarten to 5th grade. Students in kindergarten through 2nd grade attend music once a week, while 3rd through 5th grade students experience music twice weekly. Lessons focus on developing a love of music and provide a foundation in performance with a variety of instruments and musical vocabulary.

Once a week, all grade levels visit the library, where the librarian presents targeted lessons aligned to TEKS to deepen student learning. Diverse read-aloud activities enrich and nurture students to develop a love of reading. As a campus, Porter recently won the Mesquite Reads Go for the Goal reading challenge. Students read 1,083,470 minutes and received visits from professional athletes and sports teams in addition to recognition from the Mayor of Dallas at City Hall.

To meet quickly changing classroom needs, teachers incorporate technology into almost everything. Also, in preparation for the 2020-2021 school year's challenges, the entire district transitioned to a 1:1 student-to-device ratio, a crucial response to the growing impact of technology on society. Through modeling, the technology facilitator trains teachers to incorporate specific strategies and programs that increase lesson effectiveness. Teachers use programs that allow students to explore their interests and passions while maintaining connections to the core curriculum and essential TEKS. Students collaborate with peers to create products, showing what they learned. Technology allows for differentiation and helps increase engagement at Porter.

The counselor is uniquely involved within the school community. She provides character lessons focused on age-appropriate social-emotional development and is a constant source of positivity. These lessons bridge the gap for students to take ownership of their behavior and provide tools to manage their behavior appropriately, allowing them to focus during academic instruction and participate more effectively. When students control their behavior, they can interact productively with their peers, enabling entire classes to grow together.

The counselor knows every student by name and finds ways to meet even their most basic needs. She recently brought the North Texas Food Bank's backpack program to Porter, ensuring the most at-risk students experiencing food insecurity have food to take home. She builds relationships with all students, creating a culture of trust. She creates systems to promote positive student recognition and communicates with families regularly to ensure stakeholders are informed.

As a school, the Porter staff reach beyond developing students' academic abilities and help them grow socially and emotionally. Through the robust curriculum, teachers enrich and enhance the time they spend at Porter Elementary.

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

Keeping the mission and vision at the forefront, Porter wants to grow every student while focusing on "Every child. Every Need. Whatever it takes." As a result, teachers approach academic supports for all students on an individual level. Within the Professional Learning Communities, teachers focus on the essential TEKS all students must master to be successful in the next grade level. To ensure mastery, teachers use common formative assessments with immediate feedback to capture precisely what students learned. This data drive teachers' next steps in the support process. Students who have mastered concepts receive opportunities for extensions that further challenge and push their growth. These extension activities might look like a self-selected passion project by the student or an above-grade-level, challenging novel study program. Along with these advanced assignments, students who are achieving above grade level serve as peer tutors, stretching their abilities while meeting other students' needs.

After gathering data from common formative assessments and determining which students are not meeting expectations, the Response to Intervention (RTI) Team gets involved. Through the RTI process, a team of staff members examines all the pieces of the students' school identity. Rather

than focusing solely on academic scores, the team looks at the student's whole picture, including home experiences, emotional and social needs and educational supports that teachers tried in the past. The team develops a plan based on all the different pieces of the student's identity and identifies responsible stakeholders to carry out the plan. Students within RTI might be assigned to a mentor or a staff member to ensure they feel a sense of belonging and support. They could also receive academic supports based on need within specific content areas. These supports are carried out daily in the classroom and on assessments, allowing the team and the student to monitor growth and progress.

If there is an achievement gap of 10% or more for different subgroups, the staff finds a way to meet the needs promptly. The campus expects teachers and staff members to proactively identify areas of need within all students. The early identification of academic needs allows students to quickly build foundational skills that close gaps while increasing their confidence and growing their lifelong love of learning. Based on the identification of academic need, students receive intensive small group instruction to help students gain ground in areas of weakness. This practice allows students to quickly correct misunderstandings and gain confidence to keep taking risks in the classroom. Teachers closely follow the Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for students in special education and monitor progress with specific supports. As a bilingual campus, teachers must be intentional with the English Language Learner population. Teachers target literacy through rich, foundational vocabulary and comprehension instruction. According to state test results for reading, Porter increased all subgroup scores and saw a significant gain for special education students. While the staff examines data in reference to subgroups, there's a constant reminder that labels do not define students and teachers must meet them on an individual basis.

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

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

If someone were to visit Porter Elementary on a House Ceremony Day, they would walk into a building bubbling with student excitement and anticipation. Visions of blue, green, red and yellow illuminate the hallways and classrooms as students show their tremendous pride for their “house.” When a group of teachers wanted to implement a campus-wide positive behavior system to increase engagement and further a positive school culture, they studied other successful campuses and adapted the house system to meet the needs of students at Porter.

Porter created its houses to represent characteristics desired for all students to embody. The four houses are Amistad, the house of friendship; Coraggio, the house of bravery; Determinat, the house of determination; and Rispetto, the house of respect. All staff members—including custodians, cafeteria workers, paraprofessionals and teachers—are placed into houses, allowing an immediate connection between staff members and students. Students continue in the same house from kindergarten through 5th grade, fostering a positive identity and sense of belonging. Often older members encourage younger members of the house, allowing leadership skills to develop.

Students earn points individually and for their house by exhibiting positive behaviors, and a teacher-created app tracks points for each grading period. All staff members can recognize and praise exceptional behavior, which encourages others to act in similar ways. At the end of each grading period, Porter holds a House Ceremony, where students gather to celebrate accomplishments. Students sit with their houses and participate in a variety of activities. Each house has a mascot and a chant that students recite. Individual students are recognized by grade level as Top House Point Earners to acknowledge their leadership and encourage them to continue taking ownership of their behavior. Porter honors and celebrates the house with the most points. To meet the health concerns that COVID-19 presents, the house committee shifted implementation of ceremonies to a virtual meeting space, allowing all students to participate while upholding safety guidelines.

This house system supports consistency of behavioral expectations within and across grade levels. When students know all teachers hold the same high expectations, the entire campus reaches higher levels of engagement and academic achievement. According to discipline data, the need for administrative intervention in classrooms significantly decreased since the adoption of the house system, and Porter believes this behavior support positively influences student success. While the staff operate and celebrate as four houses, it is still one Porter family.

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

Through creating a positive school culture, Porter strives to make families feel invited and welcome to collaborate with teachers in the education of their child. As a staff, Porter acknowledges that parents are the experts on their child. Teachers seek parent insight and value their input for academic decisions. Porter creates a culture of open communication through making positive phone calls and contacting families frequently.

As a large district, Mesquite ISD wanted to create a community of school pride through a feeder-pattern initiative allowing students to know there is a clear pathway to high school. Through this initiative, Porter collaborates with Kimbrough Middle School and Poteet High School to provide opportunities for students to make connections with the school and student-leaders from those campuses. For example, Poteet High School athletes mentor students identified as needing social-emotional support and greet students as they arrive on campus.

As a campus, families and community partners are intentionally involved. In support of the district’s early literacy initiative, which focuses on all students reading on-grade-level by third grade, Porter plans a themed Literacy Night each school year and invites families to attend. Students are encouraged to dress as their

favorite book character and participate in a variety of activities. Knowing the student population is 70% socio-economically disadvantaged, Porter provides each student with a book to take home emphasizing that literacy contributes to academic success.

COVID-19 has dramatically impacted interactions with families, due to the restrictions needed for safety. Students experienced an unprecedented event that changed the way they ended one school year and began a new one. As a result, the staff at Porter Elementary had to approach this school year differently. To emulate successful events from previous years, Porter found ways to pivot and still offer activities that follow local and state health safety guidelines. For example, during “Meet the Teacher” night, parents and students begin creating a positive relationship with their teacher. To preserve this important tradition, the staff pivoted to a drive-through event. Parents and students still met their teachers, and they received packages of supplies students would need during the first four weeks of virtual learning. By altering this event and others, the staff provided students with a sense of normalcy and reconnection to Porter. To meet the needs of every student, Porter will strive to grow their community involvement and partnerships, through seeking new ways to involve members of the community.

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

Teachers are the heartbeat of the campus. More than any other staff members, they directly influence the students in their classrooms and impact achievement. For a school to be successful, teachers must feel valued and supported. At Porter Elementary, teachers have a voice in decisions made at the campus level. With regard to professional learning, teachers may choose areas in which they want to receive support. The Porter staff wants to go deep--not wide--in the scope of development and intentionally concentrates on one or two development areas each year.

Some examples of teacher-selected training include differentiation using effective technology integration designed for specific student needs, formative assessment practices, and meeting diverse learners’ needs. These trainings are facilitated by teacher-leaders on campus, providing opportunities for leadership development within the teaching staff. When teachers choose their areas of growth, they feel valued and heard. Their capacity in the classroom increases, and their overall effectiveness improves which positively affects student performance and success.

Teacher autonomy is valued at Porter. When teachers take ownership of decisions in the classroom, they develop leadership and innovate to meet all students’ needs, as emphasized in Porter’s vision. This contributes to a lower turnover rate; 75% of staff members have served five or more years at Porter, resulting in many benefits, including consistency within grade levels and camaraderie among colleagues.

Each year, to honor teacher commitment and achievement, the campus chooses one teacher to receive the Teacher of the Year Award. This educator is recognized by the Mesquite ISD School Board and is celebrated on campus. Porter also recognizes teachers throughout the school year for their specific contributions that align with the district’s core values. Porter honors staff members who put “People First,” who create ways to “Cultivate Culture,” who are on a path of “Continuous Learning,” and who demonstrate a high level of “Commitment to Community.” Through this recognition, teachers and staff members feel appreciated for their efforts to meet every student need.

With regard to COVID-19, the campus and district supported teachers with empathy and understanding. Leadership encouraged teachers to explore different solutions to meet the needs of virtual and face-to-face learners. In addition, administrative leadership showed a willingness to think beyond normal boundaries to ensure teachers could effectively deliver instruction to both student groups. While the impact of COVID-19 drastically changed the way teachers engaged learners, leadership continuously supported them in creating and developing solutions.

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

The leadership philosophy at Porter Elementary reflects the mission and vision. Everything Porter does promotes the idea that the staff grows every student and is responsible for “Every child. Every need.

Whatever it takes.” Porter’s principal and assistant principal have provided consistent leadership for the campus, serving for 13 years and eight years there, respectively. This cohesiveness allows the leadership team to know the strengths of staff members and develop positive relationships. These relationships provide the framework for carrying out the district’s expectations of an ownership culture and create a stable environment that families can depend on.

This ownership culture provides teachers autonomy by helping them hone their craft to meet their students’ needs more effectively. Principals encourage teachers to reflect on concerns and openly express needs to the leadership team. This open-door policy allows for staff members to work positively and collaboratively to create solutions. This collaborative culture ensures all students receive the education they deserve. When teachers feel valued and supported, they want to remain a part of the school’s culture. With this in mind, grade-level leadership has also remained consistent over the past four years. This retention of staff creates a family atmosphere where all are working toward the same goals.

When creating a positive school culture, it is the little things that matter. For example, one expectation is that every teacher must greet their students by name as they enter the classroom each day. This first positive interaction sets the tone for respect and belonging as their day begins.

Considering the use of resources, decisions always go back to the mission to grow every student. Porter invested in the House System to recognize and celebrate positive behaviors, provided learning opportunities for teachers to increase their capacity as instructional leaders, and provided teachers with the necessary classroom materials to meet standards for returning to school safely. Porter also recognizes the immense socioeconomic need within the student population and use resources to ease the burden of purchasing various school items.

Under the challenges of COVID-19, the staff worked to maintain consistency and create normalcy for students while acknowledging the unique needs the pandemic brought forth for Porter families. Now, more than ever, relationships are vital for student success. Many of the families are enduring hardships they have never experienced before, and it is Porter’s job to stand in the gap for them and be a champion for their child.

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

When looking at Porter Elementary students, it’s important to appreciate the mosaic of cultures and backgrounds they represent. The diversity at Porter is an integral part of helping students develop compassion and empathy for others while accepting and celebrating differences.

As a campus, staff members’ mindset shifted to acknowledge that any student who walks through the doors at Porter Elementary is “our” student. This means that no matter the classroom, teacher or grade level, every staff member is responsible for ensuring each student feels seen, heard and loved. With this mindset shift, teachers provide equity for all students, no matter their background, socioeconomic status or ethnicity. Porter Elementary is a neighborhood school that educates multiple siblings within a family. Beyond ensuring equity for just one student, Porter creates a space of equity that impacts entire families.

Knowing the importance of literacy for students, Porter pursues ways to represent all cultures and ethnicities within the curriculum, classroom libraries and books read aloud to students. Through these pieces of literature, teachers can provide a powerful connection for students, allowing them to dream without limitations because they can identify with characters like themselves.

To create a campus of respect, everyone begins each day by reciting the Porter Pledge: “Today I will do more than I have to do. I will treat others as I want to be treated, and I will try to become a better person. Porter pride--every day, it starts with me. Excellence Always.” Beginning in pre-K, all students learn and embody these expectations. The pledge encompasses respect for cultural

awareness, diversity in classrooms, and a sense of responsibility for all students to carry out these expectations. It is a campus-wide statement that emphasizes high expectations for behavior and how to interact with each other. When new students enroll at Porter Elementary, they quickly learn the Porter way. When misbehaviors happen, teachers say things like, “That is just not how we do things at Porter.” It does not take long for new students to internalize the commitment to respect, allowing students to feel safe, welcome and appreciated at school.

The mosaic created by the students through their different cultures and backgrounds produces a beautiful picture of what the future could be. Through culturally relevant teaching, Porter is able to provide students with the ability to make choices for their future. Students’ lives depend upon giving them access to quality instruction no matter where they come from.

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

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Knowing the unique deficits students brought to school in August following the spring school closure due to COVID-19, Porter resolved to implement a strategy to meet all students' needs. As an extension of professional development through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), the leadership team created a plan to use data to drive instructional decisions while focusing on essential TEKS. The team felt the crucial next steps in closing gaps was to provide students with the opportunity to receive intensive intervention within the school day. To increase teacher ownership, the leadership team presented the Power Hour plan to grade-level PLC leaders and asked them to introduce the plan to their teams.

The Power Hour process begins with teachers developing state-assessment aligned, common formative assessments (CFAs) for reading and math. Teachers meet with their grade level PLC and develop rigorous questions using question stems from released assessments. After developing common formative assessments, teachers create exemplars as a rubric by which to analyze student work. Teachers concentrate on procedural and conceptual strategies when creating exemplars, ensuring they are getting into the students' mindsets and supporting intentional focus and modeling for students.

After students complete a CFA, teachers analyze their work samples by comparing student work to teacher-created exemplars. Teachers then group students together based on mastery or errors within the procedural or conceptual tasks. The data derived from CFAs drive the next step in Power Hour. Based on the information gathered, teachers plan either an extension activity or a specific re-teach strategy for students based on their individual needs.

Once student need is identified, and activities are planned, teachers assign a Power Hour team member to implement the lesson. Each grade level has a designated time during the school day once a week when they are provided with key personnel to facilitate small group instruction. The people included in the Power Hour team are the campus intervention specialist, counselor, ESL teacher, librarian, paraprofessionals and instructional specialist. These staff members sacrifice time from their assigned duties once a week to help embody and carry out the mission and vision of helping all students grow, no matter what.

Through Power Hour, students receive exactly what they need when they need it. The immediate feedback and response to academic needs have shown success in closing gaps created by school closure. Teachers report students are engaged and looking forward to Power Hour, which impacts academic achievement and helps their confidence grow.