

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

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

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

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

School Mailing Address 1601 North 27th Street
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City McAllen State TX Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 78501-2000

County Hidalgo County

Telephone (956) 971-4200 Fax (956) 657-5357

Web site/URL https://www.mcallenisd.org/o/aechs E-mail Miguel.Carmona2@mcallenisd.net

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. Jose Gonzalez E-mail jose.gonzalez@mcallenisd.net
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name McAllen Independent School District Tel. (956) 618-6000

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 Mr. Samuel Saldivar Jr.
(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

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

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):
 - 19 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 6 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 6 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools

31 TOTAL

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

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

- Urban (city or town)
- Suburban
- Rural

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

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	0	0	0
1	0	0	0
2	0	0	0
3	0	0	0
4	0	0	0
5	0	0	0
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	50	54	104
10	52	55	107
11	38	50	88
12 or higher	42	86	128
Total Students	182	245	427

*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
 - 1.8 % Asian
 - 0 % Black or African American
 - 96.2 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 1.8 % 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: 6%

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

n/a

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

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	7
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	21
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	28
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	458
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.06
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	6

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

Spanish

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 11 %
45 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 74 %

Total number students who qualify: 314

8. Students receiving special education services: 3 %

13 Total number of students served

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

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <u>1</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>3</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay | <u>0</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>2</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>0</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>7</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: 4

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.

	Number of Staff
Administrators	3
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	25
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	2
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	1
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	9

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.

Required Information	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016
Daily student attendance	99%	98%	98%	97%	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.

Post-Secondary Status	
Graduating class size	89
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	82%
Enrolled in a community college	5%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	1%
Found employment	10%
Joined the military or other public service	0%
Other	2%

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

Yes No

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

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

The staff of Achieve Early College High School is committed to working collaboratively with one another and with college faculty to provide a nurturing environment with rigorous academic standards so that students can achieve their dreams by mastering college-level work, and experience academic and social success to enable them to become productive citizens in our rapidly changing world.

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.

Achieve Early College High School has been operating under a hybrid model. Some students are attending on-campus, and others are attending via remote instruction.

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

Since Achieve Early College High School is a school of choice, a weighted lottery system governs the enrollment selection process. All students are eligible to apply to Achieve. However, to remain a designated Texas Education Agency (TEA) early college high school, the school must meet population targets. The primary target group is students who have an at-risk designation as defined by the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS). The secondary target group is those students who qualify for free and reduced lunch based on USDA income guidelines.

PART III - SUMMARY

Students at Achieve Early College High School, many of whom are first-generation college attendees, low income, or at-risk see their life trajectories forever changed because of the opportunities, education, and support Achieve provides. Achieve is a public early college high school in McAllen, Texas, approximately 10 miles from the Mexican border in Hidalgo County which has the 25th lowest per capita income in the U.S. Approximately 27% of people live in poverty and fewer than 19% have a bachelor's degree or higher. In this context, Achieve, founded in 2008, has flourished in partnership with a local community college, South Texas College (STC), and brought into the community more than 1000 graduates with both high school diplomas and associate degrees since its first graduating class in 2012.

Achieve staff members work as a unit under strong campus leadership to make high standards achievable through individualized academic support. Administrators and counselors are the brain of the school, handling the complex logistics of intertwining high school and college requirements. If the administration is the brain of the school, then Achieve teachers are the heart. The faculty is a team of dedicated, life-long learners with a passion for educating the whole child.

All Achieve students take Pre-AP, AP, and dual enrollment classes regardless of their past standardized test scores or middle school academic history. Teachers use AP strategies and implement the Common Instructional Framework (CIF), which encourages active learning and critical thinking. Many Achieve students were formerly English Learners, so teachers implement sheltered language strategies. Students are scheduled for extension or and/or advisory classes for additional support in math and English based on academic needs. The annual Summer Bridge program acclimates incoming ninth graders to Achieve and supports college readiness. Teachers hold Saturday review sessions, writing blitzes, after-school tutoring, and small group pull-out sessions as part of the academic support system.

Student success goes beyond academics, so Achieve teachers focus on social-emotional connections and building positive relationships. McAllen ISD has a district-wide social-emotional learning framework to foster emotional intelligence. Teachers tie regular curriculum lessons to this framework throughout the year. Achieve holds student-planned, student-run team-building activities each semester. Students connect through events such as Winter Olympics, Field Day, and teacher-student volleyball games, or organizations such as Student Council, NHS, UIL, Chess Club, Robotics, Science Olympiad, debate, and Gaming Club.

As the newest of the five high schools in McAllen ISD, the 2015 National Blue Ribbon Award brought Achieve into the spotlight. After receiving the award, Achieve was profiled on TV and in newspapers and, as a result, had increased interest in enrollment. The award brought a greater sense of pride to students, faculty, and community, and is proudly displayed at recruitment and community events. In 2018, Achieve moved from its original home, nine portable buildings on the STC campus, to a brick-and-mortar McAllen ISD building a few blocks away. The new building presents a range of benefits for students including access to a library, a librarian, a larger cafeteria, a gym, and improved security. Since receiving the 2015 National Blue Ribbon Award, Achieve was named to the Education Results Partnership honor roll for five consecutive years, ranked in the top 200 high schools in the nation by U.S. News and World Report from 2015 to 2021, awarded a \$15,000 Region XIII College and Career Readiness Models sub-grant in 2019, and named 2020 Best High School for At-risk Students by the non-profit advocacy organization Children at Risk. Texas Education Agency (TEA) rated Achieve 99 out of 100 on overall school performance measures. Achieve also contributed to McAllen ISD's state recognition for Post-Secondary Readiness for three consecutive years and its title as a Texas "A-Rated District" for two straight years, the state's highest award.

At Achieve, all students have access to a district-issued device, free city Wi-Fi, and/or district-issued hotspots. When COVID-19 lockdowns began in March 2020, Achieve had an advantage over schools in neighboring districts. McAllen ISD has long prioritized technology literacy as part of college and career readiness and first issued one-to-one technology to all students in 2011. Achieve teachers have used online learning management platforms as part of regular instruction since 2013, well before the onset of COVID-19. During the lockdown, McAllen ISD partnered with the City of McAllen to install 1,000 Wi-Fi access points across the city. Through a partnership with Hidalgo County and TEA, McAllen ISD also provided

more than 11,000 Wi-Fi hotspots for students who still struggled with connectivity.

Many schools have excellent administrators and teachers. Many have access to technology. Some even have the means to help high school students earn associate degrees. The thing that sets Achieve apart is how it effectively wields these attributes to maintain its unwavering commitment to student success.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

Achieve Early College High School’s core curriculum includes Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), Advanced Placement (AP) course framework, and dual credit classes. All courses are supported through a network of instructional practices such as the Common Instructional Framework (CIF), Seven Steps to a Language Rich Classroom, and the integration of technology. Dual credit teachers follow the curriculum set by South Texas College (STC), which partners with Achieve. With the sudden switch to remote learning in March 2020, instruction was transitioned to the district’s designated learning management system and a form of the district-wide online learning schedule was adopted by Achieve.

Achieve's curricular approach is to prepare students for the rigors of college classes with the expectation that all students will demonstrate college readiness before the end of their sophomore year. Students who require additional support are scheduled for intervention classes during their advisory periods.

Achieve students take English 1 Pre-AP in ninth and English 2 Pre-AP in tenth. Both focus on the fundamentals of English—reading, writing, listening, and speaking—utilizing the Pre-AP Framework which emphasizes close reading and text analysis. Both are assessed with state-mandated End of Course (EOC) tests. English 1 and 2 students who have not passed the Texas Success Initiative Assessment (TSIA) college readiness exam required for future dual credit English classes receive additional support. Eleventh-grade students take AP English language combined with English 1301 and 1302, dual credit courses. Twelfth-grade students take AP English literature. Both AP classes incorporate college-level texts and assignments with a focus on college readiness and critical thinking.

In math, most ninth-grade students take Algebra I Pre-AP, an EOC course, which incorporates the study of linear, quadratic, and exponential functions and their related transformations, equations, and associated solutions. Some ninth- and most tenth-grade students take geometry Pre-AP, in which they study two and three-dimensional figures. Before eleventh grade, students who have not demonstrated college readiness on the math TSIA test are enrolled in a math enrichment class to introduce higher-level math concepts tested on the exam. Most eleventh-grade students take Algebra II which expands students’ knowledge of quadratic functions, exponential functions, and systems of linear equations. Twelfth-grade students usually take Math 1301, a college algebra class, through STC and follow its required curriculum. In addition, Achieve offers pre-calculus which investigates the nature of the graphs of polynomials, rational, trigonometric, exponential, and logarithmic functions.

For sciences, ninth-grade students take biology Pre-AP, an EOC course where students study living organisms and their vital processes. Tenth-grade students take chemistry Pre-AP and study the composition of matter and how it interacts, combines, or changes. Eleventh graders take physics or physics AP which address the nature and properties of energy and matter. Some seniors opt to take biology AP, where they study core scientific principles, theories, and processes that govern living organisms and biological systems through inquiry-based investigations and explore evolution, cellular processes, energy and communication, genetics, information transfer, ecology, and interactions.

Social studies courses include world geography or human geography AP for freshmen, world history or world history AP for sophomores, U.S. history or U.S. history AP for juniors, and economics for seniors who did not fulfill high school requirements through their college classes. European history AP is offered to seniors who want additional advanced history instruction. Courses cover human and cultural geography, the history of humankind from 8000 BCE to the present, the history of the United States from Reconstruction to the present, basic principles concerning production, consumption, and distribution of goods and services, and the cultural, economic, political, and social developments that shaped Europe from 1450 to the present, respectively.

All core teachers implement CIF strategies in their lessons: collaborative group work, writing to learn, scaffolding, questioning, classroom talk, and literacy groups. These strategies promote college readiness and student engagement. One-to-one devices and technology-based instructional strategies helped facilitate a

smooth transition from teaching in-person to teaching online. In addition, teachers use Seven Steps sheltered language strategies to support and engage English learners. Technology is also utilized to differentiate instruction, such as audiobooks and speech-to-text software and provide problem-based learning such as STEM cases and Argument-Driven Inquiry in science classes.

McAllen ISD developed and implemented a synchronous and asynchronous schedule beginning with the 2020-21 school year. During synchronous days, teachers meet with their students online for live instruction. On asynchronous days, students complete coursework at their own pace. Achieve adapted this schedule to fit the needs of students who have a block schedule due to their college courses.

Teachers use EOC, TSIA, and SAT formatted assessments such as bell ringers and exit tickets to help students prepare for these exams. This data combined with summative state assessment data, district common assessments, and technology-based assessment results drive lesson planning. Through the use of TEKS-based assessments, teachers are able to measure success on learning standards.

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

All curricula taught at Achieve support college and career readiness. In 2008, Texas was the first state to adopt college and career readiness standards that are now incorporated into the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). By teaching these standards, Achieve is inherently supporting skills students need to be successful in their future studies and careers. This is conveyed through the use of the Common Instructional Framework, college readiness strategies that enhance student understanding and engagement.

Before students begin their first year at Achieve, support for their college and career readiness is provided through Achieve's Summer Bridge program. This two-week camp is designed to grow students' social, emotional, and communication skills through team-building activities and support Texas Success Initiative (TSI) assessment readiness, which is a prerequisite for dual credit and college courses.

Students hone their critical thinking, observational, analytical, evidence-based writing, and academic conversational skills introduced in their Pre-AP courses in ninth and tenth grade. Students apply these acquired skills in their Advanced Placement (AP) and dual credit courses throughout high school.

Achieve currently offers seven campus-based dual credit courses for TSI-ready students. These courses are taught by Achieve faculty. South Texas College's (STC) proximity allows students to attend courses on the STC campus, with the opportunity to graduate with the academic associate degree of their choice.

Sophomores can earn certifications in industry-standard word processing and spreadsheet programs through Achieve's Career and Technology Education department. Students who earn credit for education courses at STC are eligible to receive a substitute teacher or teacher assistant certification.

Achieve students are expected to complete at least 60 hours of community service. Service to others enhances students' interpersonal communication and networking skills and increases their social awareness and civic responsibility.

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

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Achieve Early College High School is focused on rigorous academic courses. Additionally, the school offers a variety of electives to provide students a more robust education. Achieve is in a unique position regarding non-core subjects because students augment their high school education with courses offered by Achieve's community college partner, South Texas College (STC).

Achieve offers journalism, debate, high school-college transition, and Business Information Management

(BIM) as year-long electives, and financial literacy and Learning Frameworks 1300 as semester courses. Approximately 140 students are enrolled in journalism which is available to all grade levels and addresses journalism TEKS such as planning and drafting articles and using publishing software. Approximately 15 tenth through twelfth graders are enrolled in debate, which enables them to employ critical thinking and writing skills to draft arguments. All ninth graders take high school-college transition which focuses on TEKS that impart research-based learning strategies to prepare students for rigorous high school and college courses. All tenth-grade students take BIM, a year-long course, which teaches word processing skills and makes students eligible to earn a certification in word processing software. Approximately 40 seniors take financial literacy which teaches basic knowledge of financial responsibility and planning. Learning Frameworks EDUL 1300, a semester-long dual credit class, focuses on helping sophomores, about 110 students, develop learning strategies for the rigors of college through discussion and reflective writing.

Achieve offers Spanish as its foreign language to all grade levels. In all Spanish classes, students learn language proficiency and cultural awareness in accordance with TEKS. Approximately 300 students are enrolled in Spanish courses each year. Spanish courses include both year-long and semester courses. Most freshmen enter with Spanish I and Spanish II credits and enroll in AP Spanish Language. Juniors and seniors usually enroll in AP Spanish Literature. These are all full-year courses. Furthermore, Achieve offers dual credit courses taught by a faculty member, including Spanish 1411, 2313, and 2315, all one-semester courses usually taken simultaneously with AP Spanish Language or AP Spanish Literature.

Health and physical education (P.E.) focus on leadership, self-confidence, health, and nutrition for ninth through twelfth graders. Health prepares students to handle physical and mental health issues responsibly. About 90 students per year take this semester course. Approximately 150 students are enrolled in year-long P.E. courses. In individual sports, TEKS develop confidence and lifelong healthy habits. Outdoor education TEKS address diverse skills for outdoor activities and setting realistic fitness goals. All P.E. classes underwent adjustments due to COVID-19 such as students uploading videos of themselves exercising and the temporary removal of outdoor education which could not be accommodated due to lack of required equipment.

School buses shuttle Achieve students to district comprehensive high schools so they can participate in fine arts and athletics classes. Additionally, students have a variety of technology, graphic design, visual arts, and performing arts opportunities available to them through STC, especially for those who would like to pursue a degree in one of these fields.

3. Academic Supports:

Over one-third of Achieve's student population is at-risk; therefore, all teachers apply tier 2 and tier 3 interventions for differentiating instruction. Peer-to-peer and teacher-guided tutoring give students the help they need. During the pandemic, teachers offered online tutoring and held office hours on asynchronous days to provide support for students who struggled with distance learning. Through a partnership with South Texas College (STC), students enroll in dual credit courses and have access to virtual tutoring services through its Centers for Learning Excellence (CLE).

Teachers analyze summative assessment data to monitor and adjust instruction for struggling students. Subsequently, students are placed into small-group tutoring for math and reading. This data helps determine effective testing accommodations when students take state-mandated End of Course exams.

After each grading period, teachers identify students who are low performing and implement interventions. Students and parents are encouraged to meet with teachers to address academic concerns and discuss strategies for success. Student contracts are created acknowledging the responsibilities of early college students and committing to a remediation plan.

Students performing above grade level receive opportunities to advance academically through their

degree plan. The partnership with STC allows Achieve students to take dual enrollment and college courses on their path to earning an associate degree as early as one semester before they graduate from high school. As underclassmen, Achieve students enroll in rigorous Pre-AP courses to prepare them for college courses, Advanced Placement (AP) courses, AP exams, and other college entrance exams.

Achieve is accessible to students of all abilities, linguistic levels, and student groups, including those with dyslexia, 504 or special education accommodations, English Learner (EL) status, and migrants. STAAR data for subgroups, special education, and ELs shows performance gaps in English I and biology in Approaches level and English, biology, and U.S. History for Mastery were reported. English II showed a gap for migrants in Approaches and Meets. Academic supports are built into the school day via extension classes and advisory periods where students receive extra instruction, tutoring, or homework help. Teachers work with the special education inclusion teacher and Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) committee to develop Individualized Education Plans (IEP). In-class support is provided by a special education teacher or aide. To address ELs' academic and linguistic needs, teachers employ a sheltered language instruction model for lesson design and delivery. This research-based framework, along with high expectations, enables EL students success. EL students are assessed annually on their progress in all four domains of English Language development. Assessment data is used to track progress and pinpoint where additional support is needed and whether accommodations are effective or need to be adapted.

The McAllen ISD Migrant Education Program works with Achieve to address the needs of the migrant population, providing services that further personal and academic development. When migrant students struggle with college-level courses, the migrant program provides additional tutoring. Another growing sub-population is homeless students; teachers and district social workers assist students to ensure they do not fall behind because of their living situations.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

Achieve teachers and administrators care about students. That one fact undergirds students' outstanding performance academically and beyond.

Students know academic support is a message away because their teachers will provide support for both high school and college classes. Assistance in the form of extension classes, advisory, tutoring, study sessions, and Saturday reviews, is crucial to letting students know success is within their grasp. Furthermore, Achieve teachers continued implementation of the McAllen ISD social-emotional learning framework as everyone grappled with the stress brought on by COVID-19.

This framework is integrated with classroom lessons to develop social-emotional competencies, including self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. For example, as part of self-awareness students reflect on their learning. Students sustain motivation by setting goals at the start of each semester.

Social growth develops from students joining groups such as University Interscholastic League (UIL) and other clubs including Robotics, debate, Student Council, NHS, Science Olympiad, Gaming Club, homecoming activities, and STC intramural sports. Many school clubs are student proposed and student-run. During distance learning, students were able to compete in virtual UIL meets on Saturdays and gather online with clubs. Seniors held a Senior Parade, driving through the surrounding neighborhood as parents and staff stood on the sidewalk cheering them on instead of the usual Senior Walk. Journalism students published a yearbook, much shorter than usual, but still made available to students as a commemoration of an unforgettable school year. Student accomplishments are celebrated via announcements, school newsletter articles, in-class recognitions, school awards assemblies, and club banquets.

Throughout the pandemic, Achieve has endeavored to provide consistency. Students are provided meals at McAllen ISD distribution sites daily. The school provides troubleshooting for technical problems and issues college textbooks via a drive-thru checkout system. After-school tutoring continues online along with UIL and club meetings.

Instructionally, teachers used strong pedagogy and established a predictable online learning experience. They continued strategies to elicit student engagement such as the Common Instructional Framework, AP strategies, and sheltered language instruction. During remote learning, teachers maintained these practices via break-out rooms, student video responses, discussion boards, and interactive games to approximate the face-to-face experiences students had during in-person learning. Achieve continued its annual Summer Bridge Program to prepare incoming freshmen with the school's expectations and introduce them to STC.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

As an early college high school, the nature of Achieve is to partner with an institution of higher learning, South Texas College (STC). Achieve encourages students to use STC facilities including the library, computer labs, and student center. STC continues to be Achieve's most important community partner, meeting regularly to monitor student progress toward an associate degree. Students use STC academic support including the Centers for Learning Excellence and Student Writing Center. STC liaisons present degree information, financial aid, and college application information. Achieve students also take part in STC clubs, intramural sports, and student government.

As part of a district focused on community health and well-being, Achieve played an important community role during the pandemic. McAllen ISD partnered with Hidalgo County to hold community COVID-19 vaccination clinics, and the campus was an intermittent COVID-19 testing site. McAllen ISD also partnered with Hidalgo County and the City of McAllen to provide public wi-fi across the city, especially in low-income neighborhoods to ensure student internet access. Children at Risk, a non-profit child advocacy

group, ranked McAllen ISD third highest in the participation rate of low-income students in its School Nutrition Program. Achieve participated in meal distribution as well as hotspot and laptop distribution for students.

Pre-pandemic, Achieve also hosted community blood drives, health fairs, and school supply distribution. Achieve would also invite the community onto its campus for events such as Meet the Teacher Night, awards assemblies, homecoming activities, Decision Day, PTO meetings, and chess tournaments. Parent participation in weekly parental involvement meetings which educate parents about topics such as nutrition, health issues, curriculum, academic support, and stress management has increased during virtual learning. Community members and local businesses support Achieve by sponsoring back-to-school events and meals for Teacher Appreciation Week. Achieve students actively engage in community service such as canned food drives, helping at the food bank, ringing the bell for Salvation Army, and assisting at City of McAllen events.

Starting in 2019, Achieve began hosting the McAllen ISD STRIDES Program which partners with STC to teach life skills and employment skills to special needs students aged eighteen to twenty-two. Achieve launched the Peer Assistance Leadership and Service (PALS) program which bolsters Achieve's commitment to social-emotional learning. PALS participants have the opportunity to work with and mentor special needs students through immersive experiences in STRIDES classrooms.

Achieve continues its commitment to community outreach and partnerships in order to provide resources and opportunities that support student achievement.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

The staff at Achieve is dedicated to student success and constant refinement of educational practices. The close-knit staff has a low turnover rate and gives school leaders and colleagues high ratings on campus climate surveys. Teachers and administrators team up to help students excel, especially those faced with many obstacles.

Transitioning to online teaching and then to a hybrid model of online and in-person classes was streamlined for teachers since the district and campus both had clear expectations for technology use. One-to-one district devices were in place nine years before COVID-19 restrictions started, giving Achieve teachers and students an edge when tackling distance learning for the first time.

In the summer of 2020, McAllen ISD held online curriculum writing that included distance learning lessons as well as access to TechNovate, a yearly technology conference, held virtually in 2020, which helped teachers hone their technology skills. That fall the district provided professional development about online learning strategies and programs, and Achieve also provided teacher-led, technology-based professional development.

Teachers attend state and national conferences and then share their knowledge in peer-led professional development throughout the school year in campus-wide sessions or through department-based Professional Learning Communities to encourage continuous learning. The staff helps one another keep up to date on best practices and emerging issues in education. Teachers can develop instructional leadership skills as grade-level team leaders, department chairs, Campus Instructional Leadership Team members, and program coordinators. The principal supports and mentors teachers seeking leadership certification and advanced degrees, encouraging them in the execution of master's projects and doctoral research.

Teachers are recognized individually through Teacher of the Month and Teacher of the Year awards, "Shoutouts" in the newsletter, service year plaques, teacher appreciation gifts, and birthday messages. In addition, counselors, administrative support staff, the librarian, the campus police officer, the nurse, cafeteria staff, and custodians are celebrated on recognition days throughout the year. Though students are always the focus, Achieve staff members take time to build positive relationships with one another through potlucks, informal staff luncheons, holiday celebrations, and festive dress-up days. They participate in yearly team-building activities such as bowling tournaments and laser tag. They also join yearly campus

fitness challenges. To cultivate mindfulness and relieve stress, staff members are encouraged to use the meditation room.

Relationships between staff members built upon professionalism, respect, and trust form solid foundations for collaboration and ultimately help staff members effectively meet students' needs.

4. School Leadership:

The principal's leadership philosophy is to foster teacher leadership, build strong systems, and develop a positive environment to impact student success. During face-to-face learning, these frameworks in place transitioned seamlessly to online learning because the principal gave teachers and students time and flexibility to adapt to the virtual environment.

The administrative team consists of the principal, who is also a master scheduler, and two assistant principals. All administrators conduct teacher evaluations, monitor assigned grade levels, handle student discipline, coordinate testing, and lead committees such as special education ARDs, 504, RTI, and LPAC.

The principal heads the annual Campus Improvement Plan and Campus Needs Assessment. Teachers from each department, administrators, and counselors review data from the previous year, evaluate programs, and plan changes for the year ahead.

The administrative team meets with the academic counselor, who functions as a liaison with South Texas College (STC), and the college and career counselor. Both counselors work with the principal/master scheduler to hand-place students in required high school and college courses. Counselors meet regularly with students to discuss their academic progress, ensuring on-track graduation for high school and college. Counselors conduct presentations every six weeks to address social/emotional intelligence and college and career topics.

Department chairs, selected by the principal, head each content area: English, math, social studies, science, and electives. They represent their respective departments on the Campus Instructional Leadership Team and at district departmental meetings. They also lead their departments in disaggregating data and analyzing the effectiveness of instructional practices. Each grade level has a team leader who facilitates student intervention plans, parent conferences, and team activities.

At the start of each school year, the principal provides clear expectations for teachers. However, teachers have autonomy beyond those guidelines to support student learning. Administrators regularly conduct walk-throughs and meet with teachers to discuss student progress. Strong positive relationships allow open dialogue when adjustments must be made. During distance learning, administrators conducted virtual walk-throughs, encouraging teachers to continue instructional best practices.

As the school leader, the principal cultivates teacher leaders, develops efficient systems, and instills a culture of success. However, the crucial element to his administrative success is not only what is done, but how it is done. Even in the midst of distance learning, the principal exemplified good humor and compassion, reminding the staff that individuals are made stronger by working together.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

As part of the district's social-emotional framework, students are encouraged to have open, respectful dialogue about tough issues, always emphasizing the importance of recognizing the humanity and value of others, even in the face of political, social, religious, or economic disagreement. Students have the opportunity to share their views and to see important issues from opposing perspectives.

As a school in a border community, immigration is always at the forefront of relevant issues. Children of Border Patrol agents sit beside Dreamers in Achieve classrooms. Though these

students may have vastly different life experiences, Achieve's teachers encourage students to focus on the importance of respectful dialogue through organizing their thoughts, defending ideas with evidence, and giving specific examples to make their cases.

Many Achieve teachers are immigrants to the U.S. or first-generation U.S. citizens who can empathize with student experiences. Whether in a class discussion, persuasive essay, or analytical task, students are expected to think critically about arguments, their own, and those of others. Students are aware that Achieve is committed to educating all students who enroll without regard for their citizenship or immigration status. The school honors students' home languages and encourages students to share their cultural traditions and language with the school community.

Another issue relevant to students at Achieve is poverty and homelessness. The school is located near the Texas-Mexico border in one of the poorest counties in the nation and benefits from the federal Title I program. Teachers work with students to ensure they do not fall behind because of their living situations. Achieve staff is aware that some students' families struggle to buy food, pay bills, and cover necessities. In the last two years, the incidence of homelessness among Achieve students has increased. The district social worker and campus counselors work with students' families to access resources and assistance. The school provides school supplies, vouchers for college entrance exams, district-issued laptops, Wi-Fi hotspots, and additional academic support to help students in need overcome inequities due to economic or home status.

Achieve gives all students an opportunity to complete two years of college by the end of high school. Parents and students who have experienced circumstances like immigration, poverty, or homelessness are often the most grateful for a school community like Achieve. For them, Achieve is a head start on reaching dreams that might otherwise seem beyond their grasp.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Achieve's alternating schedule of synchronous and asynchronous learning days was the practice that most helped both students and teachers have continued success when COVID-19 closures continued into the present school year.

McAllen ISD rolled out a synchronous/asynchronous schedule to all district schools at the start of the 2020-21 school year. However, Achieve has to coordinate with South Texas College (STC) for college courses that follow block scheduling. Because of this, the Achieve principal/master scheduler adapted the district schedule to better serve students.

All ninth and tenth graders meet Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays with their core teachers for real-time 50-minute synchronous lessons via a video meeting platform, but get an asynchronous, or independent lesson, from their elective teachers who remain available to answer questions and assist students as needed through the school day. On Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays students join elective teachers for synchronous lessons and get asynchronous assignments from their core teachers. Though the rest of the district has electives meeting with students real-time on only Tuesdays and Thursdays, Achieve students also meet with elective teachers on Fridays because some electives are AP and/or dual credit classes which, due to their rigor, need the additional day of synchronous instruction. In addition, tenth graders follow a hybrid schedule that incorporates both the previously mentioned schedule and the block schedule.

All eleventh and twelfth graders follow the block schedule, meeting synchronously with core and elective classes for 110 minutes on Monday, Tuesday, and Friday each week. Wednesday and Thursday are asynchronous lessons for both core and elective classes.

McAllen ISD started distance learning in March of 2020 without this schedule in place. That spring, teachers experienced the additional strain of preparing for and developing lessons for distance learning compared to regular in-person lessons. McAllen ISD's foresight in selecting a schedule of alternating synchronous and asynchronous lessons for 2020-21 allowed teachers to maximize their asynchronous days to plan virtual lessons, meet with Professional Learning Communities, and learn new technology skills as they navigated the world of virtual instruction. With this schedule, students have the flexibility to work at their own pace on asynchronous lesson days. They can also attend tutoring sessions or teacher office hours to get help or catch up on missing assignments. The benefits of this schedule have been enormous for both teachers' and students' performance and mental health.