

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 [] Choice

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

Official School Name Spearman Junior High School
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 315 West 5th Avenue
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Spearman State TX Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 79081-4008

County Hansford

Telephone (806) 659-2563 Fax (806) 659-2243

Web site/URL https://www.spearmanisd.net/jrhigh E-mail dan.gist@region16.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* Mr. Dan Ray Gist II E-mail dan.gist@region16.net
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Spearman Independent School District Tel. (806) 659-3233

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 Dr. Mark Garnett
(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):
- 1 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 1 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 3 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	34	24	58
7	34	25	59
8	24	26	50
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	92	75	167

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

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 0.5 % Asian
 - 0 % Black or African American
 - 61 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 38 % White
 - 0.5 % 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: 7%

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.

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	8
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	4
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	12
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	171
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.07
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	7

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

Spanish

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 23 %
38 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 54 %

Total number students who qualify: 91

8. Students receiving special education services: 7 %

11 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>2</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay | <u>8</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>0</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>0</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: 14

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	1
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	14
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	6
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	3
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 12:1

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	97%	97%	98%	98%	98%
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.

Post-Secondary Status	
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.

Spearman Junior High is a campus of PRIDE (Positive, Responsible Individuals Dedicated to Excellence). PRIDE represents the identity, culture, and work ethic of students and staff. At Spearman Jr. High School, students are developing the skills to become resilient, thriving, and contributing citizens.

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.

At the start of the 2020-2021 school year, there were a moderate number of positive cases impacting the community. The community health officials along with the school district believed it was in the best interest of Spearman Independent School District (SISD) students and their families to begin the school year with a hybrid model of remote and onsite learning. As a result, the first and second six weeks of instruction the onsite and remote learning model were carefully monitored. While remote learning is a necessary option to maintain the health and safety of students during rises in positive cases, remote instruction was not making the same impact on student learning as onsite instruction. Based on experiences from the spring of 2020 and the information from the first two six weeks, it was determined that learning occurs best when teachers are able to deliver in-person instruction to all students. Therefore, beginning the third six weeks, the school district elected to return to 100% onsite instruction. Short term remote instruction continues only when students are required to quarantine.

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

Spearman, Texas, is a rural community of approximately 3,500 people located at the top of the Texas Panhandle. It is closer to the capitals of four neighboring states than it is to its own state capital of Austin. Beneath the loamy soil that sustains the robust agricultural economy in the area, lies one of the largest underground reservoirs in the world, the Ogallala Aquifer. The fertile soil and abundant water supply, along with reliable energy sources of wind, oil, and gas have combined to make Spearman rich in natural resources, but Spearman's greatest resource lies in the people themselves. Life-long friendships cultivated through shared experiences form the fabric of this tight-knit community. The same pioneering spirit that brought together a band of early settlers one hundred years ago lives on in the familiar names, welcomes the new faces, and embraces those who return home to raise families and start businesses. The optimistic resilience of those who settled this area created a community that is now a vibrant, blended family of cultures, traditions, races, beliefs and values. Currently, almost half of the population of Spearman is of Hispanic or Latino origin. It is a town of legends and heroes, champions and patriots. In this diverse, rural community, Spearman Independent School District (SISD) is the hub of community life. From school activities to the classroom, citizens of Spearman invest their time and resources to support the endeavors of all students. As an example of this commitment to education, Spearman Scholarship Foundation will exceed \$2,000,000 in scholarships that have been awarded to Spearman High School students since its founding in 1992.

Spearman Junior High (SJH) is a Title I school that currently serves 166 students in grades 6, 7 and 8. After decades in an aging building, SJH began the 2007-2008 school year in a newly constructed facility. This move to a new facility provided the opportunity for administrators and teachers to implement new procedures that facilitated smooth transitions between classes, reduced behavioral issues and increased student safety. An environment where expectations are clearly communicated and consistently reinforced formed the foundation for creating a new campus culture. Spearman Junior High is focused on quality relationships, student growth, and a standard of excellence in every aspect of student life.

Students are encouraged to participate in the various activities offered at SJH. Seventh and eighth grade students can participate in athletic competitions in cross country, football, basketball and track. SJH students can also participate in cheer leading, band, student council or competitive academic events. Community organizations such as 4-H, Junior FFA, church youth groups and scouting provide opportunities for students to develop leadership skills and participate in community service projects. SJH students can volunteer on the elementary campus as teacher's aides and tutors for elementary English Language Learner (ELL) students after school in Homework Hangout. Pep rallies, PRIDE Assemblies and individual student locker grids filled with locker tags provide opportunities to recognize student participation and achievements.

Classroom guidance lessons based on social emotional learning principles are taught by the campus counselor. Sixth grade boys and girls participate in small group sessions during the first semester of junior high to provide support during the transition to a new campus. Although health is not a required subject to graduate high school, all eighth grade students are able to earn high school course credit through the full year health course that focuses on the physical and emotional health and well-being of students.

SJH administrators utilize scheduling to facilitate the instructional priorities of the campus. Academy class focuses on small groups engaging in hands-on, interactive lessons designed to target specific tested student expectations. The Academy rotation schedule provides 45 extra days of instruction for each state assessed subject each year. PRIDE Time gives all students time each day to receive targeted, individualized, and differentiated instruction in math and reading using an online program that is diagnostic, prescriptive and adaptive. Data is used to drive instruction in Tier 1 core content classroom instruction, in Tier 2 Academy small group activities and in Tier 3 individualized PRIDE Time online learning and Response to Intervention (RtI).

A mid-morning nutrition break was added to provide student athletes and students who do not eat before school the opportunity to eat a healthy breakfast or nutritious snack. This break has reduced student visits to the nurse and increased instructional time. Addressing this physical need for students has helped students

maintain focus and energy throughout their morning classes.

As a result of the commitment of SJH staff to creating a culture of excellence consisting of high expectations and research-based instructional strategies to deliver targeted, intentional instruction, SJH earned an A Overall Rating as well as an A in Student Achievement, School Progress and Closing the Gaps in the 2018-2019 school year. SJH also received all seven distinction designations during the 2018-2019 and 2017-2018 school years.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

Spearman Independent School District utilizes a core curriculum resource for English language arts/reading, math, science, and social studies. All content in the curriculum specifically aligns to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). Spearman Junior High utilizes the provided scope and sequence as a roadmap for pacing instruction and a framework of skills. The curriculum provides vertical alignment ensuring expectations are taught to the rigor and complexity required for student mastery in each grade level and subject area. Instructional Focus Documents (IFD), provide targeted and specific focus for teachers to create high-yielding, engaging lessons and the Year-at-a-Glance (YAG) ensures that all required essential knowledge and skills are covered each six weeks. Lead4ward resources provide instructional strategies to engage learners, build content and differentiate instruction. A system of interventions and enrichment opportunities improves skills for students performing above or below grade level. Core subject teachers participate in Professional Learning Communities and meet weekly for intentional conversations on alignment, instruction, and assessment data. All assessments are administered using Data Management for Assessment and Curriculum (DMAC). Data is utilized from formative and summative assessments to target student expectations for intervention that are below mastery level as well as to identify the students that are in need of additional instruction.

Spearman Junior High began school in August with the majority of students attending in person. Remote learning was suspended at the end of the second six weeks. Because SJH is a 1:1 device campus, students identified as positive for Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) or a close contact of a COVID-19 positive individual are able to transition smoothly between remote and in-person instruction. Teachers trained students on the use of online classroom platforms during in-person instruction. Online classroom platforms are used to share classroom materials and assignments and to meet virtually with students who move to remote learning during quarantine. Assessments for remote learners are administered through online classroom platforms or the web-based assessment software used by the district.

All social studies classes use technology for research that is linked to classroom content and vocabulary. Students also use technology for independent research and for collaboration on group projects. Formative and summative assessments are used to identify areas in need of intervention and tutorials for struggling students. All grade levels use an online textbook platform aligned to the essential knowledge and skills that contains all of the course content, assessments, charts, galleries, and timelines that make learning interactive.

The goal of science instruction is to develop critical thinking skills in order to make informed decisions while acquiring knowledge of foundational scientific concepts. Science courses in grades 6, 7, and 8 follow the 5E Model (Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, Evaluate) for instruction using the IFD as a resource in teaching science concepts relating to physical, life, and earth sciences. Online resources that provide similar activities and match the rigor of classroom instruction are identified for use with remote learners. The goal for every student is to master the grade level content defined by the essential knowledge and skills. Data from formal and informal assessments, along with benchmarks administered twice a year, is used to form tutorial groups and plan for each Academy group. Data from sixth and seventh grade science assessments is reviewed to identify existing gaps and plan for appropriate instruction in eighth grade.

Math instruction has advanced in past years from algorithmic instruction to more visual and conceptual instruction using multiple modalities. Instruction utilizes visualization, manipulatives, mental models, foldables, and most importantly, real-world activities and applications. Requiring students to verbalize their thinking during bell work, group work, and targeted questioning allows teachers to immediately assess and direct instruction. The use of verbalization and discussion in the classroom incorporates peer teaching and differentiated instruction, and flows seamlessly into classroom instruction. Assessments based on released state assessment items and TEKS aligned curriculum items provide the level of rigor needed for accurate data necessary to improve instruction and identify concepts requiring intervention.

The English Language Arts and Reading teachers at Spearman Junior High strive to cultivate a love for reading through a balanced literacy approach. Students are encouraged to read through book tasting

sessions, book clubs, book talks, and reading novels together. Students are challenged to develop as critical thinkers, readers, writers, speakers, and listeners. The study of various literary genres throughout the year provides the opportunity for the essential knowledge and skills to be taught and reinforced in various ways. The use of reading passages with varying reading levels allows for differentiation within the classroom. Data from each test is analyzed for planning small group instruction. Writing at SJH is taught through a program that breaks down the writing process and builds on it throughout the year. Students have gained confidence in their writing as they are able to write in a variety of genres.

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

Spearman Junior High offers Algebra I for high school credit to eighth grade students who meet the prerequisite qualifications. Students who enroll in Algebra I in eighth grade take an important first step in completing the STEM endorsement in high school. Students who are able to receive credit for Algebra I in eighth grade will not have to take two math courses during the same year in high school to meet STEM endorsement requirement of 5 math courses.

Principles of Ag, Food, and Natural Resources is offered as an elective to eighth grade students. Approximately 20 eighth grade students enroll in this course each year. This introductory course is a prerequisite for the sequence of courses within the Business and Industry endorsement in high school. Students receive a high school credit for this course and are able to continue courses in high school in the Manufacturing or the Principles of Ag, Food and Natural Resources pathway. The online curriculum used in this course is aligned to the required essential knowledge and skills and includes assessments to determine mastery of content.

Spearman Junior High has an active student council selected by the student body. Student council members are responsible for campus fund-raising events and assist in distributing student awards during PRIDE assemblies. They are responsible for morning announcements for the campus. Students serving on the student council assist the local nursing home, the Hansford Manor, with special events and celebrations for the residents. The Spearman Junior High Student Council donates their time to support Snack Pack 4 Kids, which is a local organization that provides nutritious snacks for underprivileged students. The student council also makes a monetary donation each year to financially support this civic organization.

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

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Band is required for all sixth and seventh grade students. Eighth grade students have the option of taking Band or Principles of Agriculture. Band is a part of the students' daily schedule. Sixth grade band students are divided into two separate sections to allow the band director to focus instruction on specific skill acquisition in brass and woodwinds. Essential knowledge and skills are taught at each grade level and mastery of these skills are assessed each year using the Concert/Sight-Reading Evaluation based on standards set by Texas music educators.

Physical education (P.E.) is required for all Spearman Jr. High students. Students in seventh and eighth grade have the choice to take athletics instead of physical education. Boys in athletics compete in football, basketball, and track. Girls in athletics compete in basketball and track. Female athletes who participate in cross country competitions work out before and after school. This year, 45 seventh and eighth grade boys and 31 seventh and eighth girls are currently participating in athletics. All physical education classes follow the required essential knowledge and skills. Sixth grade P.E. activities focus on developing pre-athletic skills and personal fitness. Seventh and eighth grade P.E. is designed to increase personal fitness and build social skills through participation in group games and competitions.

Health is a full-year course required for all eighth-grade students. Although this course is not required for graduation, students earn a half of a high school credit for taking this course. Students are able to meet the

graduation requirement for CPR and Stop the Bleed training that is provided in health. The health curriculum is based on the essential knowledge and skills and covers all aspects of health. Students learn about all aspects of physical health, including physical activity and fitness, diet and nutrition, body composition, hygiene and sleep. Educating students on mental health is a priority. Lessons on resolving conflict, stress management, mental disorders and solutions are an important part of the health curriculum. Health also includes instruction in the physical, emotional and financial consequences of becoming a parent from Parenting and Paternity Awareness curriculum created by the State of Texas Attorney General's Office. The Truth About Drugs Curriculum is used to educate students about drugs and alcohol and the dangers of substance abuse. The Worth the Wait curriculum is used to provide information to students regarding choices involving dating relationships and sexual behavior.

Teen Leadership is a one semester course that is taken by all eighth grade students for high school speech credit. This course focuses on the qualities of leadership, including character, attitude, and image. Through collaboration with other students, students learn basic interpersonal skills, such as, how to meet a new person, introduce themselves, make eye contact, and shake hands. The course also focuses on the value of image and the importance of first impressions. Students are given the opportunity to analyze the famous speeches of public figures and prepare and present speeches to the class.

3. Academic Supports:

Previous year state assessment scores, data from online diagnostic assessments in reading and math along with teacher recommendations are used to identify students in need of intervention. Students functioning below grade level with significant gaps in math and reading are placed in RtI. The campus interventionist works with six to eight students in RtI two times per week during PRIDE Time using data to determine concept mastery level for these students. A plan is put in place for each student that uses vertical alignment scaffolding to move students who are functioning at lower grade levels up the scaffold ladder to mastery of current grade level concepts. Students are monitored for progress on their online differentiated learning path. All students are administered an online diagnostic assessment at the beginning, middle and end of the year to track growth in math and reading. Formative and summative assessments provide data on current grade level performance for all students.

Special education, ELL, and Section 504 students may be included in RtI. The special education teacher, trained bilingual paraprofessionals, or other trained personnel also provide individualized support for many of these students during PRIDE Time or another period during the day. Students identified with dyslexia attend a class daily with a trained dyslexia specialist. After completing the program, these students receive support through classroom and test accommodations.

Students struggling with grade level concepts receive support from core content teachers during "Transition." These students are functioning close to or at grade level, but are in danger of falling behind due to difficulties in grasping new grade-level concepts. The "transition" groups are usually very fluid and allow teachers to work with students on specific skills to ensure their success on grade level content.

Academy is a rotational class for all seventh and eighth grade students. Students are grouped based on previous year state assessment data. Academy teachers use data from formative assessments to identify areas of weakness for the group. Interactive, hands on, visual lessons that heighten student engagement are used to target specific concepts. This grouping enables the teacher to design activities that challenge upper level students to deepen their understanding of the material or to extend learning beyond the content. Performance gaps in social studies for economically disadvantaged students and Hispanic students are addressed in Academy during the social studies rotation. Academy has been an invaluable tool in filling gaps in student understanding of content and moving greater numbers of students toward mastery levels on state assessments.

Students performing above grade level receive accelerated instruction through online, adaptive software, high school credit for advanced courses, and advanced instruction in Academy. Gifted and talented students participate in student-centered learning activities in the areas of science, technology, engineering, art and math through a pull-out program twice a month.

The special education teacher, the campus interventionist, and bilingual paraprofessionals also provide support to special education students, ELLs, Section 504 and RtI students during Tier 1 instruction. This support enables these students to learn with their peers in a regular classroom setting with the resources necessary to be successful.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

A positive environment is an essential element of a culture of excellence. Through Boot Camp, a campus-wide orientation held the first day of school each year, student expectations are communicated to students and campus procedures are rehearsed by students and staff. Expectations involving student behavior, work ethic, respect for others, and pride in the campus facility are consistently reinforced throughout the year. A nurturing, structured, and safe environment provides a foundation for exploring interests, developing new friendships, and welcoming new challenges.

Spearman Junior High promotes academic growth through staff support, student incentives and ownership of academic performance. The faculty at Spearman Junior High are often available before and after school to help struggling students. Students set personal growth goals in math and reading for middle of year and end of year assessments in the online, individualized program. Students track their growth and see their progress. PRIDE Assemblies are held each six weeks to recognize students making the A and A/B Honor Roll and those who have perfect attendance. Students receive locker tags for their achievements to display on their personalized locker grid.

Students are exposed to a variety of careers through Career Day, PRIDE Assembly speakers and career guidance lessons. Eighth grade students can earn high school credit in Algebra I, Health, and Principles of Agriculture courses. They are exposed to high school CTE courses in the high school Career and Technology Tour and individualized high school schedule planning.

Spearman Junior High students have opportunities to participate in various activities and leadership positions. Students grow through collaboration with others in the classroom and camaraderie cultivated among teammates. Spearman Junior High students participate in food drives and fund-raising to help those in need. Spearman Junior High students volunteer to help with activities at the Hansford Manor for special events, pack food bags for Snack Pak 4 Kids, and assist ELL elementary students in Homework Hangout, a weekly, after-school homework assistance program. These opportunities foster a compassion for others and a spirit of volunteerism in students.

Keeping students engaged during the pandemic proved to be a great challenge. Teachers utilized Google classroom to help quarantined students stay involved. An asynchronous plan was created by the administration which required teachers to post all classroom resources, materials, and assignments online. Teachers would also create sessions to proctor tests for students who were unable to attend class in person. These practices allowed students to remain connected to the school at a very critical time.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Spearman Junior High has developed strategies over the years to gain trust and build relationships with all families served. Partnering with families and the community is key to supporting the academic achievement of all students. One of the goals of Spearman Junior High is to build a strong, trusting relationship with the parents of all students so their families will make school a priority. A majority of students at Spearman ISD come from low socioeconomic homes. Spearman Junior High instituted several strategies to foster a sense of trust and community with families.

Each August the community anxiously awaits the beginning of school. The unofficial beginning of school is the “Open House” event that is coordinated with the school’s booster club. After the Open House, the community gathers at the football stadium for “Meet the Lynx” and all high school athletes are introduced. The excitement for the upcoming school year is on full display. The community then gathers for a hot dog supper or ice cream social to highlight the evening.

Spearman Junior High makes it a priority to tackle the challenge of parent communication in a variety of ways. Classroom teachers and the administration take advantage of the wide array of technology to

communicate with parents. Two-way communication tools, email, webpages and social media are mainstays in keeping parents informed, but the very best communication tool, and the most reliable, is the old fashioned phone call. The administration has stressed the importance of phone calls home to parents. Many parents want to help their children, but do not know how. Things can be simplified through a personal phone call.

Parents, community members and business owners serve on various committees within the school. These committees meet periodically (at least quarterly) and help establish the goals and vision for the various programs within the school. Their input is used to help write the campus and district improvement plans.

One of the most valuable community partnerships is Snack Pak 4 Kids. Each month various organizations and church groups meet to assemble the sacks of food that are given to needy students on Friday afternoon. The purpose is to provide students with much needed nutritious snacks for the weekend. By seeking to meet the most basic needs of students, Spearman Junior High demonstrates its commitment to educate the whole child and boost achievement for all students.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

Creating a unique culture and chasing excellence became the mantra of the administration at Spearman Junior High. This had to be the focus for many years. Nothing is done overnight, and you can liken the process to turning a ship out at sea. There are many moving parts and many people involved, and they all have to be working in the same direction for a visible change to happen.

At Spearman Junior High there are students and staff who come from a variety of backgrounds, cultures, and experiences. The goal was to not focus on the differences, but rather, take a totally unique approach. SJH focused on what everyone had in common and what all involved wanted to accomplish. The goal was to create a “Culture of Excellence” at Spearman Junior High. The philosopher Aristotle might have the best quote to sum up the approach to creating a culture of excellence at Spearman Junior High: “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence is not an act, but a habit.”

Leaders define culture in any organization, but the success of any organization is due to the people who are in the trenches. The cultural focus with staff was building strong relationships and trust. Countless hours were spent working together and earning trust from one another and making staff feel valued and supported. Spearman ISD is a rural community that does not always get a large number of applicants for each job that is posted. There was a shift in hiring practices that focuses on hiring people of high character rather than hiring someone solely based on a resume or transcript. This proved to be the single most important ingredient in creating a culture of excellence. People that were hired over the years were team players who loved kids, had a strong work ethic, and a “can-do” attitude. This proved to be pivotal at a crucial time in the “turning of the ship.”

There are so many wonderful dedicated teachers that have taught at Spearman Junior High that have given to help in the development of students and other staff members. There has been a concerted effort to train teachers how to disaggregate and interpret data. The professional development through the years was focused on learning how to turn that information into actionable data. Data truly drove instruction at SJH. This professional development focus helped many teachers develop into leaders within the school and allowed the teachers to perform at a very high level.

4. School Leadership:

Servant leadership should be at the center of every administrator’s belief system. The number one priority of an administrator who is a servant leader is to make sure that teachers have everything that they need to be successful in the classroom. If the administration focuses on the teachers and making their job easier, then the teachers can focus on making students their top priority and helping them succeed.

The success of any group depends on ensuring that they can trust each other at all times. People do not always see eye to eye in every situation, but if they trust each other, and they know the basis for every

decision, then they can get on board and support the decisions that are made because they know what principle guided that decision.

At Spearman Junior High the administration team is comprised of the campus principal and counselor. That team was able to build a vision of excellence by focusing on the "Building Blocks of Success." The district utilizes a statewide consortium curricular resource (TEKS RS) to provide the scope and sequence. This is followed with fidelity. No exceptions.

The teachers were trained in a series of instructional strategies (Lead4ward) that would provide them with research based means to deliver the content. Data was collected after each assessment (DMAC) and then instructional decisions were made based on the data gathered. Some concepts required a revised Tier I re-teach and some TEKS were focused on during a more intensive Tier 2 approach.

"It's the little details that are vital. Little things make big things happen." John Wooden, the legendary basketball coach, focused on the smallest of details to make sure his basketball teams were successful. He would go to great lengths to ensure that his players were prepared. "Whatever is necessary" to help his boys accomplish their goals. On numerous occasions, the campus administration at SJH shuffled the master schedule at nights and on weekends to align with the goals and vision of the school. If it was in the best interest of students, countless hours would be spent re-creating an entire schedule and all students would be rescheduled by hand. There was a dedication to excellence in this approach.

The best quote to summarize the school leadership philosophy would be a quote from Nick Saban: "There is no greater barrier than low expectations" and "if the leader doesn't demand it, then certainly everyone else will not expect it."

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

The administration at Spearman ISD is very aware of the political climate and social challenges that we face in today's uncertain times. In an effort to be proactive in this area, Spearman ISD, which is over 60% Hispanic, has taken the initiative in addressing potential issues. Approximately three years ago the administration developed the Hispanic Leadership Council. This group is comprised of Hispanic leaders in the community that come from a variety of backgrounds. Represented on this committee are business owners and professional employees from the community. All are connected with the school in some way and most are either parents or grandparents.

The goal of this committee is to be able to learn more about the culture and climate of the Hispanic community while creating an open dialogue between the community, parents and the school. The district shares vital information and aims to build trust in hopes of them becoming advocates for the school within the Hispanic community.

There have been several district initiatives that have come directly from the creation of this council. An immigration lawyer was brought in on two separate occasions to discuss a variety of topics including the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). The speaker was able to answer many questions and provide much clarification for attendees. The district also offers adult ESL classes during the evening. This activity is paid for by the district and the only charge to persons who attend is for the workbook associated with the class. There are many levels of language learners and this class is for beginners and the more advanced English speakers as well. Another initiative that the district has employed to help bridge the gap between Hispanic families and the school is to provide a parent liaison. By being the constant resource for parents to contact, the hope was to build trust as well as answer questions about how things work within the school system.

One of the biggest assets of the district is that they employ a Spanish speaking secretary at every campus. All communication, both written and digital, that comes from the district is written in both English and Spanish.

As a result of the efforts of Spearman ISD, a great deal of trust has been built. The families of students understand that the school is an ally, and the teachers of the district have been equipped to establish positive relationships with the parents of all Spearman Junior High students. This has a direct impact on student performance in the classroom.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

All schools around the country, regardless of location, economic status of students, etc., faced unprecedented challenges over the last year. The COVID-19 global pandemic brought school as we know it to a screeching halt last March. No one was prepared for what we were facing and there was no procedural manual to follow.

By recognizing the challenges that all students were facing, the administration created a COVID-19 acute response strategy to help support each student. Each staff member was assigned to a team of 8 students that they were responsible for checking on weekly. A phone call was made each week to students. Students were starved for the interaction with teachers and hearing a friendly voice was paramount in helping some students succeed. The teachers documented the conversations on a Google doc so that all teachers were abreast of students' individual needs and overall well-being. The most common needs that were discussed centered on technology, food, and mental health.

Due to Spearman ISD's dedicated focus on 21st century skills prior to the onset of the pandemic, students were able to pick up devices from the instructional technology department at scheduled times and locations designated by the district administration. All students at Spearman Junior High were also provided times and locations for meal retrieval each day. Since the school created these systems of support, students could continue to have their needs met by the school system even though their world had been turned upside down.

The administration made home visits to students that teachers identified as "at risk." The school counselor was able to personally have conversations with both parents and students and the result was two-fold: parents once again saw the school as a partner, one that genuinely cared about their children; and the school was able to gauge the emotional state of the students.

At the end of the school year there was still work to be done within the COVID-19 response strategy. In a small, rural school, in a normal school year, it is a rite of passage to have an 8th grade promotion ceremony. Due to the statewide limitations it was not possible to host a ceremony in the spring of 2020. So that students did not miss out, the principal and counselor went to every student's home and presented them with a diploma and took pictures to share with their parents. The goal was to keep students and their families from becoming casualties of the pandemic.