System of Great Schools Network Application: Cohort 2 - 2018

The System of Great Schools (SGS) Network exists to support school districts across Texas interested in pursuing the SGS strategy. This is an optional technical support program designed for districts that have the determination to pursue this work with or without the support of the Network. A comprehensive program description can be found on the SGS webpage along with other resources and information. **Please thoroughly review the program description prior to and during the completion of this application.**

Districts that pursue the SGS strategy will design and implement a continuous improvement process that annually evaluates school quality, parent demand, and neighborhood needs to take strategic action to both improve schools and provide parents with the schools and programs they desire. The goal of the SGS strategy is to ensure that every student has access to a high-quality learning environment which meets their needs.

All Texas districts are welcome to apply to the SGS Network, though TEA will select no more than 6 districts to join Cohort 2. Members will be selected on their need and willingness and commitment to pursue elements of the SGS strategy, including evidence that they have explored or have already begun implementation of key SGS components. An identified set of commitments can be found below.

The application process will include multiple phases. Phase 1: complete this application; Phase 2: respond to a set of questions based on local data which will be compiled and sent to applicants; and Phase 3: interview with the superintendent and other leadership. Following Phase 3, TEA will send invitations to up to 6 districts.

The primary purpose of this application is to determine the will of district stakeholders to adopt a System of Great Schools strategy as the foundation of its theory of action. It is expected that participating districts will also have the interest and capacity to provide TEA's Division of System Support and Innovation with critical feedback on how to improve network services and programing.

Prior to completing this application, please thoroughly review the SGS Program Description. This can be found on the TEA website at www.tea.texas.gov/sgs

Contact mike.herschenfeld@tea.texas.gov, Manager of District Strategy, if you have any questions.

1. **Contact Information:**

District	Brownsville Independent School District
Mailing Address	1900 Price Road Suite 307
Superintendent Name	Dr. Esperanza Zendejas
Superintendent Email	drezendejas@bisd.us
Superintendent Phone	956-548-8011
Administrative Assistant Name	Belinda Ochoa
Administrative Assistant Email	bochoa@bisd.us
Primary District Contact for SGS Related Work	Dr. Esperanza Zendejas
Primary Contact Email	drezendejas@bisd.us
Person Completing Application	Dr. Greg Garcia

2. **District Leadership**: List all positions that report directly to the superintendent. **Please attach a current organizational chart when submitting your application.**

Name	Role/Title	Email
Lorenzo Sanchez	Chief Financial Officer	lsanchez2@bisd.us
Carmelita Rodriguez	Human Resources	carodriguez@bisd.us
Pam Van Ravenswaay	Assessment/Research/Evaluation	pvan@bisd.us
Dr. Lee G. Garcia	District Planner	lggarcia@bisd.us
Robert Fisher	Computer/Technology Services	bass@bisd.us
Berta Pena	Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction	bpena@bisd.us
Dora Sauceda/Teri Alarcon	Area Assistant Superintendent/ Secondary Schools	drdesauceda@bisd.us taalarcon@bisd.us
Jimmy Haynes/Sandra Lopez	Area Assistant Superintendent/ Elementary Schools	jhaynes@bisd.us sandrall@bisd.us

3. Current Strategy:

3a) Does the district have a published strategic plan? If yes, include a link below. If no, are there any plans to begin the strategic planning process?	YES	☒	NO	☐

http://www.bisd.us/PDFs/01_BISD/02_Mission_Goals/2016-2017_StrategicPlan.pdf

3b) Write 5 – 7 sentences summarizing the district's theory of action underpinning the strategic priorities above.

The district is very dedicated to making educational and financial decisions based on what is best for BISD students' social and academic needs. The BISD plan includes designing and implementing an effective and well aligned Early Childhood Education through Post Secondary progam that maximizes STEM/STEAM careers and training opportunities. BISD has expanded programs that provide students additional medical, nutritional and educational opportunities before school, during school and after school during extended day. Our district continues to build and sustain partnerships with local junior colleges and university, and private industry workforce to extend learning beyond the classroom. As part of the BISD Strategic Plan, teacher recruitment and retention are accomplished through high quality professional development that focuses on teacher and campus needs. Retention and development of teachers is accomplished through BISD's mentoring, team-teaching and cross-training opportunities. BISD also sees that children and families come as a package, and therefore have proposed reinforcing parental involvement, expanding child nutrition and Pre-K options, and afterschool/extended day programs. Evaluation of all programs is accomplished through an on-going process of data analyses which provides the district and the campuses with needed information for decision-making and forward planning.

3c) Strategic Plan: Write 5 – 7 sentences below that summarize the districts high-level strategic priorities. In addition, include the duration of the current plan.

BISD's priorities include preparing our students academically for well paid and high demand jobs in STEM/STEAM fields to fill the workforce needs in our area, our state and the rest of the world. Brownsville is one of the poorest cities in the country, making BISD, the largest employer south of San Antonio, the heart of the commmunity. We want to ensure a safe and healthy environment for students, parents and everyone in our district that focuses on the effective, social, emotional and cognitive development. There is also a need to equip parents with the knowledge and skills to assist them with the ability to make the best decisions for their family. BISD sees a need to infuse the system with tecnology so that students are applying technology to learn and solve problems in the classroom. Rigorous instruction and the addition of CTE programs are in place to provide our students a competitive edge. During the fall semester BISD added the Super Supper After School program to ensure students have 3 hot meals a day and are ready and prepared to learn.
Our BISD Strategic Plan was revisited and revised in 2016 and continues to evolve with the needs of the students, the district and the community as its focus.

3d) Does the district have any in-district charters (Subchapter C) or partnership schools? If yes, please describe the schools.

Brownsville ISD has no in-district charters, but we do partner with some private schools to provide certain services - for example Dyslexia screening is provided free to several private schools.

3e) Aside from any in-district charters, does the district have any innovative or unique school models or programs (ex. Academies/magnets, New Tech, IB, etc.)? If yes, list the schools.

Brownsville Early College High School is located at the UT-Rio Grande Valley campus which allows students to take college courses.
Six Early College High Schools - Hanna, Lopez, Pace, Porter, Rivera and Veterans campuses allow all their students the opportunity to take dual enrollment courses.
Cummings Career and Technology Certification Center
Brownsville Learning Academy High School - high school overage recovery program.
Brownsville Learning Academy Middle School - middle school overage recovery program.
Lincoln Park School - provides teen mothers an opportunity to complete middle and high school, while providing day care for their children.
Brownsville Academic Center - Unlike other districts that suspend students, BISD has developed a boot camp where students receive academic instruction along with character building activities.

3f) Does the district allow for students to enroll in schools outside their attendance boundaries? If so, is this limited to specific schools? Or is there a broader choice policy?

Brownsville ISD allows elementary students school of choice. At the middle and high school levels students are zoned by proximity to their neighborhood middle school and high school. BISD has in place an "intradistrict transfer process" that allows a middle and high shool student to transfer from one school to another school as long as there is capacity for the incoming school to support the extra students and the transfer students have met all transfer criteria. BISD also has in place an "interdistrict transfer process" that allows a student to transfer from a school outside Brownsville to a BISD campus as long as there is capacity for the incoming school to support the extra students and the transfer students have met all transfer criteria.

3g) Does the district devolve autonomy to schools? If this doesn't exist for every school, how are the schools selected? Which aspects of operations do principals have autonomy over?

BISD has increasingly provided more direct funding to all of its 58 campuses instead of channeling funds through programs and purchases made by support departments. With this comes great fiscal responsibility for each campus administration and site-based decision making (SBDM) team. In addition, all campuses are responsible for how they utilize their FTE's. Every grade level and/or department at each school is involved in the selection of teachers and support staff.

4. Self-Assessment of Internal Capacity:

4a) Does the district have an office (or FTE) dedicated to regularly evaluating school performance and recommending high and medium stakes actions to ensure continuous school quality improvement. If yes, include the name of the office, the person who leads it, and what functions are subsumed by the office.	YES	☒	NO	☐

Assessment, Research and Evaluation Department; (P. Van Ravenswaay), Curriculum and Instruction Department (Berta Pena), and the Area Assistant Superintendents (T. Alarcon, D. Sauceda, S. Lopez, and J. Haynes) comprise this team.
The team utilizes various data sources (benchmarks, TELPAS and STAAR/EOC Assessments, teacher walkthroughs) to provide timely results and recommendations for continuous improvements for every campus.

4b) Does the district have an office (or FTE) dedicated to supporting and creating new school, program, and/or partnership options? (ex. Office of Transformation, Office of Innovation, Office of New Schools). If yes, include the name of the office, the person who leads it, and what functions are subsumed by the office.	YES	☒	NO	☐

Dr. Lee Garcia is currently the BISD District Planner and Statistician. BISD is moving in the direction to hire an Assistant Superintendent for Innovation Strategy and Educational Technology which will expand and increase the job responsibilities. This FTE would be responsible for implementing innovative strategies, programs, and solutions that help drive continuous improvement across the school district based on identified and projected needs and opportunties. This person will evaluate existing practices in BISD to identify areas of improvement, modification or elimination and the possibility of implementing innovative and technological ideas to improve student achievement and maximization of district programs and operations.

4c) Does the district have an office (or FTE) dedicated to streamlining student enrollment and reducing barriers to access to the district's schools and programs? If yes, include the name of the office, the person who leads it, and what functions are subsumed by the office.	YES	☒	NO	☐

Randy Park at Pupil Services provides information and assistance to parents that want to transfer their children to another campus, or are new to the community and need information on the various programs available in the district.

4d) The System of Great Schools Network defines 4 levers that SGS Network districts work to continuously improve on. Please refer to the SGS Program Description to understand the type of work that exists within each lever and attempt to identify, in the tables below, who in your district would lead that work, what related work the district has engaged in over the past 2 years, and how you would rank your desire for support in that lever.
Please note if there is not currently a position or office where that work would live.

Lever 1: School Performance Management: District dedicates capacity towards annually reviewing the performance of schools, and taking strategic and transparent actions based on schools' performance with the goal of ensuring that more students are in higher performing classrooms every year.

Who in your district would lead SGS work in this lever (Name and/or title)?

Mrs. Berta Pena, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction

What work has the district engaged in related to this lever over the past 2 years?

BISD Superintendent Dr. Zendejas, has re-assigned principals to improve both campus culture and academic performance. The superintenedent reviewed the schools that had decreased in academic performance and this resulted in the appointment of high-energy principals to low performing campuses. In addition, all campuses were directed to create a Data Room where student data is displayed and consistently reviewed.

Lever 2: Expanding Great Options: District dedicates capacity towards executing strategic school actions such as replicating successful schools, taking aggressive action to improve existing schools, and launching new schools.

Who in your district would lead SGS work in this lever (Name and/or title)?

Dr. Esperanza Zendejas, Superintendent of Schools

What work has the district engaged in related to this lever over the past 2 years?

Brownsville Learning Academy(BLA) High School and Middle School were created to service overage students at each level and provide the extra support so students could be successful in a smaller learning environment. In turn this removed overage students from the corresponding schools. The BLA High School was relocated this past summer to the Cummings Career and Technology Certification Center so that students would have greater access to job certification programs. Based upon the academic drop off between 5th and 6th grade, our district has proposed a pilot to allow a cohort of elementary schools to offer 6th graders an opportunity to remain at their high performing elemenary school in an effort to increase academic achievement.

Lever 3: Access to Options: District dedicates capacity towards supporting families to understand, navigate, and access best-fit school and program options.

Who in your district would lead SGS work in this lever (Name and/or title)?

Assistant Superintendent for Innovation Strategy and Educational Technology, the selection of this person is pending.

What work has the district engaged in related to this lever over the past 2 years?

BISD in the last two years has given parents of elementary students the option to enroll their children at any of the 37 elementary schools district-wide. Parents of secondary students that want to participate in career and technology opportunities that are offered at only one high shool setting may enroll their child at that school for part of the day. BISD also provides transportation from the home campus to the specialty program

at the other high schools or at the Cummings CTE Certification Center.

Lever 4: School Autonomy: District dedicates capacity towards empowering school leaders with increased autonomy over talent, budget, program, and schedule.

Who in your district would lead SGS work in this lever (Name and/or title)?

Lorenzo Sanchez, BISD Chief Financial Officer; and Berta Pena, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction

What work has the district engaged in related to this lever over the past 2 years?

Our 58 schools have been given an opportunity to modify their schedule to meet the needs of their respective campus (I.E. number of class periods per day; ability to block within the traditional schedule for certain students). Principals also have latitude in how they invest their funds based on the needs of students, teachers and facility. Our superintendent consistently promotes the visions of autonomy and responsibility, holding everyone accountable for student outcomes.

4e) Operationalizing the System of Great Schools strategy most often requires a district to rethink the schools, programs, and services it offers to students and families. While we understand that some school actions are difficult to actualize, <u>we believe that district leaders have the responsibility to take any reasonable action to ensure that more students are in a high-performing seat every year</u>. In the table below, please indicate district leaders' willingness to pursue specific school actions.

Action	District has implemented	If yes, describe how the action was implemented and what campuses were affected. If no, please explain why the district would, or would not, consider implementing this action.
Maximize impact of highest performing schools		
Ensure all high-performing campuses are fully enrolled	Yes ☒ No ☐	BISD allows transfers to high performing schools if the schools meet the needs of the student and have capacity. Students enrolling from private and charter schools are given the choice of attending a high performing school.
Expand grades to existing high-performing schools	Yes ☐ No ☒	BISD this spring has initiated a plan to pilot 5th graders currently at high performing elementary schools to remain there for 6th grade.

Change attendance boundaries to ensure more students are zoned to high-performing schools	Yes ☐ No ☒	BISD would explore this strategy to maximize the capacity of high performing schools by adding facilites thus increasing enrollment. Because BISD has a large service area this action may cause considerable transportation issues.
Form an office to oversee the district's innovation and transformation work	Yes ☐ No ☒	BISD is currently advertising for an individual to oversee this work and district transformation effort.
School Autonomy		
Give campus leaders autonomy over talent, budget, program, and schedule	Yes ☒ No ☐	Campuses have the ability to budget, recruit talent and select programs based on campus needs.
Convert an existing campus into an in-district (Subchapter C) charter to formalize contractual school level autonomies	Yes ☐ No ☒	BISD explored this avenue a few years ago and felt it was not a "right fit" at that time. We will explore other options in the coming years.
New Schools		
Launch a new district school	Yes ☒ No ☐	BISD has created the centralized Cummings Career and Technology Certification Center that houses several CTE programs that all high schools can access for their students, including BLA High School for overage students.
Authorize a new in-district charter school (Sub-C)	Yes ☐ No ☒	BISD is open to exploring this strategy should the need arise in the future.
Conduct a "call for quality schools" to identify potential school management partners	Yes ☐ No ☒	BISD at this time does not see a postive outcome to identify potential school management partners. Since our schools are making academic gains, there is less of a need for management partners and monies have a direct path to our students.
School Closure		
Close and consolidate a persistently low-performing campus	Yes ☒ No ☐	BISD closed Cummings Middle School (MS) through a 2-year phase out due to persistent low performance. Through re-zoning, students moved to three other high performing middle schools.

Close and replace a persistently low-performing campus	Yes ☒ No ☐	Cummings MS was closed due to long-term low performance. BISD replaced the school with the Brownsville Learning Academy for overage students and a CTE Certification Center.

5. Desire for a New or Enhanced Improvement Strategy:

5a) Why is this the right time for your district to engage with the SGS Network and implement a SGS strategy as the district's operating system?
At a time when districts state-wide are receiving less funding and BISD is experiencing a decline in enrollment, it is time to think outside the box. To maximize funding and facilities upgrades for future programs, BISD would benefit from an ouside lens to help us maintain focus on student oriented outcomes.

5b) To what extent, if at all, would joining the network signal a new theory of action vs. an enhancement or acceleration of the current theory of action? Please explain how.
Through the action of the four levers BISD gains both external experts and possiblities not yet explored. This would also signal a need to revisit and revise our BISD Strategic Plan to incorporate the strategies of the Systems of Great Schools Network, which is consistent with our current direction, always keeping the focus on the needs of students and parents.

5c) If your district is invited to join the SGS TA network what specific actions will you take to both educate and gain buy-in from local stakeholders (including the Board of Trustees) on the district's membership in the network and its exploration of SGS related work that will be implemented?
BISD will setup committees around the 4 levers. Each lever will be lead by an Assistant Superintendent. They will ensure that the different stakeholders, including board members, parents, community and business leaders, BISD personnel and representatives of higher education are engaged. TV programs developed by KBSD and our website will be utilzed to keep the entire community informed.

6. Local Support: Can the district demonstrate local support from philanthropic organizations for implementing the SGS strategy, specifically for raising funds to create new schools and/or build talent pipelines?

Brownsville while it has a strong port does not have a big box industry, therefore the philanthropic organizations are missing. The majority of the industries are small and many jobs are across the border in Mexico. Many of the big businesses from different parts of the U.S. and Mexico go through Brownsville but do not stop.

7. District Commitments: TEA believes system ownership and a continuous improvement mindset is critical to the sustainable success of ensuring more students are in high-quality learning environments. Given our desire to work collaboratively with district leaders, we are seeking the following required commitments from districts applying to join the SGS network:

Commitment	Superintendent Initial
Demonstration of commitment to making the SGS strategy a top priority and the base of the district's theory of action	EZ
Dedication of capacity (FTE and/or office) to transformation and innovation work	EZ

TEA

Development and implementation of Lever 1: Performance Management	EZ
Development and implementation of Lever 2: Expanding Great Options	EZ
Development and implementation of Lever 3: Access to Options	EZ
Development and implementation of Lever 4: School Autonomy	EZ
Participation in a comprehensive District Readiness Assessment to assess current SGS strengths and opportunities	EZ
Board and superintendent participation in a Lone Star Governance workshop	EZ
Sharing of knowledge and lessons learned throughout the process	EZ
Access to central office leadership and staff	EZ
Superintendent and leadership participation in SGS network summits and meetings	EZ
Sharing of all materials and tools created in the Network	EZ

Are there any other topics or SGS related activities that the district is interested in learning more about, or receiving support around?
There is a need within BISD to explore avenues to utilize funds and resources (buildings and talent) more strategically so that our system is benefiting the students and parents now and in the future.

System of Great Schools
Reimbursement Guidelines

Please Note: Include all original receipts when submitting reimbursement. Ensure to complete the contact information at the top of the reimbursement form (Advisors should utilize the organization as stated in your contract/Letter of Agreement).

Travel Guidelines	
Air Travel	Must submit the airline passenger itemized receipt showing proof of payment. Receipts are also required for airport parking, shuttle or taxi/Rideshare as appropriate. Ticket exchange receipts are not a valid proof of purchase. Ticket exchange receipts must be accompanied by original payment receipt. Airfare should not exceed $500 total (Round Trip) without prior approval. Please contact jennifer.irrobali@esc13.txed.net to request consideration.
Car Rental	Rental car should not exceed the economy or standard sized vehicle without prior approval. No reimbursement will be given for rental car insurance, additional drivers, or luxury vehicles. (Approval must be obtained in advance.)
Personal Vehicle	If applicable, the participant is allowed to utilize a personal vehicle with point-to-point mileage documented by a mapping service, such as Google maps, for travel from lodging to the pre-approved destination. Mileage reimbursement rate will be the state specified rate at the time of travel.
Lodging	Each participant will be reimbursed the maximum lodging allowance (excluding taxes). Itemized receipt is required showing a paid status. Maximum lodging rates can be found using the following link: https://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/104877
Taxi/Rideshare	Taxi or Rideshare receipts must have a logo, time and date. Reimbursement is provided for travel from the airport to the designated hotel each way.

SGS/ESC 13 does **not** reimburse:	
● Airfare above $500 roundtrip without prior approval	● Baggage fees
● Both airfare *and* rental	● Luxury rental cars
● Car rental above economy/standard per day	● Valet parking
● Car rental insurance	● Early bird check-in
● Additional drivers for a car rental	● Room-service fees
● Tips/Gratuity	● State tax
● Premium air fare seating	● Food and/or beverages
● Internet	● Travel beyond required destination(s)
	● Hotel Incidentals

- Airfare is determined by the shortest distance from Austin using a mapping service and reimbursable for those attendees which require 100+ miles of travel. Please submit your W-9 as a district.

NON-STAFF REIMBURSEMENT INSTRUCTIONS

Please review the following instructions before sumitting your expenses for reimbursement.

Original Itemized Receipts for all items to be reimbursed are required
Receipts must show form of payment and a $0 balance

Mileage	Effective 3/1/2016, mileage will be reimbursed at a rate of $0.54 per mile. Point to Point drivers need to write down their full address of travel destinations as well as submitting a map quest for backup.
Rentals	Rentals will be reimbursed at no more then $80.00 a day. Any costs over that will not be reimbursed. Receipts are required.
Flights	You must provide receipts with the purchase/payment amount. Flights must be economy class. Any fees incurred for flight changes will not be reimbursed.
Shuttle/Cab Fare	Receipt must include all amounts - any tip as well as the date. Tips are not reimbursable.
Hotels	You will need to submit the hotel receipt with itemization of charges as well as proof of payment. Tips and Incidentals (ie: room service charges) are not reimbursable.
Meals	Original ITEMIZED (detail of all items purchased) receipts are required for ALL meals to be reimbursed. There will be no reimbursement for tips or alcohol. Receipts shall not have alcohol on them or the entire meal will be deducted. Meals provided by the event attended will not be reimbursed. Meal expenses will not exceed the per meal maximum (breakfast $10, lunch $15, dinner $21).

Please note: The Business Office of Region 13 may adjust your reimbursement amounts after submission for reasons including but not limited to complying with rules and guidelines, insufficient documentation, inaccurate mileage calculations.

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