

**U.S. Department of Education**  
**2016 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program**

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Heather A Mildon

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

Official School Name Orion Elementary School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 5112 Arctic Warrior Drive

(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City JBER State AK Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 99506-1145

County Anchorage Municipality

Telephone (907) 742-0250

Fax (907) 742-0265

Web

site/URL http://www.asdk12.org/aboutschools/orion/schoolname,3084,en.html

E-mail mcentyre\_heather@asdk12.org

Facebook Page

https://www.facebook.com/orionelementary/?ref=boo

Twitter Handle kmarks

Google+ \_\_\_\_\_

YouTube/URL \_\_\_\_\_ Blog \_\_\_\_\_

Other Social Media Link \_\_\_\_\_

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.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Principal's Signature) Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Superintendent\* Mr. Ed Graff

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

E-mail graff\_ed@asdk12.org

District Name Anchorage School District Tel. (907) 742-4000

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.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Superintendent's Signature) Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name of School Board

President/Chairperson Mr. Kameron Perez-Verdia

(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.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature) Date \_\_\_\_\_

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, write N/A in the space.*

## Part I – Eligibility Certification

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The signatures 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. The school configuration includes one or more of grades K-12. (Schools on the same campus with one principal, even a K-12 school, must apply as an entire school.)
2. The public school has met their state's accountability requirements (i.e., avoided sanctions) in participation, performance in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics, and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate) using the most recent accountability results available for the year prior to nomination.
3. To meet final eligibility, a public school must meet the state's accountability requirements (i.e., avoided sanctions) in participation, performance in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics, and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate) for the year in which they are nominated (2015-2016) and be certified by the state representative. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
4. If the school includes grades 7 or higher, the school must have foreign language as a part of its curriculum.
5. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2010 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
6. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, or 2015.
7. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's application and/or rescind a school's award if irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state.
8. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
9. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
10. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution's equal protection clause.
11. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

## PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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Data should be provided for the most recent school year (2015-2016) unless otherwise stated.

### DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 60 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 10 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 8 High schools
  - 1 K-12 schools
- 79 TOTAL

### SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located:
- Urban or large central city
  - Suburban with characteristics typical of an urban area
  - Suburban
  - Small city or town in a rural area
  - Rural
3. Number of students as of October 1, 2015 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
<b>PreK</b>	2	0	2
<b>K</b>	37	32	69
<b>1</b>	32	25	57
<b>2</b>	27	29	56
<b>3</b>	23	17	40
<b>4</b>	16	26	42
<b>5</b>	9	26	35
<b>6</b>	11	22	33
<b>7</b>	0	0	0
<b>8</b>	0	0	0
<b>9</b>	0	0	0
<b>10</b>	0	0	0
<b>11</b>	0	0	0
<b>12 or higher</b>	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	157	177	334

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 1 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 6 % Asian
  - 12 % Black or African American
  - 15 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 54 % White
  - 12 % 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 2014 – 2015 school year: 48%

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

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2014 until the end of the 2014-2015 school year	54
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2014 until the end of the 2014-2015 school year	109
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	163
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2014	337
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.484
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	48

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 7 %  
23 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):  
Spanish, Portuguese, Korean, Filipino, Slovenian, German, Samoan

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 33 %  
Total number students who qualify: 109

8. Students receiving special education services: 11 %  
35 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. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- |                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <u>3</u> Autism                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness              | <u>3</u> Other Health Impaired                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness        | <u>7</u> Specific Learning Disability          |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>15</u> Speech or Language Impairment        |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment    | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>0</u> Mental Retardation    | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |
| <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities | <u>7</u> Developmentally Delayed               |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 2
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers	17
Resource teachers/specialists e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	4
Paraprofessionals	6
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	1

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 19:1

12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

<b>Required Information</b>	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012	2010-2011
Daily student attendance	97%	97%	95%	96%	96%
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 2015.

<b>Post-Secondary Status</b>	
Graduating class size	0
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	0%
Enrolled in a community college	0%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	0%
Joined the military or other public service	0%
Other	0%

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

Yes  No

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

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

Every student receives excellent instruction every day in every class in a safe and civil environment that inspires them to learn.

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

14% of Orion's enrollment is composed of students whose families opt in through an open enrollment lottery process held twice annually. Students applying to attend our school are accepted based on space availability at their grade level. 86% of Orion students live within our designated school boundaries and are considered part of our neighborhood school population. Neighborhood students need not apply through the lottery.

## PART III – SUMMARY

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Orion Elementary School is located on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER), near downtown Anchorage, Alaska's urban center. Orion is part of the Anchorage School District (ASD) and home to 330 students in preschool through grade 6. Orion's student body consists primarily of military children residing on JBER. Our population is highly transient, with a mobility rate of 48% recorded in 2015.

Orion has a proud tradition of academic success and engagement. Teachers have led students to ever-increasing levels of performance on universal screening measures and statewide assessments, ranking third in our district for banded reading fluency growth in 2015. Students have met the academic growth challenges by setting learning goals and working to meet them. Orion staff and families celebrate student achievement with quarterly recognition for students meeting performance and growth targets. Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) skill proficiency is recognized alongside academics.

Enrichment experiences connect students and the community to one another, which is critically important for military children. Examples include Running Club, a group that facilitates child and family participation in local races; Battle of the Books, a club that engages readers and culminates with a game show-like competition with other ASD schools; and Math Derby, an activity that promotes math study and entails competition with our four partner elementary schools on JBER. In the fine arts realm, Orion participates in the annual JBER choir festival and ASD Youth Art Month.

Orion has experienced notable transitions during its 50+-year history. Originally a Department of Defense (DOD) school, Orion joined the ASD in the early 1970's. It once housed the middle school population on Elmendorf AFB, transitioning to an elementary site around 1980. Orion served an all-Air Force student body until the bases merged in 2005, and now includes students with families serving all military branches.

With our mission in mind, Orion staff collaboratively plan instruction that encourages and challenges students to achieve at high levels. Our primary goal is effective implementation of a rigorous, standards-based core curriculum. Orion has offered multi-sensory instruction in grades 1 – 3 for over twenty years to meet the diverse needs of our students. Teachers engage in weekly professional development sessions designed to increase the effectiveness of classroom instruction. Our block schedule supports core instruction and provides collaboration time for teacher teams. Students not meeting interim targets, despite strengthened core instruction and intervention, are referred to our Student Support Team (SST). At Orion, every child's instructional program is monitored and adjusted to ensure they remain on a positive growth trajectory.

Orion is a Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) school, emphasizing direct instruction and infusion of SEL skills. Teacher leadership teams plan PBIS structures for common areas and classrooms, including school procedures, guidelines for success, incentives, and recognition programs. This work contributes to a positive, safe and structured school environment, freeing students to fully engage in learning. Teachers and students connect with one another and set a positive tone in classrooms through morning meetings. Direct SEL instruction is provided through Connected and Respected or Smart Kids lessons. These lessons are paired with SEL skill infusion and programs such as peer mediation that allow children to apply communication and problem-solving skills in real-life settings. Adults model and teach our adaptation of the Rotary International Four-Way Test, which students apply by asking themselves whether words or actions are honest, helpful, safe, friendly or fair before making a choice and acting.

Orion leadership has played an important role in our school's success, having had two administrators serving terms of seven-plus years who lent stability, followed by two short-term principals with stints of one-two years who brought fresh perspective and ideas to the school. Our current principal, herself a ten-year Orion teacher, brought knowledge of the school community and culture to the leadership role. She works with a leadership team composed of a cross section of staff to analyze data and plan school goals and initiatives. Orion enjoys strong teacher-leadership that enhances student achievement by facilitating initiatives like Instructional Tours, SST, and delivering Professional Development (PD) to colleagues.

Blending top-down and bottom-up leadership has proven to be a successful combination in supporting teachers and students on their continuous improvement path.

Discussions with staff and families about Orion reveal themes of communication, collaboration, consistency and compassion. Parents appreciate the Orion staff's consideration of unique family and student needs. They note teachers' caring responses to military lifestyle demands, which can be full of abrupt changes, parent absences, transitions, and sudden goodbyes. Strong two-way communication, through daily logs, phone calls, emails, and face-to-face conferences is testament to our shared commitment to students and their learning. Teachers reinforce families' modeling of core traits, such as duty and responsibility, through application of consistent classroom expectations. Through our collective, intentional work and partnerships, Orion staff, students, and families have built an effective instructional program that supports military families in Alaska, ensuring all students achieve high levels of success.

## PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

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### 1. Core Curriculum:

Orion's curriculum emphasizes transferrable, broadly applicable skills such as communication and social-emotional skills, critical thinking, reading, writing and informational processing strategies. Curricular approaches are selected based on standards, ASD instructional frameworks, and evidence-based practices that best fit content and learning intention. Examples include explicit, systematic phonics instruction and inquiry-based science.

Orion follows the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts and Math. Teachers utilize ASD's academic plans, ensuring consistency and structure in reading instruction while strengthening core content and ensuring equity of opportunity. Plans align the Houghton-Mifflin curriculum with the CCSS, incorporating nonfiction text, close reading lessons and text-dependent questions. They outline critical vocabulary, phonics and phonemic awareness skills, comprehension skills and fluency goals for each grade.

Explicit delivery methods and a systematic progression in literacy instruction are foundations of Orion's academic success. Kindergarten-first grade (K/1) focuses on sound-symbol relationships and establishes a foundation for writing and reading. Sight words are explicitly taught. Second-third grades offer reviews of letter sounds along with higher language skills and the explicit teaching of affixes and how they affect words by changing nouns to verbs. Fourth-sixth grades introduce complex words, including teaching spelling rules using multi-syllabic words that can be misread because of incorrect emphasis on the syllables, and Greek and Latin roots. Instruction and practice in both print and cursive handwriting is essential to students' success in writing at all levels.

One unique support provided to students experiencing difficulty in language arts is our Multi-Sensory Instruction (MSI) strand. First, second and third grade MSI classrooms provide direct instruction lessons where students see, say, hear, and feel words as their hands write them. Orion teachers use the Lexia reading intervention program for students performing below grade level and those building foundational skills, particularly kindergarten-second grade. The self-paced program provides skill instruction, practice, and feedback to students, at appropriately challenging levels. Students in grades 4 – 6 demonstrating need receive additional phonics and decoding instruction. This approach builds student knowledge of polysyllabic words that hinder decoding and slow reading fluency. We have had tremendous success breaking through reading barriers by strengthening phonics skills. To boost fluency, Orion teachers use repeated readings, running records, and frequent, specific feedback to students. Students reading above grade level participate in book groups offering enriched literary selections and emphasizing advanced vocabulary studies.

Math instruction follows the CCSS, with GoMath! serving as our base resource and ASD academic plans guiding lesson planning and delivery. Students learn foundational math skills through consistent, explicit core instruction supported by spiraling review of concepts and strategies offered through daily practice sets, fact practice and timed assessments. Math skills are practiced through use of MathWhizz, a Tier 2 online intervention program, visual math strategy lessons, manipulative tools and extended learning opportunities offered after school. MathWhizz also offers challenge level work, allowing advanced math students to engage with content through eighth grade. Higher math students may work on content standards with older students or independently. Finally, enrichment is offered through Math Derby participation.

Our science program teaches students the content, skills, and processes they need to be scientifically literate citizens. K – 6 instruction follows ASD's Earth Systems Program, with a unifying concept at each grade level connected through three units of study. Teachers offer a fourth unit of study that is tied to an area of teacher or student interest. Our annual STEM night promotes math and science learning and application, including required science fair participation through class or independent projects.

Social Studies instruction follows district-designed instructional frameworks, with themes progressing from the self outward to family, community, state, national, global and historical studies. These frameworks draw

from Alaska content and performance standards, and national standards in history, geography, civics and economics. Social Studies themes and concepts are integrated into language arts instruction, with students reading, writing or speaking about a myriad of historical and community figures and events of significance.

Orion's preschool students attend for one-on-one speech sessions with our speech pathologist. Benefits include the connections students build with the school staff and setting that enable smooth transitions as they enter kindergarten. Preschool attendance enhances school readiness and success in the primary grades due to their increased comfort in the school and stronger communication skills that ensure their needs are met when moving to kindergarten at Orion.

## 2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Orion offers other curriculum opportunities that support acquisition of essential skills and knowledge. All students attend 30-minute music classes twice weekly taught by our certificated music teacher. Sixth grade students participate in optional band or orchestra three days a week for 45 minutes. We actively engage students in music instruction because of the numerous academic, social, and cognitive learning advantages that intentional music instruction can have on their lives. Additionally, we understand that music is an essential learning objective in and of itself, beyond the cross-curricular benefits.

We strive to make our students musically literate in both the tonal and rhythmic aspects of English, knowing that mastery of these skills is positively correlated with phonological skills, temporal and spatial development, reading performance, verbal sequencing, and vocabulary in elementary students. Learning is not purely academic and the cooperative aspects of a music class aid in the acquisition of concentration, self-confidence, and emotional sensitivity of young people.

We engage students in intentional music instruction to pass on our values and our culture, in the form of tones and rhythms, to those that follow. Thousands of years before writing and mathematics were invented, people sang and played instruments they created. They sang their stories, chanted their laws and moral codes, and bound their societies together in the shared melodies. Those practices continued through generations, as we continue those traditions today through our music instruction.

Students in grades K – 6 attend art classes taught by a certificated art instructor twice monthly for one hour. Affirming the belief that knowledge of the visual arts is an indispensable part of a student's total education, Orion follows our district's visual art program, which is designed to encourage independent thinking, creativity, and development of an appreciation for artistic endeavors. Inquiry-based components of our art program include aesthetic perception and valuing, creative expression, and art heritage. Design elements and principles are introduced and reinforced in all lessons. Grade level content wrapped around themes appropriate to children's comprehension of self and surroundings are also used.

Our physical education (PE) program aims to help students become physically literate individuals by offering quality, comprehensive instruction. We want students to be motivated, confident, physically competent, and knowledgeable about physical activity as a lifetime habit. All kindergarten through sixth grade students at Orion receive PE instruction twice per week for 45 minutes with certified physical educators. PE classwork develops students' fundamental movement skills, manipulative skills, rhythmic skills, gymnastics skills, outdoor adventure skills and team building/SEL skills through a variety of activities. Each unit of instruction focuses on "Skill Related Fitness" through which students can improve in seven specific areas: agility, coordination, speed, power, balance and reaction time. We intentionally focus on developing "Health Related Fitness" skills such as cardiovascular and muscular endurance, muscular strength, and flexibility during every PE class through a variety of fun and engaging fitness activities. Intermediate students participate in the FitnessGram physical fitness assessment twice annually in order to set SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, time bound) personal fitness goals.

Classroom teachers facilitate technology lessons, in both the classroom and computer lab, providing instruction in GoogleApps, online research, reading and math intervention programs and keyboarding. Our certificated librarian enhances technology instruction through events such as Coding Day and incorporation

of iPad technology into classroom lessons. During core instruction, teachers model and extend student understanding of tech tools by incorporating interactive whiteboard technology into lessons.

Our certificated health teacher provides health lessons twice monthly to students in grades K – 6. Lessons follow ASD’s health and SEL standards and support students in building healthy lifestyle habits and friendships, preventing bullying, and developing problem solving and goal setting skills. Classroom instruction is enhanced through our community partnerships with JBER Security Forces, who sponsor our annual D.A.R.E. program that teaches resiliency skills, decision-making, and other critical skills.

Social and Emotional Learning is a key feature of Orion’s curriculum and receives strong support from ASD. Orion teachers use direct instruction, infusion and structures such as morning meetings, to support skill building in the area of problem solving, manners, friendship, and the four SEL skill proficiencies of self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, and social-management. Our school counselor teaches students in grades 4 – 6 listening and mediation skills, which they apply through our school mediator program by assisting peers in solving small problems on the playground.

### 3. Instructional Methods and Interventions:

Orion’s success in instruction and intervention begins with effective planning. Orion’s master schedule features 90-minute literacy blocks with 30 – 45-minute intervention periods alongside, 60 – 75-minute math blocks, and a morning meeting block to support SEL instruction, classroom community building and set the daily learning tone. We guard instructional time from intrusions. Finally, grade level teams share planning time during the school day during which teachers collaborate on assessment, instruction, and individual student needs in a proactive, problem-solving manner.

Our instructional approaches begin with solid core instruction, adhering to our district’s academic plans that ensure all students have the opportunity to learn and master grade level standards. Teachers collaborate on identifying learning targets and planning effective instruction by sharing techniques for communicating content, boosting engagement, questioning and discussion strategies, and assessments that inform teaching. Explicit, systematic instruction in foundational skills such as phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary and math facts or strategies is used across grade levels. A K/1 example is their use of judicious review templates that provide increased practice and response opportunities targeting early reading skills. Trained multi-sensory (MSI) teachers in each primary grade use simultaneous multi-sensory instruction techniques to strengthen core literacy. Many students assigned to these classrooms are screened for specific language disabilities, making them strong candidates for this approach.

Teachers differentiate instruction during lessons by explicitly teaching standards-based core content, and incorporating whole-group and individual response opportunities that assess levels of student understanding during instruction. Teams and individuals use assessment data to form and monitor the success of flexible groups during both core and intervention, providing tiered instruction in both reading and math that addresses diverse learning needs at the group or individual level. One example is our grade 5/6 team going beyond the basal and bringing middle school literacy texts to our advanced readers, thereby increasing the rigor of their reading content and vocabulary while boosting student engagement.

Interventions offered range from daily teacher-directed pre-teaching or re-teaching of content and vocabulary, systematic teaching of skill building lessons such as decoding polysyllabic words and computer based interventions providing individually paced skill instruction, review, or practice. Orion’s MSI teachers support all students at their grade level daily during the intervention block by facilitating skill-building lessons that incorporate MSI strategies. Finally, Orion teachers employ repeated practice resulting in high levels of student learning.

### 4. Assessment for Instruction and Learning and Sharing Assessment Results:

Orion’s assessment plan, based on district guidelines and best practice, includes universal screening, diagnostic, interim, and summative assessments for each grade level. Examples include AIMSweb, Houghton Mifflin Phonics Decoding, the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), and the Alaska

Measures of Progress (AMP). Our plan includes timelines for assessing new students, monitoring growth, and intervening when growth slows. Teachers collect initial assessment data in language arts and math, identifying students performing at, below, and above grade level targets. They plan enriched and differentiated instruction during core and intervention blocks to support and challenge all learners to meet learning goals. We strive for one year's growth or more annually for every student.

Our use of Dylan Wiliam's formative assessment techniques to adjust instruction during short-term cycles, including providing specific feedback showing students where they are in relation to learning targets, is key to our success.

Strong communication is essential in motivating students to meet learning goals and occurs at many levels and time intervals at Orion. Teachers initially inform families by sharing fall AIMSweb reports identifying where students place in relation to both national and school norms. Orion generally outperforms national norms, increasing the level of challenge. Progress monitoring schedules show growth in relation to goals and are shared with students regularly to celebrate and motivate. ASD publishes annual summative assessment data that informs our community of our achievements. Orion hosts quarterly recognition ceremonies acknowledging students who have met learning goals or achieved specified levels of academic or SEL success.

Where achievement gaps of ten or more percentage points exist between a subgroup and all students, teachers identify low-performing students and use diagnostic assessments to determine strands needing instruction. Teachers differentiate during core and intervention and use small group lessons to provide review and pre-teaching using evidence based resources and practices. Teachers provide tutoring for students needing extended learning opportunities to master concepts.

Similar to our work in closing achievement gaps, Orion teachers maintain high levels of student achievement by providing rigorous core instruction, using data to identify learning needs and offering supplemental or enrichment learning experiences for student groups. Student goal setting figures prominently in all of our classrooms and achievement is consistently honored and celebrated at individual, classroom and school levels. Teachers closely monitor progress and conference with students and/or parents about ways to challenge or support in areas of need, whether behavioral or academic. Formal conferences are held twice annually for all grades, with start-of-year conferences held for K/1. Interim conferences are scheduled based on student need.

## **PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS**

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### 1. School Climate/Culture:

Orion’s school climate is invitational, engaging and learning-focused. We engage and motivate with interesting lessons at appropriate challenge levels, feedback linked to goals, and achievement celebrations. Quarterly award ceremonies, daily Lion’s Points of Pride and recognition of success in clubs, tournaments, the arts, or athletics serve as motivators. When greeted with positive, supportive responses to their work, effort and contributions, students demonstrate an increased drive to engage and achieve.

All individuals are welcomed, included, and challenged to meet their personal bests, whether in the academic or social-emotional arena. Teachers, students, and families contribute to this climate of learning and success through relationship building, communication, and celebration. Daily rituals unite us, ranging from morning meetings to reciting the Four Way Test, reminding us to be honest, helpful, safe, friendly, and fair in our words and actions. Spirit days boost energy and offer opportunities to celebrate together. Students themselves impact Orion’s climate by proposing ideas to engage them as learners. Recent suggestions included having junior playground assistants, morning announcers and lunchtime dismissal aides. One-time events like family nights or Kids in the Kitchen see parents learning alongside children, thereby boosting connectedness. Leadership opportunities, such as kinder helpers, student ambassadors and peer mediators, connect students with peers across the school. Social-awareness skills develop through participation in philanthropic activities such as letters to troops, food drives, and Jump Rope for Heart. Connected and Respected and Smart Kids lessons provide direct instruction in SEL skills, which are infused throughout content area lessons. SEL skills are further enhanced through participation in school clubs and activities.

Orion’s culture creates an environment where teachers feel valued, supported and empowered to improve their craft. Our PTA conveys support through organizing staff socials, providing seasonal surprises or donating classroom supplies. Time is dedicated to building relationships during weekly meetings beginning with team builders and celebrations. Collegial recognition is encouraged through V.I.P. and “lifesaver” programs, with staff members offering appreciations weekly. Value is conveyed through shared staff experiences like collaborative team meetings that inspire and motivate while validating teacher impact on student learning. Support is provided through coaching conversations, embedded professional development and regular feedback. Communication features prominently, as teachers are supported and encouraged when navigating challenging situations and provided the tools and training needed to accomplish teaching and learning goals. Emphasis is placed on collaboration and teamwork at all times.

The resulting combination of these efforts is a positive school climate that supports academic, social, and emotional growth for all. Because students feel support from and connection to their teachers, peers, and families, they are free to engage fully in learning, providing the foundation for Orion’s success.

### 2. Engaging Families and Community:

A number of strategies have been successful in working with families and our community in support of student success and school improvement, establishing and maintaining two-way communication chief among them. We have an updated website and regularly share school happenings on our Facebook page. Orion publishes a newsletter twice monthly to keep families informed about school and community events. We build relationships with families one parent at a time through consistent application of strategies such as conversations during drop-off and pick-up times, quarterly “Coffee with the Principal” events, phone calls, emails, and notes home.

Orion’s dedicated PTA leads engagement efforts by hosting a variety of community events throughout each year. Their philosophy includes “give backs” and school-wide community events such as a winter carnival, scheduled in balance with fund raisers, that embody their core belief of bringing our military families together to build relationships at school. Together with our PTA, we offer a number of opportunities for

developing relationships between families and school staff, such as Book Bingo, Family Movie Nights, STEM night, monthly PTA meetings, and Skate Night with the Alaska Aces.

Orion enjoys tremendous support from the military community we serve and our students seek to give back, as well. Our principal meets quarterly with JBER leadership and the military school liaison to strengthen communication ties and ensure support for families. Our school-business partners from US Army Alaska provide another military connection, volunteering in our school and serving as role models for our students. The neighboring JBER Fire Department teaches about fire safety and generously floods our ice rink, weather permitting. Our Student Council recently reciprocated with a cookie-baking event for the fire fighters. The Department of Defense provides for Orion students by staffing a Military Family-Life Counselor (MFLC) two days per week, who supports both students and families proactively through Deployment Club and New-to Orion luncheons. The MFLC offers individual counseling when difficulties arise. The health and wellness of our students receives military attention, with the dental clinic teaching about dental health, an annual flu clinic, and more. D.A.R.E. lessons offered by JBER police enhance our fifth grade students' understanding of peer pressure and resiliency strategies that will serve them well as they move into middle school.

We honor the military culture of our community through military family recognition during deployments, honoring Veterans, participating in Month of the Military Child, and sponsoring other activities that connect students and families with our school while building relationships with one another.

### 3. Professional Development:

Orion's certificated staff recognizes that ongoing PD focused on evidence-based practices resulting in improved student learning outcomes is essential to our continued success and must be embedded in our everyday work. Our Leadership Team plans initiatives based on needs identified through school/district goals, observational data and research. Orion's professional development model promotes collaboration and communication through the use of Adaptive Schools' Norms of Collaboration. We dedicate staff meeting and after school time to professional development, ensuring teachers learn critical content, apply strategies, reflect together, and then adjust teaching in a continuous improvement cycle.

Recent areas of professional study include PBIS, Wiliam's Embedded Formative Assessment, and Instructional Tours. Our PBIS work encompasses school wide and classroom structures that support student safety and learning as well as individual behavioral supports that allow students at the top of the behavior triangle to learn replacement skills. Teachers study formative assessment research and techniques with the potential to improve teaching and learning, yielding great benefits to students while being easily implemented by staff. Finally, in our teacher-led PD initiative called Instructional Tours, teacher teams examine indicators of effective practice, visit colleagues' classrooms to collect evidence, then reflect together upon the work and provide feedback. Work on these professional development initiatives has increased teacher capacity, effectiveness and motivation for the work and will continue as long as teacher and student needs require. All of our professional studies are grounded in the Danielson Framework for Teaching and Learning, our guide for continuous improvement as well as our district's evaluation tool.

Our principal engages in ongoing PD on topics ranging from Adaptive Schools and Cognitive Coaching to PBIS, Anita Archer's Explicit Instruction and Wiliam's Embedded Formative Assessment, enabling her to serve effectively as the instructional leader of the school. She coaches teachers using the Danielson Framework and Cognitive Coaching strategies, as another form of ongoing professional development tailored to individual needs.

Orion teachers are self-motivated professionals committed to professional growth beyond building level initiatives. Informal and formal teacher mentors support their colleagues' growth by providing feedback, modeling, and other supports. Many attend the annual Alaska RTI Conference and the Alaska Staff Development Academy each May. Teacher risk-taking is supported and encouraged, as it allows for flexibility and choice in where teachers grow their practice. Individuals engage in continuous study of areas of personal interest or need, such as dyslexia, multi-sensory or science instruction. Teachers are

invited and encouraged to step into leadership roles at the school and district levels that allow them to take on new professional challenges and grow as educators.

#### 4. School Leadership:

Orion school employs a shared leadership approach seeking to involve, inspire, and challenge staff and students to reach high levels of effectiveness and success in teaching and learning, taking ownership of their school's performance. Our principal works in partnership with the Leadership Team to review data and research on effective instruction, then set school goals and plan school improvement processes that address building needs while supporting district-level initiatives. Our 2015-16 school goals include one year's growth or more for each and every Orion student and 90 percent of our students recommending our school to others.

Orion prioritizes safety and effective instruction in every classroom, every day. Our PBIS work establishes and ensures the continuation of a safe school environment that frees staff and students to focus on instruction and growth. We follow a progressive discipline process and apply the multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) behavioral approach when students are unsuccessful with self-management in the classroom or school.

Our principal is visible on campus and accessible to students, families, and staff, striving to make all feel welcome, supported, and to meet individual needs. Orion's principal is an instructional leader, incorporating PD into staff meetings, connecting teachers with district PD offerings and teaching credit courses in PBIS/CHAMPS and formative assessment in the past two years. She supports and promotes a process of continuous improvement for all at Orion, certificated and support staff alike.

Teacher leaders acting as literacy, math, or data Site-Based Specialists receive training and resources from our district that they, in turn, share with colleagues with the goal of improving teacher effectiveness and student learning outcomes. Teachers work in grade level teams, under the guidance of the principal, using data and evidence-based practices to set goals and make instructional decisions for their students. Our induction liaison works with new teachers in navigating the culture of our school and district. Orion teachers host university student interns annually and staff mentor colleagues new to grade level or profession as a matter of daily practice.

Student leadership is promoted and facilitated through programs such as student ambassadors, who offer tours to new families and school visitors; peer mediators, who receive training in problem solving and communication then assist fellow students during recess; Morning DJs who lead daily school announcements and Student Council, who plan and host school spirit weeks, special events, connections with community partners, and philanthropic experiences for our school community. Our student leaders are a key source of Orion pride.

## Part VI – INDICATORS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS

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One Orion practice that makes us so successful is our effective use of the Response to Instruction/Intervention (RTI) framework. This delivery model supports both academics and behavior under one multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS), ensuring effective instruction for all learners.

Data guides Orion teachers in planning differentiated core instruction and intervention to meet individual learning needs. Collaborative team meetings following universal screening periods provide time to analyze assessment data, reflect on practice, organize instructional groups, and plan instruction. Meetings allow structured conversations about data interpretation, diagnostic assessments needed, and evidence-based instructional practices to be used. Collaboration balances the workload amongst teachers by grouping students for instruction and using a “walk to” read or intervention model.

Teachers intensify core when data indicates a need. For example, this year’s kindergarten team noted overall grade level progress was below the norm expected at winter benchmark and determined to increase the systematic, explicit instruction and practice opportunities offered during core literacy lessons for third quarter.

Teachers monitor students performing at the strategic and intensive levels weekly or bi-weekly, then engage in ongoing data review, ensuring efficient use of teaching and learning time. Their examination of AIMSweb progress monitoring data and web-based intervention reports from Lexia and MathWhizz, allows for flexible grouping and adjusting instruction when learning stagnates. Teachers provide re-teaching, skill practice, or extended learning opportunities as needed, and partner with parents for additional practice at home. Sharing data and feedback with students boosts motivation, knowledge of where they are in their learning and what action is needed to move forward. Our grade 5/6 team’s collaborative use of data resulted in eight Tier 2 and 3 students moving up a tier between Fall and Winter AIMSweb benchmarks this year, clear evidence of a strong connection between practice and student learning outcomes.

When individual students make limited or no progress despite strengthened core and intervention, teachers refer them to the SST for group problem solving with professionals from multiple areas such as our school psychologist, nurse, classroom and resource teachers and principal.

For behavior, teachers collect and analyze classroom and office discipline data when students struggle to maintain safety or composure in school. Data is used in writing initial behavior intervention plans. Should behaviors continue, teachers collaborate with our school’s multi-disciplinary team (MDT) and district specialists to identify additional behavioral interventions and data collection options. This problem-solving cycle continues as long as need exists.

Orion’s collaborative application of the RTI/MTSS problem solving process has resulted in impressive learning gains for our students and is one practice that has been critical to our high levels of success.