

**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 [ ] Choice

Name of Principal Mr. Kenneth J Delcambre Jr.

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

Official School Name Sixth Ward Middle School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 1865 Choctaw Road

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

City Thibodaux State LA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 70301-7283

County Lafourche

Telephone (985) 633-2449 Fax (985) 633-7373

Web site/URL http://swms.mylpsd.com/ E-mail kjdelcambre@mylpsd.com

Twitter Handle \_\_\_\_\_ Facebook Page https://www.facebook.com/SixthWardMiddle/ 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.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent\*Dr. JoAnn Matthews E-mail jmatthews@mylpsd.com

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

District Name Lafourche Parish Tel. (985) 446-5631

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 Ms. Julie Breaux

(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, 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):
- 17 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 8 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 3 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 28 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
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	53	39	92
7	39	42	81
8	43	38	81
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	135	119	254

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 1 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 0 % Asian
  - 7 % Black or African American
  - 1 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 91 % White
  - 0 % Two or more races
  - 100 % Total**

(Only these seven standard categories should be used to report the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.)

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2014 – 2015 school year: 16%

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	21
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2014 until the end of the 2014-2015 school year	16
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	37
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2014	237
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.156
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	16

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 0%  
0 Total number ELL

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 46%  
 Total number students who qualify: 117

8. Students receiving special education services: 5%  
12 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.

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

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 4
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	2
Classroom teachers	11
Resource teachers/specialists e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	6
Paraprofessionals	3
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 23:1

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	94%	94%	93%	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 X

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.

At SWMS, we will challenge our students daily to read, write, and speak with rigor through activities that align to a clearly defined essential curriculum.

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

## PART III – SUMMARY

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Sixth Ward Middle School is surrounded by the swamps of Choctaw, a small isolated community several miles to the north of Thibodaux, Louisiana. The name Sixth Ward represents the entire Ward 6 area which includes the communities of Choupic, Chackbay, Choctaw, Kraemer, and Bayou Boeuf. These communities were initially settled by displaced refugees known as the Acadians. The Acadians were descendants of French settlers who were forcibly removed from their lands in present day Canada by the British at the conclusion of the French - Indian War (1754-1763). Many Acadians began to arrive in New Orleans later in 1763, and the first indications of settlement in our Ward 6 area are noted in 1765.

The first records of schools in the Ward 6 area date back to 1897. There was very little transportation and barely any roads, so students attended small, mostly one-room schools near their homes during this time period. Choctaw School, a precursor to SWMS, was opened in 1930 and served elementary students in the small community of Choctaw. Even until the 1950's, some students still exclusively spoke French at home and did not learn English until their attendance at Choctaw School. During that period of time, students were actually punished for speaking French in schools. The Choctaw School remained open until 1980. SWMS was founded just down the road in that same year as a school for 5th, 6th, and 7th grade students.

In the fall of 2000, the school configuration changed to include grades 6th through 8th. Once the 8th graders were included, our school began to offer athletics and expanded extracurricular activities. Today, the SWMS Blue Jays offer boys football, basketball, and track and field as well as girls volleyball, basketball, and track and field. We also have a thriving band program that includes 99 of our 253 students. Additionally, we offer extracurricular activities such as 4-H, Future Farmers of America, Christian Club, Student Council, and Library Club.

The focus of all academics at SWMS begins with a clearly focused vision that drives all decisions. At Sixth Ward Middle School, we will challenge our students daily to read, write, and speak with rigor through activities that are aligned to a clearly defined essential curriculum. This vision captures the essence of curriculum and instruction at SWMS. The focus on an essential curriculum is evident in a never ending process of the alignment of standards. The administration conducts what we call essential learning walkthroughs which are used to monitor alignment and rigor of lessons. These walkthroughs are the centerpiece of accountability and monitoring. In the process of delivering the essential curriculum, teachers are expected to engage students in reading, writing, and meaningful student led discussions every single day. We believe that this singular focus is the catalyst of improved academic achievement. With the emergence of this vision and focus, we are also seeing other improvements. Discipline referrals are decreasing as our academic achievement is growing. In 2011-2012, SWMS issued 232 referrals with 26 out of school suspensions. In 2014-2015, we processed 80 referrals and only 1 out of school suspension. We have not been able to find any other factor that could be attributed to this sustained improvement in student behavior.

With a precise vision in place, we have built structures in support of that vision. In the past four years, we have redesigned our master schedule to increase minutes per day in ELA and math. Efficient scheduling and use of personnel has given us the ability to dedicate a position to a full time intervention teacher who is highly qualified in ELA and math. We have also created a 30 minute period at the end of the day that we call RITE (Reteaching, Intervening, Tutoring, Enriching). During this period, core teachers are able to quickly respond to students' needs by pulling in students as needed for reteaching or intervention of skills. Students themselves also ask our teachers to come back for this intervention period when they need additional help. We also periodically use this time to have our counselor meet with small groups to teach social skills as needed. The key outcome of this system is that we have the ability and flexibility to respond to individual students' needs immediately. Students who are not in need of additional help are given the opportunity to experience various activities that they would otherwise be unable to do in their traditional daily schedule. For example, we have our own teaching staff offering such activities as art, acting, choir, piano, recreational games, gardening, and dance. The teachers enjoy the opportunity to share their own unique talents with interested students. The students appreciate being able to end their day with a fun and interesting activity. This RITE period is also used for school assemblies and pep rallies. For this reason, instructional time is very rarely disrupted.

## PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

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### 1. Core Curriculum:

At Sixth Ward Middle School, we will challenge our students daily to read, write, and speak with rigor through activities that are aligned to a clearly defined essential curriculum. This vision statement is where every discussion of curriculum and instruction at SWMS begins. We have 100% certainty that every concept and skill taught in the core is specifically aligned to the standards. There are no extended lecture sessions with students taking notes. Instead, students read to gather information and then become actively involved through analysis and manipulation of that information. We encourage meaningful student led discussion; we believe that those who do the talking do the learning. We do not believe in canned programs as the answer; good teaching is the key. We also do not blindly follow textbooks; we seek out a variety of materials that support our standards. Teacher observations reflect our vision by focusing on intellectual engagement rather than simple compliance. Strong similarities in the focus of every subject area are evident as all staff members strive to promote our vision.

Our ELA classrooms are built upon the idea that reading, writing, speaking, and listening should be integrated fully throughout the class. In order to accomplish this task, teachers have spent time deconstructing the Common Core standards to better develop a viable curriculum that incorporates these important skills. Drawing from available resources, teachers have built a curriculum through complex texts that provide the opportunity for students to have content rich discussions and evidence based writing. The ELA curriculum offers diverse reading opportunities including informational and literary texts in order to give students a variety of genres to prepare them for high school. To ensure writing is developed across grade levels, our ELA teachers have developed interrelated reliability by using a common rubric to assess writing in the classroom in a consistent manner. In order to strengthen our reading and writing, we have developed a school-wide method for making simple annotations to text. We have also implemented a school-wide strategy for writing based on textual evidence. Our ELA department has provided professional development to the entire faculty, and those teachers have in turn incorporated those strategies in all classrooms throughout the campus.

Mathematics at SWMS continues to focus on our teachers' ability to incorporate conceptual understanding of math. Using elements of the Marzano deconstruction process of the standards, math teachers of all grade levels have worked together to identify the progression of knowledge and skills in order to close the learning gaps present amongst grade levels. Teams of teachers have created common unit assessments aligned to the Common Core standards which are used to monitor the implementation of the essential curriculum. Teachers routinely work together to find opportunities to build conceptual understanding while utilizing the mathematical practices. To support the mathematical practices, weekly math tasks have been created that require students to compute, model, and explain the process of solving real-world problems. Students that struggle or become temporarily confused are immediately addressed through a variety of methods.

Social studies and science are using state standards at this time as our state has not yet adopted new standards; however, our focus on reading, writing, and discussion persists. Through Professional Learning Communities, we have engaged in a process to define our essential curriculum. Our science and social studies teachers support our school's vision by incorporating literacy standards into their daily instruction. Students are presented with an essential question at the beginning of each lesson. Students understand that they will answer this "assessment question" in writing by the end of each lesson. We believe that this helps students focus on the important outcomes of each lesson. Students read and annotate a variety of texts and discuss the ideas and information gathered from their readings every day. This, rather than note taking, has greatly increased student learning and engagement. Students in social studies and science classrooms are also frequently presented with tasks. These tasks ask students to read multiple documents, charts, graphs, maps and other stimuli and then answer related questions. The culmination of every task challenges students to answer a question by writing a multi-paragraph essay with evidence cited.

## 2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Each school year, students take two electives along with their four core subjects. There are several courses students can choose from including French, Agricultural Science (Ag), Family and Consumer Sciences (FACS), band, and physical education. Keyboarding is a mandatory elective for all 6th grade students while Journey to Careers is a mandatory course for all 8th grade students. In addition to those two mandatory electives, we also identify those students who need to be scheduled into an intervention class.

At the beginning of our school-wide initiative to align curriculum in the core, our elective teachers began exploring Common Core Literacy Standards. Our goal was to give our elective teachers an opportunity to meaningfully support our school's vision as it applies to their own specific content areas. After exploring the standards, teachers worked collaboratively to create tasks specific to their subjects that ask students to read and interpret a variety of stimulus materials. Part of this process asks students to answer extended constructed response questions. As with all other classes, our elective teachers share our focus of reading, writing, and discussion on a daily basis.

Our French teacher conducts all of her classes using the French language almost exclusively. These small classes provide frequent opportunities for students to practice speaking and writing in the French language. A favorite activity in this class has students participating in role playing activities where students will conduct conversations with each other on a given topic as the rest of the class listens and discusses. 6th and 7th graders take an exploratory French class, while our 8th graders can choose to take a French class that will give them a high school credit towards graduation requirements.

Students in our agriculture classes get a mixture of literacy based instruction as well as project-based instruction in the safety and practical use of shop tools. We offer agriculture classes to all grade levels including an Ag I class for a high school credit. Due to our area's reliance and focus on agriculture as a way of life, we typically see more students requesting this class than we have seats available. Many of our agriculture students are also part of our very active Future Farmers of America and 4-H organizations.

FACS class offers real-life applications. Students learn food safety and cooking skills. They also complete simple sewing and crochet projects. Our FACS teacher teaches this class to approximately 30 to 50 students per year depending on demand. As with some of our other electives, we do offer a FACS I class for a high school credit.

In 8th grade, all students take Journey to Careers for a high school credit. This class is taught in units of study based on career fields. Our guidance counselor has been instrumental in bringing in community members who work in the various career clusters to present first-hand information and insight into those careers. This has given our 8th graders a broad survey of possible career choices.

Band students have participated and earned numerous awards at the district, regional, and state levels. Our band is widely recognized for playing music that has a complexity level typically seen being played on the high school level. Students have the opportunity to perform in honor bands and solo and ensemble festivals. Our band program has become so successful and popular that our student participation has grown in each of the past several years.

Physical education classes challenge students daily. Students begin the class with warm-ups that are student led. P.E. teachers have yearly goals for students related to fitness. Those goals involve pre-testing and post-testing of students using the indicators of the Presidential Physical Fitness Challenge. Students work on physical fitness throughout the school year. In our PE classes, we notice a strong sense of sportsmanship and inclusion of our special needs students.

The most recent addition to our elective offerings is a keyboarding class. With the emergence of online testing and the importance of technology in our society, proper keyboarding skills are now considered essential. Our 6th grade students take this keyboarding class. We have seen those students make tremendous gains in their ability to type with speed and accuracy as well as their ability to word process properly in an academic setting.

### 3. Instructional Methods and Interventions:

Instruction at our school is focused on the use of literacy to deliver an essential curriculum. We have consolidated our professional development in the area of instruction to model various methods to incorporate reading, writing, and discussion. As we are fortunate to have an experienced staff, our own teachers have been the source of most of the professional development. New teachers spend significant time in experienced teachers' classrooms learning to improve their instructional practices.

At Sixth Ward Middle School, we have chosen to not place a large focus on monitoring lesson plans in isolation as part of monitoring instruction. Instead, our administration reviews plans more so while in the classrooms of our teachers. This gives us a better understanding of how the written plan and the strategies being used are related to the expected outcomes for the lesson and unit of study.

We have incorporated time in our schedule to further provide interventions through our RITE (Reteaching Intervening Tutoring and Enriching) Program. Our RITE program allows for flexible interventions and enrichments based on each student's individual needs. Intervention is provided by a core teacher four days a week for 30 minutes each day. Students are assigned to intervention groups based on need in six week intervals. Teachers are allowed to bring students into intervention groups day by day for reteaching as needed. Every six weeks, administration re-evaluates student progress and adjusts intervention groups accordingly. Parents and students may also request a certain RITE class if they feel the need for further intervention. Core teachers reteach, provide additional instructional materials, or allow for peer tutors in needed areas. Students can also use this time to make up work and tests. This helps our teachers meet the individual needs of our students and gives us a level of intervention that provides for rapid response by the classroom teacher.

If students show a greater need for intervention beyond RITE groups, we have an intervention class that is taught by a teacher who is highly qualified in middle school ELA and math. This class meets 5 days per week for 52 minutes per day. Students are identified based on previous standardized test scores, grades, teacher recommendations, and lexile level. The intervention teacher meets weekly with core teachers to collaborate lessons, address individual student needs, and discuss adjustments needed to the program. Our intervention teacher also meets periodically with administration to determine if students should be added to or taken out of this class. Students are monitored daily and weekly to ensure interventions are appropriate based on curriculum standards. Students are taught daily lessons in ELA and/or math with a deeper emphasis on the standard in a small group setting. Exploration of standards and ownership of learning are key concepts in this class.

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

Alignment to standards is a core belief of Sixth Ward Middle School. To ensure that alignment is found in all classes, we begin the year with analyzing grades in core classes and proficiency on state tests to determine if classroom practices and assessments are aligned to student performance. If there are errors in alignment, teachers adjust, revise, and align to meet the standards and assessment. To inform instruction, we use Measured Progress which consists of benchmark testing throughout the year to determine student progress in reading and math. These results are used in conjunction with standardized tests for placement of students in intervention groups. SWMS also uses Achieve3000 which provides a Lexile level at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year. Teachers monitor Lexile levels and discuss the results with students.

All teachers meet regularly in Professional Learning Communities (PLC) by subject area to review student data and student progress. Discussion on how to adjust instruction is considered as well as how to engage students to a cognitively complex level of thinking. Along with meeting in subject level PLCs, teachers periodically collaborate with teachers in other subjects to discuss areas that need improvement based on student results. Teachers also meet to discuss how to improve writing across all subject areas.

Teachers give various formative assessments to determine student mastery. Students self-assess their understanding and determine if they need to attend that teacher's RITE group that day. If the teacher feels

that the student needs extra tutoring, the teacher can request that student for RITE. This allows teachers the ability to instantly address any misunderstandings in class so students can master the standard.

Keeping all stakeholders informed of results and progress at SWMS is a priority. At the beginning of the year, Sixth Ward hosts a meeting to inform parents, students, and community members on the progress we have made the previous year and to present our goals for the upcoming year. Any time there are important issues or changes that parents need to be made aware of, we host early morning and evening meetings to accommodate their schedules. We use Facebook to provide parents with information on school-wide results from state testing and accountability which helps the community understand how the the school is progressing towards its goals. Many teachers use the Remind 101 app to keep parents informed of upcoming assessments. Finally, parents of students can access the district's Parent Portal on-line program which allows parents to access their child's grades in real-time. Using Parent Portal has allowed parents the opportunity to learn instantly of their child's results on a classroom assessment.

## **PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS**

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### 1. School Climate/Culture:

Sixth Ward Middle School has an inviting and positive environment for our parents, students, faculty, and staff. It is a frequent occurrence to pass by our cafeteria at lunchtime and hear students loudly singing happy birthday to a student or teacher. New students at SWMS typically have no trouble making new friends. Our students go out of their way to invite new students into their groups. New teachers to our school who've worked in other schools quickly note that SWMS is quite unique in this regard.

We are a Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports school. Our school focuses on the expectations “Just be responsible, Always be safe, Yearn to learn, and Show respect” (JAYS). Students are rewarded for positive behaviors both in and out of the classroom. We honor two students from each grade level and elective classes based on improvement and positive behavior as our Students of the Month. Quarterly, we host a celebration to reward students who have shown exemplary behavior. At the end of the year, students are honored for academic achievement, perseverance, and sportsmanship at an awards ceremony which the community is invited to attend.

Students enjoy being involved in many activities and service clubs at our school. Jays for Jesus is a service club that is student led. Students participate in activities in the community both during school and outside of school. We also have a Student Council; these students meet every afternoon to work on a school newspaper and various service projects for our community and school. Our FFA and 4-H organizations meet as a RITE group to work on service projects to better our environment, community, and school.

Our faculty and staff members work together to collaborate on various lessons across our curriculum. We are also guided by an administration who gives the faculty and staff ownership in the success of our school. Everyone works as a team for the betterment of our school and children. For example, our ELA teachers work closely with our other teachers to assist them in their efforts to support literacy. Our experienced teachers take ownership by guiding new teachers and making them feel like part of the family. Our school custodian, who immigrated to the United States from Vietnam as a young man, collaborates yearly with our FACS teacher to teach the children about Vietnamese culture and cooking. The level of cooperation and support given by this faculty has been a key selling point when recruiting teachers to our school.

### 2. Engaging Families and Community:

The Ward 6 community shows great pride and support to its schools. Students and faculty show pride in the community by giving back through volunteering time and energy to improving and maintaining a strong relationship. Our community also supports our students' achievements through incentive prizes given for academic success.

In addition to volunteering time to our school, parents have the opportunity to be involved in the academic side of Sixth Ward Middle School. We involve parents from their first visit to our school before their child enters sixth grade. Fifth grade parents and students from our feeder schools are invited to a “Sixth Grade Night.” At this meeting, parents can meet and talk to the sixth grade teachers as well as receive information regarding activities that take place at the school. During the school year, we keep parents informed through a Student Progress Center, an online portal that contains grades, attendance, and discipline. We also host meetings throughout the year regarding test data and curriculum information. These meetings provide us the opportunity to give resources that parents and students can utilize in order to prepare for continued success. Our vision is also reinforced to the parents through these meetings. Since we have started regularly communicating our vision to parents, they have “bought in” and become more supportive of our initiatives.

At SWMS, literacy is our focus and is integrated into everything we do. To promote reading outside of the classroom, our media specialist hosts a school-wide book fair during the fall and spring semesters. One night during the week of the book fair is dedicated to families. Families are invited to shop the book fair

and are encouraged to immerse their child in literacy.

We understand that time is limited for some parents who might not be able to volunteer, but they can still be involved through other means. For example, we have a website that includes a Google calendar with events, activities, and news that parents can access. We also have a Facebook page that is updated regularly with celebrations of student success and announcements regarding important day-to-day information. Many parents also frequently use the messaging feature of Facebook as a way to communicate directly with our administrators who monitor our page regularly. This has allowed parents to communicate with the school in real time, day and night. Parents and teachers also communicate through the Remind 101 app which provides parents with information on upcoming assessments, homework, and other academic reminders.

### 3. Professional Development:

Before undertaking any professional development activity at Sixth Ward Middle School, it must first be determined that it is aligned with our school's vision. We want to be smart consumers in this regard. We believe that the most beneficial professional development activities may not require attending a conference or hiring an expert. We believe that giving teachers time to invest in their craft will give us "more bang for the buck." Professional development has shifted, to the greatest extent possible, from listening to presentations to teachers working together to achieve common goals. At SWMS, all professional development activities focus on one of three areas: curriculum, literacy, and instruction.

SWMS typically participates in two types of professional development: school level professional development and district level professional development. District level professional development is driven by the district middle school leadership team; our principal is a member of this team. The district schedules full days for teachers to meet throughout the school year. Our district leadership team has also decided to use professional learning days at the beginning and end of school years to collaborate across the district. Lafourche Parish professional development focuses on the Common Core State Standards and increasing student achievement on state testing. Teachers meet by grade level and subject area to design common unit assessments that are aligned to the standards. Creating common assessments has enabled all schools and teachers throughout the parish to better align their instruction to meet the expectations of the standards.

School level professional development is completed through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and after-school faculty meetings. A common school level professional development activity would present information while modeling a literacy strategy that can be easily implemented into classrooms. We then give teachers the time to conduct peer observations so that they can see how other teachers implemented the strategy. Walkthrough observations are scheduled so that the administration can observe and give feedback for the implementation of the literacy strategy. During these cycles, teachers and administrators maintain positive and encouraging feedback in order to foster teacher willingness to step outside of their comfort zones. Frequently, strategies involved in these cycles of professional development are included as part of teachers' Professional Growth Plans.

### 4. School Leadership:

As stated earlier, we at Sixth Ward Middle School have established a clear vision and use that vision to guide all decisions made at the school. We also believe that it is very easy for schools to lose focus with the abundance of competing programs, initiatives, and ideas that can be found in every school system. We feel that the quote, "Jack of all trades, master of none," can sometimes be applicable to schools in this regard. By keeping our vision in the forefront of everything we do, this allows us to maintain focus and prevents us from being pulled in different directions. Our principal firmly believes this and does not allow our focus to be diverted. Therefore, keeping the focus is a top priority of our leadership team. We believe that this level of clarity of expectations has given teachers an explicit understanding of what good teaching looks like.

Our administration encourages creativity and variety in order to achieve the school's vision. The

administration has set a clear and specific vision for teaching and learning; how teachers implement and arrive at that vision can vary. The insistence on an essential curriculum is a non-negotiable at SWMS. However, teachers are given some latitude in how they deliver their instruction. Teacher creativity in this regard is encouraged because we believe in harnessing the power of everyone's good ideas. Everyone at SWMS is also encouraged to speak up when they disagree or have a better idea about how to achieve the vision of SWMS.

SWMS has created a leadership team to lead initiatives within the school. The leadership team typically includes the principal, assistant principal, and the teacher leader of each of our Professional Learning Community teams. The purpose of the leadership team is to ensure that each of our PLC groups are moving in the right direction. During the leadership team meeting, teacher leaders share progress, and instruction and curriculum concerns are discussed. Leadership team meetings are protected from any other topics of discussion that are not focused on academics. The administration also uses this time as one way to communicate progress on school-wide initiatives as well as any other pertinent information that needs to be shared.

## Part VI – INDICATORS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS

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In the past four years as standards have changed and rigor of tests used to measure the effectiveness of schools has increased, our school has continued to grow. The factor of our school that we believe to be most directly related to our growth is our singular focus on the creation and implementation of an essential curriculum that emphasizes literacy focused instruction. Mike Schmoker advocates time and time again for a guaranteed and viable curriculum to be taught using authentic literacy. To the best of our ability, we have centered our vision around the idea that students who can read, write, and speak about the most important content in their subjects have the best chance of being successful when they leave Sixth Ward Middle School.

At the onset of this process four years ago, teachers were using state standards, to varying degrees, to determine what to teach. The amount of time given to concepts in each subject was left up to the individual teacher and may not have been based on anything concrete. Teacher made tests varied in quality, format, and level of rigor. The ELA department did not have any common practices in regards to teaching the writing process.

In all subjects, including electives which made their focus on common core literacy standards, our teachers undertook a close examination of their standards. At every professional development opportunity, we used that time to allow teachers to work together to deconstruct standards, develop curriculum, and create assessments based on a common format that align to the standards. Professional development became a time to do important work rather than a time to sit and listen.

Early on, we decided that domains such as engagement were not going to be a priority until we could first guarantee that students were engaged in the right curriculum. Questioning strategies weren't going to be a focus until we were certain that we were asking the right questions. During the transition to the essential curriculum, the majority of walkthrough observations focused on the implementation of the essential curriculum.

During a time where some schools have struggled to keep up with the Common Core State Standards, we have increased our students proficiency rate from 82 to 93 in the past four years. During that same time, we have risen from the 86th to the 97th percentile of all schools in our state based on our state's accountability program. Most importantly, our former students are telling us that they were well prepared for high school after leaving Sixth Ward Middle School.