

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

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Mrs. Ann Pegg

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

Official School Name Merrymount Elementary School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 4 Agawam Road

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

City Quincy State MA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 02169-2414

County Norfolk County

Telephone (617) 984-8762 Fax (617) 984-8909

Web site/URL http://quincypublicschools.com/merrymount/ E-mail annpegg@quincypublicschools.com

Twitter Handle _____ Facebook Page _____ 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. Richard DeCristofaro E-mail richarddecristofaro@quincypublicschools.com
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Quincy Public Schools Tel. (617) 984-8700

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date _____

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board President/Chairperson Mr. Thomas Koch
(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

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

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):
- 11 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 5 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 2 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 18 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	27	26	53
1	37	27	64
2	27	25	52
3	29	32	61
4	36	30	66
5	30	25	55
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	186	165	351

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 23 % Asian
 - 7 % Black or African American
 - 3 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 1 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 65 % White
 - 1 % 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: 7%

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

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2014 until the end of the 2014-2015 school year	11
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2014 until the end of the 2014-2015 school year	13
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	24
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2014	365
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.066
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	7

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 15 %
51 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):
Arabic (Iraqi and Moroccan dialects), Haitian Creole, Albanian, Bengali, Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese dialects), Italian, Spanish, Swahili, Vietnamese, Telugu, French, Tamil, Hindi, Portuguese, Indian, German, Gujarati, Luganda, Dutch

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 40 %
Total number students who qualify: 138
8. Students receiving special education services: 12 %
43 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.

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

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 12
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	Number of Staff
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers	18
Resource teachers/specialists e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	6
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.	3

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 20:1
12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

Required Information	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012	2010-2011
Daily student attendance	96%	96%	96%	96%	95%
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.

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

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.
Yes No

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

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

Our mission at the Merrymount School is to equip every child with the necessary academic, emotional, physical and social skills to lead a productive and healthy life.

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

Merrymount Elementary, a K-5 school, is surrounded by a neighborhood of quiet streets and private homes in Quincy, MA, a block away from Quincy Bay. However, the Merrymount school district is widespread, extending to urban Quincy Center and including many apartment buildings with low income housing. The school has 18 classrooms, three of each grade. Merrymount has a full time Resource Room teacher, English Language Learner (ELL) teacher, and Literacy teacher. In the school year 2004-2005 Merrymount School was designated as a Compass School by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Education based on Merrymount's improvement in student performance.

Merrymount's student demographics have shown steady changes throughout recent years. Special Education (SPED) students in 2015 are at 12%, up from 10% in 2014; ELL students in 2015 are at 15%, up from 11% in 2014; Low Income students in 2015 are at 40%, up from 35% in 2014; FLNE students in 2015 are at 29%, up from 19% in 2014. These changing demographics challenge staff to be aware that we must reflect on the actions and initiatives that helped us to achieve our goal of becoming a Level 1 school. Though the teachers, parents, and students of Merrymount are filled with pride, this has simply motivated us to continue to work together as a team to make additional progress.

The entire staff of Merrymount works tirelessly to develop and implement various initiatives that were aimed at narrowing the proficiency gap for the students of Merrymount. Over the last three years, these initiatives have resulted in a steady increase in student achievement. The teachers collaborated, formed study groups, and targeted instruction areas in which we had identified as in need of improvement. Working together, the staff created change that led to improvement.

The entire staff has the unanimous understanding that successful assessment performance is not contingent on the teaching practices of the third, fourth, or fifth grade staff. Successful performance and subsequent student achievement is contingent upon the entire staff realizing that we are all in this together and that each grade level contributes to the success of the following grade levels. Under the expert leadership of Merrymount's Assessment Team and its facilitator, test results are analyzed and synthesized into clear and concise School Improvement Plan SMART Goals each year. These Goals are brought to the staff so that grade level teams and subject vertical teams can develop Action Steps which can be implemented to support the success of our SMART Goals. As we map out our School Improvement Goals each year, the culmination of in-house teaming and cooperative problem solving, technological know-how and high quality professional development have proven to be tremendously helpful.

One of Merrymount's most highly successful approaches is voluntary study groups among staff members. These study groups have been invaluable in building consistency in instructional methods and strategies in each subject area throughout the grades. Writing Across the Curriculum, Close Reading, and our Math Open Response groups have built collegiality through appreciation and respect for one another's professional knowledge and expertise.

Professional development workshops led by system-wide identified areas of need, such as math workshops by Sue Looney, have been well received by Merrymount's staff. Through collegial planning, various strategies and methods have been implemented to support the curriculum. Professional development has also been led by staff members who have taken courses and wish to share new ideas and methods to further support our goals.

After-school programs led by staff members have been important in supplementing the curriculum. Intervention programs include year-long math support for struggling students, as well as challenging strong math students. Enrichment programs include Shakespeare for Children; Space Camp, an exciting STEM (Science Technology Engineering Mathematics) program which challenges students to work in teams to explore, problem solve, and create such projects as bottle rockets; Lego Robotics programs for students in grades K-5. In the spring of 2015, Merrymount's Fifth Grade Lego Robotics Team came in first place in a district-wide competition.

Merrymount held its third annual International Night—Celebrate Diversity! This special event, sponsored by the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), highlights the cultural diversity of new immigrant families in the Merrymount community. Families create displays, including maps, flags, photos, clothing, artifacts, and food representative of their culture. Over 25 countries have been celebrated.

At Merrymount, we have become a staff that recognizes that we are not only a teaching community, but also a community of learners that is open to growth, new ideas, and greater expectations. Philosopher Herbert Spencer said, “The great aim of education is not knowledge, but action.” We would say, the great aim of education is to use our knowledge and put it into action. It is a philosophy that has empowered our staff and enlightened our students.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

The Merrymount School uses various materials to address the core curriculum needs of our students as they strive to master the Common Core State Standards. The Quincy Public Schools provides curriculum materials in the areas of English Language Arts, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies. Using these materials, along with supplemental materials compiled by our own teachers, we are able to address the learning needs of each student within the Merrymount School.

Consistency is essential, so when our staff decided to make reading and writing a school-wide goal a few years ago, it was important to adopt strategies that could be utilized by every student, in every classroom, in every grade. Students at the Merrymount School are immersed in reading and writing activities on a daily basis. Foundational reading skills are acquired through a variety of methods. Through the adoption of the Journeys reading program, acquiring vocabulary through the Beck Model, engaging in guided reading groups and reciprocal teaching, students have achieved great success in reading and writing. Each grade level also participates in in-depth studies of specific nonfiction topics in which students are required to read, write, and report. In keeping with consistency, the implementation of two-column notes as a graphic organizer for writing across the grade levels has been a stepping-stone for students becoming skilled writers. Our techniques have been used as examples in other schools in the Quincy district.

Additionally, we have focused on mathematical achievement as a school-wide goal. We believe that in order for students to be successful mathematicians, they need to be confident and competent problem solvers. We continue to stress the importance of perseverance, out-of-the box applications of previously learned skills and a hands-on approach to begin the journey from concrete thinking to abstract understanding. The classrooms in our school are filled with problem solving journals, math talks, math word walls, math literature and manipulatives. Each year we have a school-wide 2-week celebration of mathematics, which includes a math rally, prize-winning problems of the day, a K-5 number scavenger hunt, and a math essay contest.

Our approach to content area learning instruction is creative and thorough, as well. You wouldn't have to wander far to discover children in our school discovering science. As a school, we have adopted a hands-on, inquiry based approach in the teaching of science. Children observe the metamorphosis of caterpillars into butterflies and in doing so learn about life cycles, students research animals and share their findings with the school and the community in our annual third grade Animal Fair, fourth graders learn about the engineering and design process by building and then redesigning rockets, which are launched in our school field. Fifth graders dissect flowers to discover and understand the reproductive life of plants.

Our students' attainment of understanding of social studies and historical concepts follows a similar model. Our students gain valuable knowledge and insight through interactive, hands-on activities and projects. Students conduct research on US states, reporting on the historical significance, geographical advantages, natural resources, and climate of each state. Using this information, the students create displays, dioramas, PowerPoint presentations, as well as other projects to relay information to parents, teachers, and students. The students also delve into history to research and create projects based on historical topics ranging from ancient civilizations to the Middle Passage. These projects are presented at an annual History Fair, showcasing the students' work and allowing the community to benefit from the information presented by each student. We also take advantage of our historic location in Quincy- "The City of Presidents". Home to both John Adams and John Quincy Adams, we are lucky to have access to historic locations right in our own backyard. The Quincy Historical Society provides free educational programs for our students focusing on not only our famous Presidents, but also other local historical figures such as Abigail Adams, Josiah Quincy, and John Hancock. Also, with Boston and Plymouth both within a short distance, we truly are surrounded by history. This experiential, hands-on approach has proven to be effective in allowing students of varying backgrounds, abilities, and experience to work together to learn, create, and present ideas.

Merrymount teachers are constantly analyzing and revising teaching methods so that each student is able to

access the curriculum and gain a clear understanding of the core concepts being taught, as well as benefit from the experience to synthesize knowledge and problem solving skills to improve learning in the future.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Merrymount Elementary School strives to achieve a child centered art program full of enjoyment and learning. During the art class, students explore materials, such as markers, oil pastels, tempera, watercolor, paper, clay, and recycled materials, in order to develop skills in drawing, painting, collage, printing, and sculpture. Art lessons are created to enable students to use these skills and materials to develop personal visual symbols. These symbols can be used to express ideas, emotions, and beliefs.

To enhance students' art work, basic elements and principles of design are studied and incorporated into their projects. Students share in discussions of their own art work. They are also exposed to work created by artists throughout history and reflect on the influence of time, environment, and culture on various art forms. Through the art process, Merrymount students are encouraged to think creatively, perceive connections, and recognize one's potential through active engagements, critical judgements, and interpretation of the past and present.

In addition to the visual arts, our students participate in various performing arts activities. Each student in grades K-5 participates in music education each week. Third grade students learn the basics of reading music as they begin to play the recorder, which prepares them for formal instrument lessons in grades 4 and 5. Though our school does not provide theater instruction as part of its curriculum, several dedicated teachers have created an after-school program designed to allow students in grades 4 and 5 the opportunity to participate in annual productions of plays written by William Shakespeare. Through the rehearsal period and performances of plays such as "A Midsummer Night's Dream", "Julius Caesar", and "Romeo and Juliet", students learn the value of hard work, dedication, public speaking skills, memorization, and self-confidence.

Merrymount's 2015-2016 School Culture/Wellness SMART Goal states: "The staff of the Merrymount School will provide a safe and nurturing environment, offering opportunities that promote physical and emotional wellness." This SMART Goal contains 15 Action Steps which include: physical activity throughout the day such as Brain Gym, Jam'n Minute; whole school field day in June; Second Step lessons taught by the guidance counselor and psychologist to each class; various anti-bullying initiatives such as: Unity Day—Unite Against Bullying (led by the fifth grade) and Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS); Nutrition Nuggets newsletter for parents; and Jump Rope for Heart fundraiser. The physical education teacher instructs Quincy Public Schools physical education curriculum to each class a half hour each week. Through these activities and initiatives, we hope to foster the success of the whole child, both emotionally and physically.

We also recognize that building and fostering 21st century skills in our students is important. Our school has implemented a K-5 Lego Robotics Program that provides our students with STEM-based, hands-on, cooperative learning experiences. Students in grades K-3 participate in a weekly, after-school program in the spring of each year that utilizes the WE-DO Lego Robotics System. Students in grade 4 participate in a weekly, after-school program in the spring with Lego Mindstorms. Fifth graders spend the fall in a more intensive, self-directed after-school program, which is followed up by grade 5 Lego Robotics Competition team, which competes in a city-wide challenge meet.

3. Instructional Methods and Interventions:

Three times a year, our Integrated Learning Team (ILT) meets to discuss the best instructional methods and interventions to meet the needs of individual students. Using data from various assessments (DIBELS-Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills, MAP-Measures of Academic Progress, MCAS-Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, classroom assessments), our team which consists of our principal, literacy specialist, resource room teacher, classroom teacher, ELL teacher, and guidance counselor determines which students need additional instruction at Tier 2 and Tier 3. Students at Tier 2 or Tier 3 are below expected benchmarks for their grade. Our discussion about students is invaluable so that instructional

programs in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension can be delivered that focus on the specific needs of each student. At our ILT meetings, we discuss the strengths and weaknesses of our various instructional programs (Journeys, Early Reading Intervention, Project Read, Orton-Gillingham, Wilson Reading System), and we offer suggestions to the classroom teacher on differentiating instruction.

Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction begins with our literacy specialist. Students in kindergarten through grade three are pulled out of the classroom for explicit instruction in small groups for 30 to 40 minutes a day, four times a week. Kindergarten students are instructed in phonemic awareness using Early Reading Intervention. First and second grade students receive Orton-Gillingham instruction and Project Read. Comprehension and fluency are the focus of third grade instruction. As part of the literacy program, students utilize our computer lab and classroom iPads to access Read Naturally, Lexia Core 5 , and Handwriting without Tears for additional practice and support. A student's progress is monitored several times a month. If a student does not make sufficient progress, our team reevaluates the instructional program, the frequency of delivery of the instruction, and the group size.

Sometimes a student is referred to our Student Support Team (SST) for further evaluation and special education services. When a student has been referred for a full evaluation, various assessments are completed. A meeting involving parents, the special education team, and the principal is convened to determine whether or not a student qualifies for an Individualized Educational Plan. The team will determine the instructional plan that will best meet the child's needs. The plan can include a pull-out model, inclusion model, or a combination of both.

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

The Merrymount School has a dedicated Assessment Team, whose role it is to analyze and disseminate data from various state-wide, city-wide, and classroom assessments. Such assessments include Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) , Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners (ACCESS for ELLs), and Screening Assessment for Gifted Elementary and Middle School Students (SAGES-2). The Assessment Team analyzes the achievement and growth of all students and subgroups, looking for trends and patterns in students' overall scores and responses. Through this analysis, the assessment team is able to find areas of weakness or concern, as well as areas of strength. The team looks carefully at how students perform on different types of test questions, how students grasp concepts of different Common Core Standards, and how students performed overall. The assessment team then prepares comprehensive presentations for administrators, classrooms teachers, special education and literacy teachers, and other interventionists. The Assessment Team also prepares a presentation geared towards parents and other community members. Through these presentations, staff members gain an understanding of how each individual student, each subgroup, and each grade level are performing on various assessments in various subject areas. Working together in grade level and vertical teams, staff members work to create goals and actions steps aimed at continued success in areas of strength, while thinking of creative and innovative approaches to instruction that cater to the future success of subgroups where an achievement gap may be present. Action steps include changes in instructional methods, implementing different approaches to special education services based on student, grade level, and subject matter assessments, school-wide initiatives promoting student success, and a commitment to collaboration and consistency throughout the grade levels. For example, the MCAS data from the spring of 2016 indicated a general weakness in the areas of Key Ideas and Details in English Language Arts and Number & Operations in Base Ten in Mathematics. The staff worked together, under the guidance and support of the Assessment Team, to create SMART Goals intended to improve these areas of weakness. The action steps created to help achieve these goals were designed by the entire staff, with each staff member realizing the importance of their contribution to the successful achievement of these goals. Our school is proud of the high performance and achievement of our students in every subgroup, however, we are constantly looking at the data presented so that we may change our approach, if necessary. As professionals, we look carefully at all assessment data in order to inform our instruction.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

The Merrymount School staff works collaboratively to engage and motivate students. Instilling a sense of responsibility in our students is a priority at our school. It is one that teachers throughout each grade level work on daily. The students are highly motivated by opportunities to showcase how responsible they are. For example, our fifth grade students participate in a multitude of activities that foster a desire to be responsible such as school safety patrol, kindergarten helpers, school store workers, and reading buddies just to name a few. Also, many times during the school year, we come together as a learning community to celebrate and remember important days in our country such as Veteran’s Day, Memorial Day and Flag Day. Students at each grade level each have a role in these important ceremonies, such as singing a song, reading a poem, or performing a play. Parents and members from the community are also invited to participate in these special celebrations.

The staff is very committed to working with students throughout the day to provide a positive environment that supports their academic, social, and emotional growth. Teachers take time to nurture students not only during academic time, but during lunch and after school as well. Teachers spend extra time with students during lunch to provide extra help, enrichment activities, or simply a listening ear when students are having a tough day. The students and the teachers both benefit greatly from the bond that is created during these times. Student successes are celebrated by a kind word or a positive note home to their families. Our principal and assistant principal have a positive rapport with the students in the school, making sure they engage with each student at some point. For instance, the principal holds monthly birthday lunches for the students, providing ice cream sundaes. These encounters make lasting impressions on the young minds of our students and assists in strengthening the trust between our students and staff.

In today’s climate, many teachers do not feel free to use their creative talents as a part of their lessons. One size fits all models are implemented and the students lose out. Teachers at our school have the freedom to use their creativity to create strong lessons for our students. Not only does the principal encourage this freedom, she also inspires teachers to share their ideas with other staff members through professional development and vertical team meetings. Additionally, our PTO fundraises tirelessly to make sure that we have the programs and supplies that we need to enhance and enrich our students’ academic and extracurricular activities in the school.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

At Merrymount School, we are a true community of learners consisting of students, staff, families, and business partners.

All students at Merrymount School learn the importance of giving back to the community through participation in various community service events we promote and sponsor throughout the year. From collecting canned goods for the local food pantry to collecting toys and blankets for pets at the animal shelter, the Merrymount community sees the importance of community service. We know that providing community service opportunities such as these will allow students to learn about civic responsibility as well as make a difference in the lives of others.

Over the past few years, our students have held clean-ups of the school grounds, sang Christmas carols at the local nursing home, decorated wooden spoons for Project Bread, and donated to the Red Cross to support victims of the Nepal earthquakes and Boston Marathon bombings. In all of these endeavors, the entire student body comes together and unites with a common goal and purpose. In doing so, our students demonstrate teamwork and work cooperatively for a common goal.

Recently, our fifth grade students organized and coordinated Unity Day in an effort to stamp out bullying. In addition, students raised funds to erect a “Buddy Bench” on school grounds for anyone who feels left out at recess. Student-generated ideas such as these are commonplace here at Merrymount School.

In addition, our Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) is very active at Merrymount, promoting several fundraisers and events to foster community involvement and support. They support grade-level webpages, created by teachers to communicate expectations, news, homework, and curriculum information to families. One of their most successful family events is the annual International Night held each fall, where families showcase their heritage and countries of origin by setting up displays and sharing recipes. It's a wonderful way to see how diverse our school community truly is.

Merrymount School is very fortunate to have some generous business partners in Stop and Shop and BJ's Wholesale, as they help sponsor various events throughout the year while helping to defray expenses.

Merrymount School successfully engages families and communities in a variety of ways. The end result is students, staff, and families who are fully engaged and invested in enhancing and improving the school culture. According to Marian Wright Edelman, "Education is for improving the lives of others and for leaving your community and world better than you found it."

3. Professional Development:

The teachers at the Merrymount School participate in various professional development opportunities aimed towards strengthening and reinforcing instructional methods, collaboration, and meeting the needs of all of our students. Merrymount's principal and assistant principal are both members of the district-wide Professional Development Committee, which is committed to providing high-quality professional development to all teachers at the elementary, middle school, and high school levels. The professional development opportunities provided by the district include opportunities for teachers to focus on instructional methods in various areas including writing (Units of Study), attending to the social/emotional needs of students, a backwards design approach to lesson planning through standards-based unit design, and a commitment to staying current in approaches to reading (Close Reading with Nancy Boyles) and mathematics (Looney Math with Susan Looney). Merrymount teachers are also committed to participating in professional development opportunities that are designed to enhance instruction for specific subgroups of students, including Rethinking Equity and Teaching for English Language Learners (RETELL). Through these professional development opportunities, teachers are able to collaborate with colleagues from other schools within the district. In addition to district-wide professional development, the Merrymount staff is devoted to professional development within our own school. Always willing to grow and evolve, our teachers look for areas that are in need of improvement, then form voluntary study groups that are designed to increase student achievement and help teachers modify instructional methods. During the 2015-2016 school year, the English Language Arts teachers have created a study group that meets once per month. During meetings, teachers discuss a range of topics including close reading, including authentic literature in lessons, instructional practices, and using assessment data to inform instruction. The commitment to work together in a collegial and collaborative environment is key to the success of the teachers at Merrymount. Each teacher sees professional development opportunities as a way to increase knowledge and skills necessary to better educate the students in our classrooms.

4. School Leadership:

Behind every successful school are a dedicated teaching staff and a principal who inspires them to greatness and then guides and supports them as they walk a sometimes challenging path to reach it. In order for schools to improve, they need to have principals who are willing to roll up their proverbial sleeves and work tirelessly. At Merrymount, we are lucky to have a leader who has challenged us to constantly seek out and strive for excellence. Good leaders, like good teachers, need to be able to take good ideas and strategies and customize them to fit the needs of their individual staff, students and school community. Merrymount's principal's vision has been to develop a school culture in which the teachers, interventionists, and support staff are invested in doing the best they can to support one another and their students.

Over the years, Merrymount's principal, assistant principal, and assessment team have developed a way of empowering teachers. Teachers take on leadership roles when they present professional development

workshops to the staff and/or facilitate study groups in writing, reading and math. Study groups provide a platform for teachers to explore and share instructional strategies and methods. Teachers are eager to participate and to help each other learn new instructional strategies, as well as to understand the big picture of a scope and sequence of skills and expectations across the grade levels. The writing study group has chosen a common graphic organizer to be used K-5; the reading study group has read professional articles on Close Reading strategies and shared ideas about using authentic literature to support the curriculum; the math study group has developed a graphic organizer to help students to analyze and solve word problems. This collaboration has made a huge impact on creating positive staff morale and student success. The climate in the school is one of mutual respect and support.

There is no single remedy, no simple cure-all that will bring about success, but a good principal needs to be able to recognize innovative educational practices and know how to personalize them; own them. As a staff, we realize that our current success is not the end of our journey, but rather a highlight along the way. We will continue to be motivated to develop new initiatives to encourage student success. The teachers, support staff, interventionists, and administrators at Merrymount know that the only way to continue to improve is to continue to change our approaches and ideas to meet the needs of our students.

Part VI – INDICATORS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS

The Merrymount School is more than a typical school; it is a community. It is a community of learners, teachers, parents, and other local stakeholders, whose interests all converge on the common idea that every student can learn and be successful. Though the concept of a professional learning community is currently the topic of many discussions, we do not refer to ourselves in that regard. Rather than labeling ourselves, we instead strive to work together in a way that promotes success in our students, enables and empowers teachers, and includes parents and other community members in the educational process. It is a system of collaboration that allows us to reach our lofty goals of success. Through our collaborative environment, we are able to reach a level of consistency that benefits our students in their quest for knowledge. As educators, we all use common vocabulary, language, instructional practices, and behavioral expectations in our classrooms. Simply put, our students know what to expect when they enter every classroom in the school—regardless of the grade level or subject area. We are all on the same page, and we all work hard to create an environment that promotes consistency. Teachers work in grade level and vertical teams to collaborate and discuss students, assessment data, and instructional practices. Parents, teachers, and administrators work together on the School Council to determine the needs of the school and how to better create an environment conducive to learning. The School Council makes recommendations to the PTO, which works to raise funds so that various instructional materials can be purchased to help us achieve our goals. Truly, the Merrymount School is a community that works together toward common goals. There is a unique sense of camaraderie within the community, with each person realizing and respecting his or her own role within the greater picture of each child’s education. This symbiotic relationship is not easy, and requires constant work and support. The school’s leadership is strong, prioritizing this idea that each and every member of the Merrymount community is important and integral to our success as a school. As Helen Keller said, “Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”