

**U.S. Department of Education**  
**2020 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program**

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Mrs. Carmen Vargas-Guevara  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name South Street School  
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 129 South Street  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Danbury State CT Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 06810-8039

County Fairfield County

Telephone (203) 797-4789 Fax (203) 830-6587

Web site/URL https://sites.google.com/danbury.k12.ct.us/sss E-mail vargaca@danbury.k12.ct.us

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\* Dr. Sal Pascarella E-mail pascas@danbury.k12.ct.us  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Danbury Public Schools Tel. (203) 797-4700

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 Ms. Gladys Cooper  
(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. All nominated public schools must meet the state’s performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
2. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2020 in order to meet all eligibility requirements. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
3. The school configuration 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.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2014 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, or 2019.
6. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. If irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state, the U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school’s application and/or rescind a school’s award.
7. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as “persistently dangerous” within the last two years.
8. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
9. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
10. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district, as a whole, has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution’s equal protection clause.
11. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

## PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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Data should be provided for the most recent school year (2019-2020) unless otherwise stated.

**DISTRICT** (Question 1 is not applicable to non-public schools)

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 13 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 3 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 1 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 17 TOTAL

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

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located. If unsure, refer to NCES database for correct category: <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/> (Find your school and check “Locale”)

- Urban (city or town)  
 Suburban  
 Rural

3. Number of students as of October 1, 2019 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent at the school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	34	36	70
1	30	33	63
2	31	29	60
3	39	34	73
4	29	31	60
5	31	32	63
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
<b>Total Students</b>	194	195	389

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

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 6 % Asian
  - 7 % Black or African American
  - 58 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 27 % White
  - 2 % 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 2018 - 2019 school year: 11%

If the mobility rate is above 15%, please explain:

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

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2018 until the end of the 2018-2019 school year	28
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2018 until the end of the 2018-2019 school year	14
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	42
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2018	390
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.11
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	11

6. Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):  
Spanish, Portuguese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hausa, Hindi, Telugu, Urdu, Vietnamese, Mandarin, Wolof

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 48 %  
186 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 60 %  
 Total number students who qualify: 234

8. Students receiving special education services: 8 %

32 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>5</u> Autism                  | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>3</u> Other Health Impaired                 |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>11</u> Specific Learning Disability         |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>12</u> Speech or Language Impairment        |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment      | <u>1</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>0</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 3

10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to the nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	19
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	12
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	9
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	6

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 22:1

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

<b>Required Information</b>	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014-2015
Daily student attendance	96%	97%	96%	97%	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 2019.

<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.

South Street School's mission is to develop in all children the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that will enable them to live a productive and self-sufficient life, and engage in responsible citizenship in a global society.

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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South Street Elementary School (SSS) is one of thirteen elementary schools located in the heart of Danbury, Connecticut. A K-5 Title 1 school, we are a rich, diverse community with over 11 languages represented (Spanish, Portuguese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hausa, Hindi, Telugu, Urdu, Vietnamese, Mandarin, and Wolof). We are known for our welcoming smiles, community involvement, and our zeal for academic excellence.

In 2015-2016, 2016-2017, and 2018-2019 South Street was awarded and recognized by the Connecticut State Department of Education as a School of Distinction in two academic categories; High Growth (All Students) in Math and High Growth (High-Needs Students) in both ELA and Math. We have one of the highest percentages of students listed in Danbury as high needs (48% English Language Learners, 60% Free and Reduced lunch, 8% Special Education). Yet, we are tearing down biases and reshaping views in how effectively a school in a significant low-income community can achieve academic success for all students.

We are a passionate and dedicated staff that holds no boundaries when meeting the needs of our students and families. We work hard to create an atmosphere of continuous improvement and success for our students in an effort to close the achievement gap. This is evident by the various academic successes that demonstrate student achievement at South Street is on the rise.

Over the years, South Street has grown from being an underperforming school to achieving the highest level of growth in the district last year. As a result, our school principal, along with Danbury Public Schools (DPS) Administrator for Data, Assessment & Research, represented our school in a forum titled, Factors that Contributed to Academic Growth: A Discussion organized by the Connecticut State Department of Education, where best practices were shared among superintendents and district personnel from across the state. As a result of this discussion, we were invited for a second presentation at the 2018 Performance Matters Forum hosted by the CT State Department of Education. We were part of the panel speaking on Strategies that Promote Academic Performance: Voices from the Field of Education. The outcome led to a public document feature on the state's website titled, Voices from the Field-Factors Influencing Academic Growth. South Street School is accredited in this publication.

Our rise in academic growth and achievement stems from our instructional practices, school climate, and school community. We believe that our students deserve the best academic instruction supplemented by additional support that will help students achieve success. However, most of our students are presented with challenges that impact their education. Many students immigrate from other counties with interrupted schooling and gaps in learning. They lack parental support at home. Hence, South Street teachers meet students at their level and personalize learning through small group instruction to help them grow academically, emotionally, and socially.

As a school community, we understand the importance of building social and emotional connections with our students and their families. Teachers, support staff, school nurse, and the school principal give up their lunch time in order to offer daily incentives, such as, lunch bunch, Lego club, and others. Our school also has a mentoring program and a comfort dog that comes in once a week to assist our students that suffer from anxiety disorders.

South Street is committed to providing a rich curriculum committee that delivers academic instruction and student support through engaging activities that enrich students' minds and their knowledge.

This is a fun and engaging school that community members are proud to support. We provide students with many opportunities and experiences that they will always remember. Some of our special events include the pep rally, which gets students excited for the Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBA). We also hold a track meet parade to cheer on our 4th and 5th graders competing in the track meet. The annual Walk to School Event brings all South Street staff and families on a morning walk to school to promote healthy lifestyles. The Connecticut Ballet entertains us with their uplifting performances and costumes that many of our students would only ever experience in the confinement of our school. We strive to give our students as many opportunities as possible to enrich their learning experience because we care and see the impact it has in their lives.

South Street teachers are committed to effectively meet the needs of the "whole" child. We follow the vision "It Takes A Village" to raise a child. We strongly believe that by building community partnerships, maximizing resources, and fostering a nurturing and safe school-based community, students will reach their highest potential.

## **PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

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### **1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.**

**1a.** Overall approach, which may include overarching philosophy or approaches common across subject areas

South Street teachers are committed to meeting the needs of all students in their classrooms. Teachers at South Street School execute the DPS curriculum. The curriculum in both literacy and numeracy reflect the Connecticut Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Teachers implement a balanced literacy program through Teachers College Reading and Writing Program Units of Study (TC) and Pearson Investigations for Mathematics.

Departmentalization began in 2015 in fourth grade. Departmentalizing works at SSS because the teachers are onboard 100%. In addition, teachers are able to effectively teach their chosen content and become master teachers in the specific subject. The core subject consists of math, reading, and writing, and each has a 60-70 minute block. The students learn responsibility for completing assignments for three different teachers, and become more organized by having books, papers, etc. ready for each class. In addition, through our departmentalized instructional model, students move in and out of small groups based on assessments to specifically target their needs on a regular basis. Teachers in 4th and 5th regularly discuss student performance through both informal and formal assessments to formulate strategy groups to deliver explicit instruction.

For the 2018-19 school year, the teachers in 4th grade decided to loop onto fifth grade with their students and the results were very impressive. Fall STAR (Renaissance) assessment demonstrated that our incoming 5th grade class maintained their learning over the summer. Another factor that played into the success is that the students had a relationship with their teachers. They were eager to please and fully invested in meeting their academic goals. In the spring of 2018, the Smarter Balanced Assessment scores for this cohort were notably high. This class started in 3rd grade with 21% of students at proficient or above in ELA and 23% at or above in Math. The following year the same class in 4th grade scored 30% at or above in ELA and 30% at or above in Math. The year the teachers looped with the same class onto 5th grade, the SBA scores increased significantly with 56% at or above in ELA and 41% at or above in Math. Departmentalizing 4th and 5th and Looping has without question played a significant role in our students' growth performance and overall student achievement at South Street School.

Another effective strategy that South Street teachers implement on a daily basis is effective feedback. Students in K-5 set goals in literacy and math before each unit of study and reflect on these goals by the end of each unit. Goal setting encourages student motivation. All students push themselves to reach their goals. This has proven to be influential in moving students toward proficiency in both literacy and math. Teachers promote goal setting by holding students accountable during student conferencing. In the primary grades, students draw pictures or use sticky notes to reflect on their learning.

In the intermediate grades, teachers show students their fall STAR and Fountas & Pinnell running record scores. Students use this information to set achievable goals before the next assessment. A pivotal strategy that has proven time and time again its importance and effectiveness in student outcomes is small group instruction. During small groups, teachers address students' needs and communicate to students what they need to improve upon. This feedback is instrumental for improving student performance and increasing student engagement, in addition to, fostering a positive relationship between teacher and student.

Star Assessments for Reading and Math are directly aligned to CCSS. Formal and informal assessments include, but are not limited to, running records, conferring notes, TC pre/post tests, and Interim Assessment Blocks (IAB) for literacy, numeracy, science, and math assessments. Formal and informal assessments are instrumental for South Street teachers since it drives their instruction, planning, and professional development. An effective way teachers use informal assessments is through everyday inquiry in the form of exit tickets, stop and jot, skills checklist, Turn and Talk, and oral presentations. It allows teachers to quickly gauge comprehension and which students need more support.

Formal assessments are an important part of our continuous progress monitoring tools in South Street. Teachers utilize STAR assessments, DIBELS, and SBAC as well as Writing on Demands, and Units of Instruction and Math Investigations unit tests.

### **1b. Reading/English language arts**

The mission of South Street teachers is to help our students become avid, skilled, and engaged readers and writers. We accomplish this by following the district's core curriculum using Teachers College (TC) Reading and Writing Units of Study. Teachers use performance assessments and learning progressions to deliver grade-level content instruction. Teachers at South Street have access to all instructional materials found on the Heinemann Teachers College website. This online resource provides teachers with everything they need to implement scientifically research-based lessons to differentiate instruction. One example is our access to their online anchor charts. These charts help students retain strategies taught within each unit of study. Heinemann also includes teacher guides for each unit. This resource is invaluable to South Street teachers and supports the literacy curriculum on a daily basis.

Teachers implement a balanced literacy approach daily, which includes reading, writing, read-aloud, phonics, and word study. South Street students are immersed in literacy for over two hours a day. In the departmentalized 4th and 5th grades, they have two 70-minute periods of literacy instruction a day for reading and writing. K-5 teachers deliver grade-level core instruction through a daily 10-12 minute mini-lesson. The mini-lesson is taught as a whole group, followed by independent practice during guided reading or strategy groups. South Street teachers set expectations with their students starting in kindergarten. Students are aware of the routine of the workshop model, as well as, their responsibilities as a reader and writer. This is evidenced by their notebooks, post-its notes, and writing exemplars.

Read-aloud is an essential part of the balanced literacy model that South Street exemplifies. Students are engaged in the story while the teacher uses think-aloud to teach specific reading or writing strategies. In order for teachers to plan effective read-aloud, they analyze pre-tests, STAR reading scores, and writing on-demands. By using these assessments, teachers pinpoint students' needs, thus making gains and reaching levels of proficiency for every student.

As part of a balanced literacy model, South Street teachers utilize running records from Fountas and Pinnell and TC. Teachers in grades 1-5 formally assess the entire class three times a year; fall, winter, and spring. Any student that scores below grade level is tested every 2-3 weeks. This assessment allows teachers to see which literacy skill the students need to target; word accuracy, fluency, or comprehension. South Street teachers are TC trained and have received professional development on how to adequately analyze running records. For example, if a student struggles with word accuracy, teachers then analyze any miscues to see if the student is making visual errors, syntax errors or meaning errors. The analysis of running records helps South Street teachers deliver explicit instruction through small groups within Readers' and Writer's Workshop.

Word work and phonics is another part of a balanced literacy instruction. In grades K-2, students receive phonics instruction through TC. One effective aspect of TC phonics is that it is a program that keeps students engaged through storylines, classroom mascots, songs, chants, rhymes, and games. The phonics program keeps pace with the current reading and writing units being taught to meet students' expected proficiency levels in reading and writing.

### **1c. Mathematics**

South Street's mathematical vision involves inquiry-based learning, problem-solving, and real-life hands-on activities to engage and encourage all students to be successful. South Street teachers exemplify an inquiry-based model in mathematics. All students are exposed to core instruction before working independently. Teachers then pull differentiated small groups in order to effectively meet the needs of all their students.

Five years ago, The Danbury School District rolled out a new resource, starting in the lower grades, for teaching the math curriculum, Pearson's Investigations 3. This program is fully with aligned to the content  
NBRS 2020

and practice standards of the CCSS. Making sense of mathematics is the core of the lessons for students and teachers. The program encourages and provides many hands-on games and activities for students to enhance their understanding. We then add activities related to Common Core Standards when necessary to make sure we cover all objectives and practices needed, such as Estimation 180 and 3 Act Math. We do this to create a “whole student” who is prepared to problem solve and independently tackle math concepts in the real world. For example, 5th grade students participated in measuring the volume of their classrooms and built their own boxes and cities to connect real-life scenarios with volume and area.

Another part of the Investigations model is Ten-Minute math. This is a time for students to think outside the box, share their thinking with others, and listen to the creative thinking strategies of their peers. This also gives students the opportunity to apply previously learned concepts to make connections and synthesize their learning.

One big component of our math practice is Math Workshop. Through Pearson Investigations 3, teachers were taught how to conduct math workshops throughout the curriculum as a way to get students to practice new content while also reviewing prior skills and previous knowledge. Math workshops are presented as a must do/can do model. Students are given a task(s) they must do. Usually, this task requires students to practice new content. Teachers use this task as an informal or formative assessment to help guide them towards struggling students. After students finish their must do, they select an activity they can do based on options given by the teacher. Can do activities are often review activities or math games that have students practice skills they previously learned. Teachers can also use the math workshop time to pull small groups to work toward a specific skill. Math workshops are not only beneficial for teachers to see which students need further scaffolds or re-teaching, but they also give students autonomy and freedom to choose which skills they want to practice and which activities or games they want to play. Not only that, but math workshops are engaging to students and allow teachers creativity within the math curriculum.

Many digital tools such as Freckle, Prodigy, and Moby Max also are used to fill in gaps and motivate students. These digital tools are used to target specific skills that students need to practice and are also used at home to strengthen the lessons of the day. Teachers at SSS are devoted to creating students who play an active part in their own learning plan and these digital resources are one way to help make that connection possible.

#### **1d. Science**

South Street School’s Science curriculum follows the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) with the support of Mystery Science across all grade levels. Mystery Science has complete lessons aligned to (NGSS). Each Mystery is assigned to a topic and grade level, with several Mysteries to choose from within that topic. Students become engaged during the videos, hands-on activities, and assessments. Students watch the videos in a whole class setting while investigating theories and following their hypotheses throughout the period in small groups and partnerships. They conduct experiments, track data in their science notebook, and present their findings to their peers. Science curriculum at SSS is led by student curiosity and discovery with the teachers taking more of a facilitator approach.

In addition to Mystery Science, third grade uses Discovery Science as the platform for the third grade science curriculum. Through Discovery Science, students become immersed in the content through science phenomena, interactive games, hands-on activities, and videos. The program gives students the chance to participate in many real-world activities related to the science curriculum such as class wide tug of war to learn about forces and motion and growing lima beans to learn about plant life cycles.

Teachers also incorporate science within literacy instruction. One example of this is in first grade where students learn about seeds. The students read books, write informational texts, and then experiment by growing a plant in class. The students are engaged throughout the unit of study and the teacher is able to incorporate a variety of academic disciplines through that one unit.

Another example of student engagement in Science is in fifth grade. Fifth graders always look forward to the STEM-based egg drop project. The challenge is for students to use materials to design a contraption to NBRS 2020

keep an egg safe from a high fall. The students are encouraged to bring in materials from home for their contraption. They work as a group or in partners to brainstorm and build. After the class designs their contraptions, they analyze all the other egg drop contraptions created. The students record their predictions in their notebook. The last step is the students take their contraptions outside to test them. After each project is dropped, the students discuss which designs worked and which didn't work and support their reasons with evidence from the experiment. The students love this activity so much that they want to perform the experiment later on in the year, using the new knowledge they learned to reconstruct their contraptions.

#### **1e. Social studies/history/civic learning and engagement**

Teachers embed Social Studies across all grade levels. Lessons are based on the Connecticut Elementary Social Studies Frameworks. The framework states that there are four major disciplines in social studies—civics, economics, geography, and history, with inquiry being the basis of instruction. Social Studies is an integral part of numerous Teacher's College nonfiction units.

Grades K-2 work with global geography, Connecticut, and North American Geography through thematic activities. Students also learn about rights and responsibilities in second grade as well as their roles in a community. In addition, many of the ELA units incorporate social studies standards.

In third grade, students learn about Danbury throughout history, starting with Native Americans, Colonial Era, Revolutionary War, Industrial Revolution, and up to present day. Teachers use movies and crafts to help build connections with students. Students are immersed in Colonial Life with the annual Colonial Day, where students experience life as a child in the Colonial Era. Teachers set up stations for students to rotate including feather pen writing, colonial crafts, colonial toys, and colonial games. The year ends with a field trip to the Danbury Museum where students are exposed to traditional life as it was in historic Danbury.

Social Studies is embedded within literacy in both fourth and fifth grade. Fourth graders study The American Revolution and geographic themes, and fifth graders study Westward Expansion. South Street students love to commemorate their learning in social studies through reading and writing celebrations.

In fourth grade, students celebrate the end of the American Revolution by creating a living timeline in the gymnasium. Students incorporate reading, writing, and technology into their presentations. Students dress as their topic, write an informational text about their topic and present it by creating individual slideshows. Parents, administration, and the rest of the school are invited and thoroughly enjoy their presentations.

We have numerous community partnerships in South Street. One of those is our involvement with Junior Achievement (JA). JA sends volunteers from the local business community to teach lessons about work-readiness, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy skills. The volunteers encourage students to dream big and think about how they can reach their potential. The program is approximately six hours with most volunteers coming once per week for six weeks. Many of the JA lessons will hopefully stay with the students as they make life and career choices.

#### **1f. For secondary schools:**

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

#### **2. Other Curriculum Areas:**

Every student at South Street participates in a forty-minute "special" each day. Specials are activity blocks focused on subjects outside the core curriculum classes that students attend on a rotating basis each week. Students participate in Art, Music, Media, Physical Education, and Technology Education. Lessons are planned using state and district standards with an emphasis on vocabulary development for all of our students.

While teaching our students the elements of art and principles of design, we foster an appreciation of the arts and assist in developing the students' own artistic expression. Our curriculum aligns with the Common Core

with an emphasis on listening and speaking. It was designed with the core curriculum in mind. Students create 2-Dimensional and 3-Dimensional art using a variety of mediums, such as drawing, painting, sculpture, printmaking, and various others. Students in Kindergarten through Fifth Grade are asked to use their creativity to solve problems and to express their ideas.

For instance, the Visual Art teachers celebrate their students' creativity by hanging their artwork in the halls of the school. The art teachers collaborate with the music teachers to showcase students' artistic and musical talents. Teachers also have a culminating art show that represents every student at South Street. At the district's CoDA festival that celebrates Fine and Applied Arts K-12, South Street proudly has students perform at this event and display their visual artwork.

Physical education classes are designed to enhance students' physical literacy, as well as providing opportunities for students to work on developing positive character traits through activities that enhance trust, sportsmanship, and fair play. Activities are aligned with the Connecticut Healthy and Balanced Living Curriculum Framework and SHAPE America National Physical Education Standards. Most recently South Street was awarded a grant to implement activities from OPEN: Online Physical Education Network. OPEN promotes equity of access to quality physical education instruction through their free resources.

During the 2018-2019 school year, South Street conducted a Kids Heart Challenge event to support the American Heart Association. By participating in this program our school was eligible to apply for grant funding which led to the purchase of the necessary equipment to implement the use of OPEN activities in our physical education classes. This grant has provided our students with improved instruction in the area of physical education due to the ability to teach lessons that we previously did not have adequate equipment for. Many of the activities from OPEN not only provide an opportunity to improve physical health, but they also embed numerous opportunities for students to learn about health and nutrition as well.

Our physical education teacher participates in ongoing professional development sessions designed to enhance his understanding of academic vocabulary and Depth of Knowledge questions to monitor for understanding throughout the various modules being taught.

Media lessons are based on a rigorous information and media literacy curriculum that we have proudly developed to help our students thrive in an increasingly digital world. The Media Specialist teaches our young children skills to help them navigate the Internet, deal with information overload, search for and evaluate information, and learn about safe online tips to avoid would-be predators, phishers, and scammers.

The Media Specialist is very proactive in getting students interested in reading through audiobooks for those who want to "read" something at/above their level, graphic novels, and resources for classroom teachers through nonfiction texts and videos to support the curriculum for each grade level. The Media Center also receives many book donations and these books are displayed on tables for students to come to "Free Book Day" in the morning before school begins.

South Street is one elementary school that is a core grant recipient from the VH1 Save the Music Foundation. This grant has given 32 instruments, music stands, sheet music for our teachers, and professional development for our music staff. This program, along with the donations from the local Kiwanis Club of Greater Danbury, has allowed our students to have access to instruments that they did not have before.

Since we are a Little Kids Rock trained school district, at South Street we have guitars, ukuleles, and modern band instruments that our students perform using modern band pedagogy, teaching according to music as a second language. In addition to band and string instruments, you will find our students performing in music classes through movement, creating, composing, and responding to music.

For the second year in a row, our school received a grant from the Danbury Library and learned all about harmonicas from America's Got Talent Contestant Jia-Yi He, a world-class harmonica virtuoso. The students learned about all different types of harmonicas and learned how to perform them. It was a

wonderful experience for our students and fostered great collaboration between South Street and the community.

### **3. Academic Supports:**

#### **3a. Students performing below grade level**

South Street is fully dedicated to meet the needs of all of our students. We believe all of our students can and will learn to the best of their abilities. Our motto is “Core Plus More” where all of South Street’s students receive differentiated, personalized instruction by accessing additional learning tools without compromising access to grade-level content in order to achieve academic success. Currently, our most effective school-wide instructional model is the implementation of a daily 30-minute WIN (What I Need) block for every grade level at various times in the day, which drives our yearly master schedule. This is also set aside to deliver interventions for Tier 2 and Tier 3 students in literacy and math. ESL and identified students receive support services during WIN. The intent is that no student is removed from their class during core content instruction.

In first grade, additional academic support is provided to struggling readers during WIN by using a comprehensive reading program. Currently, we use McGraw Hill Wright Group Literacy with its explicit research-based instruction. In addition to the teacher’s guided reading during Reader’s workshop, struggling readers have an additional guided reading and strategy group, in a structured learning environment, delivered by our certified interventionist. Groups are not larger than three to five students. Our interventionist works with the literacy coach and the classroom teacher to share, plan, and set goals for individual students by looking at data (running records, STAR reading, Dibels) every two weeks. Groups are flexible and are rotating every four to six weeks based on student’s met goals and independent performance.

Systematic Instruction in Phonological Awareness, Phonics, and Sight Words (SIPPS) is a successful program that we use as an additional academic support for Tier 2 and Tier 3. This is a research- based decoding intervention program that supports struggling readers to become fluent and independent readers. Our data showed a significant number of students in grades 3-5 lacked decoding and fluency skills. Hence, we started SIPPS in 2018-2019, and since we have seen a significant growth and increase in our students’ reading proficiency levels. SIPPS is delivered during our WIN block in some grades by the interventionist or literacy coach. The Language Arts (LA) coach trains interventionists and work hand in hand to ensure students are getting targeted instruction. Interventionists also perform informal progress monitoring to share with classroom teachers. In third grade, the classroom teachers deliver explicit lessons during small group instruction in an accelerative approach.

For Tier 3 students, our most successful program is the Fountas & Pinnell Leveled Literacy Intervention System (LLI). LLI is a supplementary literacy intervention for students with difficulty in reading and writing. Our full-time LA coach works specifically one-to-one or in groups of no more than three students using this program to formulate specific goals. Through bi-weekly monitoring student’s progress, students have successfully achieved grade-level expectations in reading. Our data shows that at least half of our students in Tier 3 end up back in Tier 2 using this effective academic tool to deliver personalized instruction.

In the upper grades, we have effectively implemented Bridges from the Math Learning Center, as an academic mathematical tool. Bridges Intervention is a targeted tiered system of support in mathematics instruction with an ongoing progress monitoring consistent with a Response to Intervention (RTI) or Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) framework. We have used Bridges in our Departmentalized 4th and 5th grade classrooms for whole group, small group, and individualized instruction. During our 70-minute Math instruction students receive a 20-minute grade-level content core instruction, and the remaining time is spent in a small group where some students receive instructional support using Bridges Intervention Program delivered by our Math Specialist. Students work with models that ignite thinking and build mastery. It is organized by content, with ongoing progress monitoring with a goal of reaching grade level expectations by filling the gaps. We use it and tailor this program based on formative assessments and teacher observations. It has allowed us another researched-based tool that aligns with grade- level content to meet the needs of every student.

### **3b. Students performing above grade level**

WIN is more than just an intervention block that follows the SRBI framework model. What is specifically unique about our WIN block is that it is an additional set block of time to target specific areas in need through personalized instruction. This is when all teachers formulate a plan to provide support for all students in various forms with academic supports. Therefore, it is also a time to further enrich students at or above grade level.

For the past three years in Kindergarten (K), Imagine Learning is one tool that we use as an additional Tier 1 academic support during WIN block. Imagine Learning is an adaptive online program used as a supplemental resource to core literacy instruction that provides practice in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The majority of our K students start school with little to no foundational literacy skills, phonemic awareness, and poor oral language development. Below is a summary of Kindergarten's 2018-2019 Imagine Learning Data Analysis that demonstrates our success with this implementation:

Beginning of the Year Fall Assessment: 1% above level, 40% on level, 58% below; end of the Year Spring Assessment: 54% above level, 34% on level, 12% below.

As a Title 1 school, we utilized its funding to purchase carts of 26 Chrome books for every K-5 classroom. This provides a 1:1 device in every classroom to reinforce learned skills and/or enrichment support for at or above grade level students. We purchased academic online programs such as Moby Max, Newslea, Mystery Science, and RazKids. In addition, we use other online programs like EPIC, Prodigy, Flocabulary, and Freckle. These programs are used to target specific skills, supplement instruction, and as an additional academic toolkit to serve various academic levels of performance in the classroom, including students at or above grade level. Our goal is to fill gaps to move students to mastery, and reinforce learned and/or new skills in a fun and engaging way. It is another way to differentiate and personalize instruction as an additional academic support. Furthermore, these programs organize and provide rich data to further drive small group and tiered instruction.

### **3c. Special education**

South Street follows the DPS inclusion model. Listed as one of the schools with a high percentage of high-needs students, our special education and pupil services support staff provide academic support by modifying grade level content and implementing an individualized educational plan for identified students. While we do have some students that receive pull-out services, the majority of our support staff works collaboratively with classroom teachers to push-in services and support all students by planning and supporting regular educational teachers to differentiate instruction with best practices that support all students. All of the special education and related services staff participate in our monthly grade-level and SRBI meetings, as well as, weekly instructional leadership team meetings. This allows support staff to collaborate in instructional planning, interventions, and socio-emotional support for all students.

### **3d. ELLs, if a special program or intervention is offered**

Another successful academic support is our ESL model of instruction. Since more than half of our students are ELL, we had to create an instructional model that would serve our students without compromising core instruction. During the individual grade level WIN block, ESL certified staff "Pull-Out" students deliver oral language-based instruction that is purposefully aligned with grade-level content. Our ESL staff maximizes student's learning by providing a balanced literacy approach meant to support student's reading and writing skills in conjunction with oral and vocabulary language development. For the past three years, our Smarter Balanced Assessment Data show that our ELL students are growing academically by meeting their targeted growth. Spring 2019 data demonstrated that 93% of our ELL students in grades 1-5 increased their overall LAS scale score.

Through our grade-level meetings, monthly SRBI meetings, and common planning time, staff is continuously looking at data and collaboratively thinking "outside the box" to scaffold and meet students' learning styles with scientifically research-based instruction. This includes our ESL students that while

technically not placed in Tier 2 interventions because of their language acquisition, still need more instruction to support them in their academic growth. Furthermore, through data analysis, our teachers are continuously monitoring progress to drive instruction. WIN has allowed us to have an additional instructional time to implement various academic supports and supplement our diverse students' needs.

**3e. Other populations (e.g., migrant), if a special program or intervention is offered**

A portion of our ESL students consists of “newcomers.” Most of our newcomers come from developing countries with little to no educational experience in their native language. Therefore in addition to ESL services provided by an ESL certified staff, our ESL paraprofessionals provide daily one-hour direct instruction for students that moved to the US in the past 18 months. Their focus is to build and reinforce language acquisition using songs, poems, and interactive games while implementing basic literacy and foundational skills in English. Newcomers are also using Imagine Learning as an additional academic support tool.

We are breaking grounds when it comes to meeting the needs of our high-needs population. South Street is paving the way to create new and exciting ways to close the achievement gap. We maximize instruction with academic support systems to meet the students at their level and at their pace while still executing high expectations, a rigorous curriculum and instructional model for all students to achieve their full potential. Through WIN and our effective use of our academic supports, we continue to build on our student's foundational skills, which we believe is the key to closing the achievement gap. This follows our “Core Plus More” motto where we allow students to experience core content and set aside a time where supplemental academic supports are successfully implemented.

## **PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE**

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### **1. Engaging Students:**

Positive school climate and culture is an area of focus at South Street. We take pride in providing a safe and positive learning environment for each and every student. Because of this, students have discovered a sense of community and are eager to attend school daily. Students are greeted upon arrival by administration and support staffs that are energetic and outgoing. Teachers greet students at their classroom doors with music playing and high fives, which gets them excited for a new day of learning.

South Street believes in integrating academic and social-emotional skills. The entire staff has created this environment in each classroom by participating in a Responsive Classroom approach. We believe students can do their best learning in this environment. Every day begins with a morning meeting that is tailored to the needs of the students in their class. All students gather in a circle for ten to fifteen minutes at the beginning of the school day to greet each other, share thoughts and ideas, participate in a group activity, usually a game or an activity that incorporates movement, and a morning message. We use a rating scale called “fist to five” where students can show their readiness for the day or their emotional needs for the day, with a five being the best and a fist being the worst. This allows the teachers to quickly evaluate the needs of the students in their classroom at the start of each day. This school-wide practice has increased positive behavior, student engagement, and relationships between peers and staff members. We believe that those students who are actively engaged in the life of the school are more likely to excel academically and socially in the years to come.

An important part of maintaining a healthy school climate is keeping our students engaged. SSS provides different activities throughout the year for all students to be included in diverse learning experiences. We participate in the Connecticut Invention Convention, an opportunity for our students to develop critical thinking skills through inventing and innovating.

We also encourage our students’ interest in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) through the Invention Convention as well as local STEM fairs. Students from South Street walked to the STEM Street Fair as a school. The STEM Street Fair was an event sponsored last spring by United Way of Western Connecticut. It took place in the grounds of the Danbury Wall Memorial located right across from our school. Students had the opportunity to participate in STEM activities sponsored by many of the greater Danbury corporations such as Microsoft, Praxair, Kimberly-Clark, EverWonder, Collins Aerospace, Bellissimo, and Savings Bank in Danbury. Students were also allowed to choose free books from a UPS truck that was full of donated books. A demonstration and tour of the fire trucks from the Danbury Fire Department is another exciting part of the STEM fair for our students. These corporate companies volunteered their employees, materials, and demonstrations to provide hands-on STEM activities that enriched our students’ understanding of concepts such as chemical reactions, structure vs. forces, torque and levers, and coding to name just a few. It was truly a very special event for all and something we plan to continue every year.

Because of our diverse population, we provide many ways to celebrate the heritage and culture of all of our students. Each year we participate in activities such as Black History Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, and Read Across America where we have guest readers from the community come to read stories and bring students and adults together. We have the Fire Marshall, the Chief Deputy of the Police Department, and the Mayor of Danbury, among many others, read their favorite book to our students.

We want our students to experience a world diverse in various modes of learning while still fostering a culture of fine arts, math and science applications.

### **2. Engaging Families and Community:**

Prioritizing our families’ and community engagement with South Street has also been a focal point for us. In order to foster a sense of connectedness within the school community, we have created a Parent Involvement

Committee. We strive to provide open communication to all parents through our school website, social media, robocalls with important information and dates, and parent-teacher apps such as Class Dojo and Remind Me.

South Street's faculty and staff collaborate with our Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) to provide family and community engagement events throughout the year. The PTO provides funding to assist teachers with the cost of field trips. They have also brought engaging school-wide assemblies, such as The Brain Show, Mr. Peace and BINGO nights, as well as, informational nights as requested by parents with inviting special guest speakers with presentations on socio-emotional awareness, school safety, and many others. All of these events are crafted to promote school-home connections and provide useful information for parents to assist in their child's learning inside and outside of school.

Other events that South Street promotes to engage families are pajama literacy night, superhero math night, and SBA and curriculum nights. We've also brought in special guest speakers to address topics on positive connections at home, and ESL classes for our parents who want to learn how to speak English. These events not only promote academic learning for both literacy and math, but also help to assist parents with the skills their children are learning in school. All meetings and events at SSS are translated into Spanish and Portuguese. Childcare is provided at the school during any parent meeting.

There is consistent and full (100%) participation in our parent/teacher conferences. This is no small feat, as we have more than 75% of parents needing translation in either Spanish or Portuguese. We do it with our own staff that goes above and beyond to support our families and provide the need in order for our families and staff to unite in one same cause.

The school's social worker works hand in hand with organizations in the community to help families and students in need. For example, South Street School is sponsored by the "Coats for Kids" program through the Knights of Columbus. This program provides warm jackets for our students with significant needs who would otherwise not have adequate winter attire. We also participate in Toys for Tots, where students in need are given toys and gifts during the holiday season. For the past two years, during Thanksgiving we donated 15 baskets full of dinner items for Thanksgiving all donated by our local Danbury-Bethel Seventh-Day Adventist Church. These families and students are also connected with community, county and state agencies for resources and support as needed. We believe in fostering the whole child. Hence, when students' and families' basic needs are addressed, students are able to better focus on learning.

Another important experience that students at SSS receive is a program called Jericho Reading Buddies. Volunteers from our community work alongside teachers and administrators to help ensure students get the attention and support they need. The goal of Reading Buddies is to partner with school administrators to reach at-risk students as early as possible in their academic career, providing them the support they need to be successful, for the common good of our city. Some teachers have volunteers read with or to a small group of students while others might work on a specific reading skill or lesson. We have also had other volunteers work with students who are excelling while the teacher spends time with other students who are struggling. This is just another way that SSS caters to the needs of each student every week.

BUG is another program that we have the privilege to be a part of with our 5th graders. BUG is an acronym that stands for Bring Up Grades. The Kiwanis Club in Danbury runs it. These volunteers meet with our students in the beginning of the year to talk about what it takes to be successful and how to set goals. They then share their own success stories twice a month with our students. Volunteers discuss the steps that lead them to their career and what their daily responsibilities are. The students are introduced to various types of careers from lawyers to landscape designers. At the end of the year, the students that have met their goals, or made growth, are celebrated with certificates and a ceremony. This program connects students to our community and shows them the many opportunities available for them in the future.

### **3. Creating Professional Culture:**

The overall culture of South Street is dependent on teachers and staff that always feels respected and supported. Our SSS principal has an open-door policy where all voices are heard and opinions are valued.

Teachers' concerns are always considered and are included when school and community issues are discussed. While high expectations are a clear standard by our school principal, teachers in the building are encouraged by our school principal to try new ways of teaching, embrace challenges, and to be the best educator they can be every day.

Teachers are also supported socially through team-building activities and social gatherings inside and outside of the school. We have monthly potluck breakfasts to help encourage us and recognize the successes of the school as a whole in addition to acknowledging staff birthdays and life events, such as pregnancies and weddings. The staff at South Street is a tight-knit family that continues to encourage each other and lend a helping hand when needed.

Last year, the Danbury Public Schools embarked on a new journey with training administrators and school staff with Restorative Practices. As we move into a school district that is defining its Portrait of a Graduate, we are also learning and developing a model where our school's code of conduct reflects equity and restorative justice. In South Street, we are ahead of the district with the implementation of Responsive Classroom, however, we are learning to embed more restorative practices to unite us in our vision.

#### **4. School Leadership:**

South Street's current principal started three years ago by identifying a clear vision; high expectations for all students, closing the achievement gap, and making South Street an exemplary school to share best practices with others. We have been recognized as a School of Distinction three years within a four-year span by the CT Department of Education, invited to state forums to share our successes with other superintendents and personnel, but more importantly, we are closer than ever to closing the achievement gap evident in state standard formative tests, such as the Smarter Balanced Assessment. We have achieved many of our goals due to a shared leadership approach, with systems in place to reach our vision.

First, our master schedule has over 190 minutes of common planning time for every grade level team, exceeding the expected mandated prep time for teachers. During this time teachers can meet with the literacy and math coach, the ESL team, the resource teachers and specialists to work together to adjust practice, enrich curriculum, and plan for small group instruction.

Second, South Street has an Instructional Leadership Team that meets every Friday to discuss specific student case studies, review formative data, and discuss shared instructional practices, resources, and support services. The instructional leadership team rotates its members as facilitators to build leadership capacity within our school. The Instructional Leadership team also defines and revises first the School Improvement Plan every year. The team also invites district personnel to further increase our knowledge, continuously improve our strategies, and assess the effectiveness of instructional practices.

Furthermore, grade level teams (GLT) meet with the Instructional Leadership Team every month for two hours. In the first hour, we follow the SRBI framework model to discuss all struggling students; the other hour is facilitated by the literacy and math coach where we review curriculum, unpack common core standards, and develop a plan to deliver effective instructional practices.

SRBI meetings are concise and focus on students' overall academic performance and socio-emotional wellness. It is a team effort to not only support student learning, but also to equip classroom teachers with scaffolding strategies shared by a team of experts in delivering explicit instruction in a specialized field. Our SRBI team consists of our ESL teachers, resource teachers, the social worker, the school psychologist, the speech and language pathologist, the literacy and math coach, and the school principal.

The second half of GLT meetings is for grade-level core content curriculum and instruction facilitated by our literacy and math Coach. We plan for upcoming units of instruction, aligned with common core standards, and small group instruction to support Reader's and Writer's Workshop, and Math Workshop. Our focus in these meetings specifically targets Tier 1 instruction.

In addition, we have bi-monthly data review meetings, following the Data-Wise process, where we analyze

formative assessments. Teachers complete, update, and share a live Google class progress monitoring spreadsheet with the team. We discuss every student's progress or lack of. Information in the spreadsheet includes STAR Reading and Math (fall/winter/spring) data. It also includes running records, writing on demands, Dibels, and LAS LINK scores. It is a quick glimpse of every student where we discuss patterns, strategies, support systems, and the student's overall performance.

Every meeting has an agenda shared 24 hours in advance, which includes date/time/location, our mission, norms, meeting goals, a facilitator, attendance, and meeting notes. All of our meetings are transparent and shared in Google drive with all pertinent staff.

## **PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

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South Street is a very special and unique school. We are known for having a high number of at-risk and high-needs students across the district. For the past few years, South Street has been changing that mindset and we are no longer the school that wishes it could, but the school that can and is paving the way. What has changed? We still use the same programs and administer the same tests. We continue with grade-level meetings, instructional leadership teams, and SRBI meetings. Our demographics have not changed. In fact, our numbers are increasing with a growing population of high-needs students. So, what are we doing differently? Data, data, data! That's not a new word. However, South Street teachers are becoming more effective at analyzing data to inform their instruction

Back in 2017, we started by delving further into data with our classroom teachers in conjunction with the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT). By empowering and training, and the implementation of the district's 8 steps of the Data Wise Improvement Approach, we were able to relieve any misconceptions and target our problems of practice and learner-centered problems.

### **Step 1. Organize for Collaborative Work**

We started building capacity by collectively sharing data in our various collective areas of expertise. ILT was the center of where we empowered first each member and how information was dispersed among the rest of the certified staff.

### **Step 2. Build Assessment Literacy**

Classroom teachers, in conjunction with ILT, were trained in how to interpret assessments more effectively. Classroom teachers in grades 3-5 delved on STAR and Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBA) data points. We looked at discipline and attendance data. ESL staff looked at LAS Proficiency data. The school principal met three or four times a year with the district's data analyst to identify and collect data points.

### **Step 3. Create Data Overview**

We solidified our interpretation of our most useful formative data, which consisted of STAR Reading and Math, SBA, Imagine Learning, Lexia, LAS and other data to create a school-wide data analysis. We presented the data to the whole school and created spreadsheets with questions in four quadrants: Successes (What's working?) Challenges (What's not working) Solutions (Team Recommendations), and Next Steps (Plan of Action).

We organized the staff into three groups to address all of the main operations in a school environment: Curriculum and Instruction, School Climate, and Parental Involvement. In each group, there was an equal representation of all certified staff: Each group would meet once a month to reassess where we were. Notes were kept and shared in Google drive.

### **Step 4. Dig into Student Data**

We started looking at trends and patterns for the past three years, looking at data longitudinally and vertically, as well as looking at cohorts. This paved the way to identify action steps that would address learner-centered problems and problems of practice. By continuously delving further into data analysis, utilizing our own experts and district personnel support, we were able to drill down into our own data, build assessment literacy, open communication among interrelated teams, and develop next steps to dig deeper into student data.

### **Step 5. Examine Instruction**

As we increased our understanding, we were able to slowly start incorporating this approach in our grade-level meetings. We were able to remove any misconceptions and biases and started to truly understand our

students' needs through data analysis. Data became our friend, our necessity, and it opened the doors for the classrooms to start mending instructional practices, that while not wrong, the data clearly demonstrated, was not supporting our student population.

#### Step 6. Develop an Action Plan

Teachers were now confident and owned their data, and were ready to be fully transparent and open to expanding their instructional practices. Teachers created a progress monitoring spreadsheet where all of their students' data was collected. A path was created which directly impacted the whole group, small group, and most importantly, individual student's needs.

#### Step 7. Plan to Assess Progress

Progress monitoring has been a key factor to our success. By looking at each student individually and also collectively, we identified gaps in the curriculum, reshaped our instructional strategies, maximized and targeted our resources, and planned professional development in the areas that we needed to improve as identified by the teachers.

#### Step 8. Act and Assess

In the classroom, between the teacher and the students, is where the magic happens. Small group instruction is where we see most of our gains, but only because we use data to shape it. Our departmentalized classrooms are paving ways, but it's because teachers continuously use data to organize flexible groups and scaffold instruction. Even our upper-grade students have started to look at their own data as they work to achieve their goals. From attendance, office referrals, standardized assessments, math tests, and meetings, we look at all sorts of data. Data drives SRBI, ILT, School Improvement Plans, parent/teacher conferences, grade levels, and faculty and professional development meetings. Data is the drive for all of our focused instructional decisions. South Street teachers are equipped to impact student achievement by effectively analyzing data to inform our small group instruction.

Doctors cannot prescribe medication without first learning and studying the symptoms, and not every medication works for every patient with the same diagnosis. In comparison, South Street looks at data first to successfully personalize learning with effective instructional practices. We are far from experts, but we are on the right track in closing the achievement gap, and fostering students to be competent citizens in society.