

**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) [ ] Title I [ ] Charter [X] Magnet[X] Choice

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

Official School Name Bak Middle School of the Arts  
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 1725 Echo Lake Drive  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City West Palm Beach State FL Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 33407-3513

County Palm Beach

Telephone (561) 882-3844 Fax (561) 882-3879

Web site/URL https://msoa.palmbeachschools.org/ E-mail Sally.Rozanski@palmbeachschools.org

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. Donald Fennoy E-mail donald.fennoy@palmbeachschools.org  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name The School District of Palm Beach County Tel. (561) 434-8000

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

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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

The original signed cover sheet only should be converted to a PDF file and uploaded via the online portal.

*\*Non-public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, write N/A in the space.*

## **PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION**

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The signatures on the first page of this application (cover page) certify that each of the statements below, concerning the school’s eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education and National Blue Ribbon Schools requirements, are true and correct.

1. 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):
- 112 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 37 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 27 High schools
  - 1 K-12 schools
- 177 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	0	0	0
1	0	0	0
2	0	0	0
3	0	0	0
4	0	0	0
5	0	0	0
6	125	343	468
7	153	313	466
8	112	331	443
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	390	987	1377

\*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
  - 9 % Asian
  - 16 % Black or African American
  - 24 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 45 % White
  - 6 % 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: 1%

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	0
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2018 until the end of the 2018-2019 school year	17
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	17
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2018	1381
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.01
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	1

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

Spanish, Haitian-Creole

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 5 %  
69 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 26 %

Total number students who qualify: 358

8. Students receiving special education services: 3 %

47 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>9</u> Other Health Impaired                 |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>20</u> Specific Learning Disability         |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>11</u> Speech or Language Impairment        |
| <u>2</u> Hearing Impairment      | <u>1</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>0</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>1</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 7

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	4
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	85
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	1
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	2
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	8

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 16:1

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

Required Information	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014-2015
Daily student attendance	97%	96%	95%	95%	97%
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.

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 X No

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award. 2008

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

Empowering students to have the knowledge, skills, and self-confidence to achieve their goals in the arts, in academics, and in life.

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

Bak Middle School of the Arts (MSOA) is a full choice public middle school in Palm Beach County. All students are eligible to apply if they meet the residency, age, and program eligibility criteria set forth by The School District of Palm Beach County’s Choice and Career Options Department. Unlike other choice schools, academic ability is not a prerequisite nor is it part of the selection process. Students qualify solely based on their audition(s) in their chosen art area(s). Admission and audition guidelines are made available by October of each school year.

Application- Choice and Career Options Department

The Choice and Career Options Department accepts applications during the published application dates. Students that are applying at Bak Middle School of the Arts may choose up to two art areas for auditions. (e.g., first choice and second choice).

Audition Sign-Up at Bak MSOA

After the application deadline, the Choice and Career Options Department provides Bak MSOA with a list of applicants who have met the initial application requirements and includes the applicant’s art area choices. Bak MSOA school personnel then contacts each parent/guardian and invites them to an audition sign-up day. Parents come on this day to sign-up for an audition date(s) and time(s). School personnel also meet individually with the parent/guardian whose child has an active I.E.P., 504 plan, or LEP (students are also present). We ensure that these students have the appropriate services and support based on their specific plan so they are provided with the appropriate accommodations.

## Auditions at Bak MSOA:

Applicants come to Bak MSOA on their audition date and participate in an audition in their chosen art area. Students who selected two art area choices in their initial application will return on a different day to audition in a second art area. When the audition process is completed, each student receives a final audition score based on the applicant's art area audition(s). This final score determines if the applicant has earned the minimum qualifying audition score to be eligible for the lottery process (i.e., 6th grade is 70% or higher and 7th and 8th grade is 80% or higher).

## Lottery - Choice and Career Options Department

In preparation for the Choice Lottery, Bak MSOA submits the audition and eligibility information for each student who auditioned in one or two art areas to the Choice and Career Options Department. Bak also identifies how many students can be admitted in each area for the upcoming school year. Eligible applicants (students who received an eligible audition score) are selected in a random lottery process conducted by the Choice and Career Options Department based on those numbers. Results of the lottery are available during the first week of April.

## Final Step- Lottery Chosen Students Accept or Decline to Attend Bak MSOA

Of the selected applicants, parents have a window to decide to either to accept or decline their child's choice placement. May 1st was the deadline for students/parents to accept or decline the choice seat. For the upcoming school year, 500 students were chosen by the lottery process and 497 students accepted and 3 declined.

## **PART III - SUMMARY**

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Bak Middle School of the Arts (Bak MSOA), is a full-choice arts magnet middle school, serving 1377 students in Palm Beach County. Located in West Palm Beach, Florida, Bak is part of the School District of Palm Beach County, which is the tenth largest urban school system in the nation and the fifth largest in the state of Florida. Bak is the only middle school in Palm Beach County that provides an art education in all eight disciplines: band, communications, dance, piano, strings, theatre, vocal, and visual arts. To gain admittance, students must apply, audition, qualify, and then be chosen in the lottery. Academic achievement nor any other student data or information is factored into the selection process. About 1,700 hundred auditions are conducted and just under 500 students are admitted each school year.

Palm Beach County is over 2,383 miles and unlike the majority of schools, our students live in all areas of Palm Beach County. The average student travels 25 to 50 miles to and from school each day - some travelling over 110 miles round trip. Our incoming 6th grade students are representative of over 86 elementary schools and 37 private and charter schools. We are a melting pot of elementary education. This presents some challenges, but it also adds to the richness and diversity of our student body. Bak's racial/ethnic composition is similar to Palm Beach County: 45% white, 24% Hispanic, 16% Black or African American, 9% Asian, and 6% Multiracial. Twenty-six percent of our students are on free and reduced lunch. We embrace the differences and individuality of our students, faculty and staff. This enables Bak MSOA to create a unique and diverse art community designed to foster growth and creativity in order to reach each child's potential. So no matter where you live, the elementary school attended, your native language, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or economic status – we are a family. The Bak Family!

It is Bak's mission to empower students to have the knowledge, skills, and self-confidence to achieve their goals in the arts, in academics, and in life. To make this a perpetual accomplishment, it takes all stakeholders working together in never-ending effort to innovate, secure the resources, and meet the needs of each student. The Bak Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), School Advisory Council (SAC), MSOA Foundation, business partners, dedicated parents, faculty, and staff all work in concert to benefit the students and school. We have built a culture of family, excellence, and high expectations that all stakeholders embrace. Within this structure we have instilled a growth mindset- that brains or talent is the starting point, but it is through dedication and hard work that goals can be achieved. This view creates a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishment in the arts and academics.

All students have an art area major in band, communications, dance, piano, strings, theatre, vocal, or visual arts. Students have eight classes, attending four 90 minute classes each day on a rotating odd/even schedule. The 90 minute block was specifically chosen because it is conducive to art instruction. On average, student will have three art area classes; many students will have four art courses by the time they are in 8th grade. Each art area has a specific course of study to build a universal knowledge and skill levels. Based on the student's ability and interests, more rigorous and specific courses are offered. Students also have the opportunity to take elective outside of their art area major.

Bak has multi-talented and highly qualified art teachers - many of whom have six different class preparations. They stay current in their field by attending state and national conferences. We support these dynamic teachers and their art students by hiring Artist-In-Residence to work on specific projects or to conduct a mini-class, and experts in the field to provide private or small group lessons and master classes. Our students also perform and compete at the local, state, and national levels. Wherever they go, they "wow" the audience or judges with their talents and professionalism. It is sometimes hard to believe that they are only young teens – they are so talented! The students' dedication and the skills and knowledge they gain in the art area carries forward to their academic studies.

As revered as we are for the arts, we are also recognized for our academic achievement. Bak MSOA is the highest achieving secondary school (middle and high) in Palm Beach County and ranks in the top five middle schools in the state of Florida. Highly qualified teachers provide rigorous, standards-based instruction that integrates the arts. The goal is that learning that engages the whole brain, the left side (intellectual) and the right side (creativity/arts) will maximize learning. Students demonstrate knowledge in

various ways that “show-off” their art area talents. This can be done through songs, interpretative dance, music, radio broadcast, speech, tableau, drawing or sculpture. Our students take rigorous coursework (advanced and gifted) and have the opportunity to take high school math and foreign language courses. Eighty-five percent of our students take at least one high school course before leaving middle school. Technology is utilized across all areas - every student has a Chromebook and every teacher has an Interactive Smartboard. A Google Classroom is created for every class. Because we were so strong with our use of technology and already had Google Classroom in place, the art and academic teachers were able to provide a solid educational experience for the Bak students.

Success in the arts and academic is wonderful, but our students’ social-emotional well-being is paramount. We want to ensure our students can effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, and establish and maintain positive relationships. We have lessons embedded in various classes, and the counselors and mental health professional work with those students most in need of assistance. During distance learning, Bak continued to provide counseling and emotional support to our students through Google Meet and Video Chats. It is important for the Bak Family members to know that we will always be there for each other, no matter the circumstances.

It is hard to properly assess and determine the impact winning the National Blue Ribbon School award in 2008 has had on Bak Middle School of the Arts. At that time, Bak MSOA was a deregulated school, and the state and district testing was not at the level that it is at this time. Additionally, the current administration (principal and assistant principals), the MSOA Foundation Executive Director, and 43% percent of the faculty and staff were not part of Bak MSOA in 2008. Since that time, the mission and vision of Bak MSOA has evolved, the expectations for academic standards and achievement have become more rigorous and we have become even more dedicated to providing a one-of-a-kind arts education experience. The school personnel that was on campus in 2008 and data from academic achievement indicate that the rigors and success of the arts, academic achievement, and community support has become even stronger and more notable. It was a great honor to win the the National Blue Ribbon School award in 2008 and that accomplishment was celebrated by the school and community. One thing has remained constant: the dedication to providing a unique and outstanding arts and academic education, while helping students reach their potential. It is the hope of the current faculty and staff that we are deemed deserving to win the prestigious National Blue Ribbon School award in 2020.

## **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

Bak Middle School’s core belief is that the arts are an essential part in our students’ lives and in their education. The dynamic performance-based arts curriculum, coupled with an engaging and focused standards-based academic instruction, provide students with the skills, knowledge, and self-confidence to achieve in all facets of their education. In academics, we follow the standards put forth by the state of Florida. Highly Qualified teachers use a variety of instruction methods that integrates the arts and incorporates project-based learning. Additionally, our teachers use differentiated instruction and lessons that require students to make real world applications. The highly-skilled art teachers provide instruction that far exceeds the expectations of the state of Florida for this age group. By the very nature of arts education, performance based learning is the cornerstone of their instruction. Students are constantly learning, practicing, performing, and demonstrating their knowledge, skills, and understating of the arts coursework. Across the campus, no matter the subject area, students demonstrate the ability to apply and use knowledge, rather than simply knowing the information.

The district has created a very elaborate and comprehensive electronic Educational Data Warehouse where student formative, diagnostic, and various summative assessment data is housed for stakeholders’ use. We use this data to drive instruction and chart students’ progress who have been referred to our School-Based Team (Response to Intervention). The data is also used to predict student success on the state-wide assessments; consequently, we share this data with students to see if they are meeting their academic goals. Parents also receive a comprehensive report that outlines their individual child’s progress. Because every student has a Chromebook to use in their classes throughout the school day and all teachers have an Interactive Smartboard, all teachers utilize technology as part of their instruction. All teachers utilize Google Classroom for each period and communicate all facets of learning in this platform - lesson, resources, assessments, assignments, student work, videos, and recordings.

Because of this, distance learning has been a smoother transition for our faculty and students than for other school around the county, state, and nation. Bak MSOA had the highest rate of student participation as compared to all schools in Palm Beach County. No matter the learning environment, our teachers provide authentic and meaningful instruction to our students that prepares them for life-long learning and success both inside and outside the classroom.

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

Language Arts Florida Standards are taught in all three grade levels focusing on close reading, informative and argumentative essay writing, comparing literary elements across literary texts, higher level applications of close reading and writing, narrative techniques/narrative writing, and conducting a research project/presenting research findings. As a performing arts school we feel it is our duty to teach those standards through a lens of acceptance and tolerance. We value our students' social and emotional growth as well as their academics and find that the infusion of art, tolerance, and a growth mindset can teach the whole student.

Our teachers collaborate every year to create a novel list for a summer project that focuses on tolerance, bullying, and/or acceptance. For example, the list includes, Restart, Twerp, The Skin I’m in, Out of My Mind, Black Like Me, Speak, and The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian. In addition, all of our students participate in writing for the National “Do the Write Thing” challenge. Students have an opportunity to examine the impact of violence on their lives and what they think should be done to reduce youth violence. Student work, art, and personal experiences provide the content that makes the learning relatable and empower our students to want to learn.

Our teachers use technology, problem-based learning and targeted grouping to differentiate content, process,

and products. For example, teachers use programs such as IXL, Reading Plus, and Newsela, which allow them to assign individual Lexile levels to students within the same classroom. Problem-based learning games like Break Out Edu (an escape room platform) is an example of the lively lessons found in our classrooms. Google Classroom is used to create groups within the same class to differentiate instruction. This platform also allows for both common work for the whole class and work that address individual needs of learners at their assigned pace. Student driven instruction is a focus of our educators. For example, the entire 6th grade body participates in Poetry March Madness. Students analyze poetry for literary devices and vote electronically for their favorite poems. As the favorite poems advance, large tournament brackets are displayed in the 6th grade hallway until the winner is selected.

A variety of assessments throughout the school year help target specific and individual student needs. Florida Standards Quizzes (FSQ), Unit Standards Assessments (USA), Diagnostic testing, and the Florida Standards Assessment are used to place students in the appropriate classes that include intensive, regular, advanced, and gifted. Our philosophy is to do formative assessments often so teachers can address content deficits, use small group rotations, and homogeneous group work as needed. The success of our instructional practices are reflected in our students' results; As the 11th largest district in the Nation, Bak is ranked 1st in English Language Arts (ELA) Learning Gains, Bak MSOA is ranked 3rd in the state of Florida amongst all schools (elementary, middle, and high) in student English Language Arts Achievement (ELA) and 8th in ELA Learning Gains.

### **1c. Mathematics**

Math is the academic subject that has the greatest span of student abilities on the Bak MSOA campus. We have students that enter 6th grade already completing Geometry and other 6th grade students that are not fluent with multiplication tables. Our goal is to meet the needs of all students, no matter the level. Consequently, students are placed in math courses based on their knowledge, skills, previous coursework taken, academic maturity, and their high school, college, and career goals. Math is the gateway to many of our high school magnet programs, so we ensure that our middle school students are on the correct path, getting the support needed to be successful. Therefore, Bak offers a variety of math courses: intensive, inclusion, regular, and advanced for grades 6th, 7th and 8th, as well as, two high school credit courses- Algebra I Honors and Honors Geometry. Students needing Algebra II Honors, Trigonometry, and Pre-Calculus can take the course online with Florida Virtual School (FLVS).

The 6th and 7th grade advanced math courses provide students with an accelerated math program through curriculum compacting. These courses are designed so students have the opportunity to complete at least one high school math course before leaving middle school. For example, a quarter of our students enter 6th grade already completing 6th grade advanced math. These students are placed in a 7th grade advanced math course that covers two-thirds of the 7th grade standards and all pre-algebra standards in one year (compacting). These students are on track to take Algebra I Honors in 7th grade and Honors Geometry in 8th grade. If needed, the students can begin Algebra II honors during the summer on FLVS. Math enrichment continues with our students who compete in Mathcounts, a national program that provides students in grades 6-8 the opportunity to compete in live, in person contests against and alongside their peers.

Students that struggle in math (two or more years below grade level) are supported with an intensive math class, in addition to their regular math class. ESE students, if noted on their Individualized Education Plan (I.E.P.), are placed in an inclusion math class (with support facilitation). ESE students might also be required to take an intensive math class as an additional intervention. Students that are not in an intensive class, but are struggling, attend a six-week after school tutorial program. The goal is to provide “just-in-time” support so the students are successful and do not fall further behind in their math education.

We use a variety of online math programs (both purchased and free) to supplement the standards-based instruction and provide students with the opportunity to accelerate or remediate. The Algebra I Honors and Honors Geometry courses use an online program from the University of Florida called Math Nation to supplement instruction. Every math teacher uses technology (online platforms, Chromebooks, Smartboards), small group, differentiated instruction, and explicit instruction to teach the Florida Math Standards. To

ensure students are learning and achieving mastery, in addition to the classroom assessments, teachers utilize the district-developed standards-based math assessments - Florida Standards Quiz (FSQ) and Unit Standards Assessment (USA). These formative assessments drive instruction and provide teachers, students, and parents with valuable information that are also used for goal setting, progress monitoring, and predicted Achievement Levels on the FSA (Florida Standards Assessments). We have the highest Math Learning Gains (88%) and the fifth highest ranking for Math Achievement (95%) compared to all middle schools in the state of Florida. These unparalleled results are a testament to the hard work and effort by all Bak stakeholders.

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

Always one to be unique, Bak MSOA chooses to teach science differently than any other school in Palm Beach County. Rather than a spiral curriculum taught throughout our district, Bak uses an in-depth approach. In 6th grade students become experts in Earth Space Science, in 7th grade they are immersed in Life Science, and in 8th grade students master Physical Science. This approach maximizes our staff's expertise and passion in their field of study, translating into our students being provided the best and most consistent education in science. Our teachers combine a STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) and "hands on" approach that inspires and engages all of our students' various learning styles.

Real world applications are a common thread in teaching science at Bak MSOA. For example, in 6th grade students participate on a field trip to Bone Valley. At Joshua Creek and Peace River, students use large screens to identify fossils, sharks' teeth, and Native American artifacts. In 7th grade, students dissect squids, pigs, frogs, and sharks. In 8th grade, students integrate all of their benchmarks in a culminating STEM project analyzing roller coasters at Busch Gardens for gravitational potential energy and kinetic energy. Our staff enhance explicit instruction with national experts. The Science Department collaborates with programs, like the Thompson Earth Systems Institute, that provide scientists who share their research with younger students. For example, a scientist from the Florida Gulf Coast University recently visited our 8th grade classrooms explaining his research on "Green Chemistry".

Creating our own scope and sequence requires our staff to work closely on assessing our students' knowledge and working as a team to analyze that data. For example, a summative test was created for each grade level to empower the next year's teachers to reteach any gaps in learning from the previous year. It is this exemplary teamwork that earned our students an Achievement Level of 91% on the 8th Grade Statewide Science Assessment and ranks Bak 7th in the state of Florida for the percentage of students earning a Level 3 or above (noting that we taught more than three times the number of students of those schools ranked above us).

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

The standard progression in social studies at Bak MSOA is World History in Grade 6, Civics in grade 7, and United States History in grade 8. The focus for our social studies programs is to provide students with the knowledge, skills, and resources that enable them to be a conscientious and well-informed electorate and productive members of society. Though sometimes dismissed, knowing the past helps people learn and grow and make better decisions in the future. The 6th grade teachers face quite a challenge because none of the 480 students coming into Bak MOSA have had any previous world history education. Making the challenge even loftier, many students received very little state and US history as well. Elementary schools tend to concentrate on the state assessed subjects (ELA, math, science). However, that does not prevent teachers from providing a rigorous, thought-provoking, and in-depth study of the world, nation, state, and local communities. We prepare our students for future studies and for active citizenship. In fact, since the inception of the statewide Civics End of Course Exam, Bak has always ranked in the top four percentage points earned when compared to the other 572 middle school in the state of Florida.

Teachers use a variety of methods that strengthen analytical and critical thinking skills, the ability to communicate ideas effectively, argue and support a point of view, and the ability to separate fact from fiction. All classes use a Socratic Method to clarify concepts, probe assumptions, and use rationale and reason. Students are taught critical thinking by looking for evidence, understanding implications, finding the

consequences, and questioning the question. This process also fosters thoughtful, cooperative, and argumentative dialogue based on preset rules, procedures, and mutual respect. Our speech and debate students are especially proficient at the Socratic Method. The district provides assessments that are aligned to the standards and are administered district-wide. The formative assessments (FSQ) and Civics Winter Diagnostic, provides teachers with a predicted score for student achievement on the Civics End of Course Exam given in May. All these assessments provide essential data that help drive instruction and give students and parents a progress snapshot to keep them informed. In addition, teachers provide students with opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge through artwork, videos, music, dance, written and verbal presentations.

Additionally, we ensure a multicultural approach across all grade levels. This curriculum includes Holocaust Education, the contributions and history of Africans, African Americans, Hispanics, women, and veterans. Guest speakers bring the subject to life; recently, Chief Justice Barbara Pariente of the Florida Supreme Court, addressed our Civics classes. In addition to required history courses, we offer a government course that centers around community-based actions. Through research, investigation, and interviews, students identify a community concern and construct a plan to solve the problem. Students learn through interactive, real-world applications, and volunteerism that they can make a difference.

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

The arts and academic coursework completed at Bak MSOA prepares students for high school, and in turn, give them college and career readiness. Academically, Bak offers students the opportunity to take six high school courses on campus (i.e., Algebra I Honors, Honors Geometry, Spanish I and II, and French I and II). Completing high school coursework early not only broadens students' knowledge base, but it also allows students to take more advanced courses upon entering high school. The core academic courses are designed to be very rigorous and focus not only on grade-level standards, but the skills needed to be successful in subsequent higher-level coursework. Being well-prepared for high school opens all possibilities for college or being career ready.

The majority of our advanced art courses enable students to gain the skills and knowledge needed to be well-prepared for high school, college, or a future career. Our visual art students have been commissioned to complete special community and private art projects. The theater students have been cast in commercials, television shows, and even Broadway! For example, several of our students have worked on Kid Stew, a public television show by best-selling author James Patterson that has won five Emmy Awards. Many of our musicians perform at various events; a few years ago, our jazz band was invited to be the welcome entertainment for a new cruise line - all our band members were given a free three-day cruise for their families. Even though these students are only 11, 12, or 13 years old, they are consummate professionals and are provided opportunities that many adults are not afforded. The Software and Web Design (industry certification), Advanced Graphic Design, and Photoshop and Digital Media courses are taught beyond the designated level due to the expertise and skillset of Bak's teachers. We offer such advanced and unique courses that there are not designated middle school courses that capture everything that is learned. Because of the exposure, experiences, and knowledge obtained over the three years at Bak MSOA, students obtain part time work and decide, rather early, what they would like to pursue as a career.

Data supports that the arts and academic coursework at Bak MSOA prepares students for college and career readiness. In October of 2019, 433 Bak students took the PSAT 8/9. The mean score at Bak MSOA was 1023, the School District of Palm Beach County's average was 835 and the state of Florida's average was 825. Even more impressive, only 3% of the students at Bak MSOA did not meet the English and math benchmarks as compared to the school district (36%) and state (38%). This is a staggering statistic that demonstrates the level of knowledge and skills the students at Bak MSOA possess. The PSAT 8/9 is the first exam in the College Board's SAT Suite of Assessments. The purpose of the PSAT 8/9 is to establish a starting point in terms of college and career readiness as students transition to high school. It is evident that Bak students are well-prepared for what lies ahead.

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

## 2. Other Curriculum Areas:

The arts education provided at Bak MSOA is just as important and rigorous as the core academic coursework and is a key contributor to the school's academic success. There are five art areas: Communications, Dance, Music, Theatre, and Visual Arts. Every student on campus has an art major and through their course of study, students take anywhere from three to six courses in their art major each school year. Just like a college major, there is a standard course. Students also have the opportunity to take art electives outside their art major.

Music students engage in a variety of learning processes that support and strengthen academic skills. They learn to read music notation, develop eye-hand-mind coordination and fluency, improve their listening skills, develop team skills, and the discipline to practice. The knowledge and skills acquired by studying music/being a musician has a positive impact on academic achievement and cultivates a dedication to learning. The Music Department has four specific areas of concentration:

**Band** - Each student's musical ability is assessed each year and students are placed in the appropriate level core band class: Intermediate Band, Concert Band, or Symphonic Band. In addition to the core band class, 6th grade students take Music Theory to ensure they have the needed sight reading skills and musical knowledge and an instrumental technique class to increase their abilities in their selected instrument. In addition to the core band class, students in Grades 7th and 8th grades, take Advanced Instrumental Techniques, Instrumental Ensemble, and can choose to audition for Jazz Band or Symphonic Orchestra.

**Piano**: Beginning in 6th grade, students are placed in a core piano class per their grade level and a Theory, Sight-Reading and Music History course. Additionally, students take a Piano Techniques based on their level of expertise -Intermediate or Advanced.

**Strings**: Each student's musical ability is assessed each year and students are placed in the appropriate level core strings class: Strings Intermediate I, Strings Intermediate II, and Advanced Strings III. In addition to the core strings class students take each year, 6th grade students take a techniques class, or they can audition to be a member of the Symphonic Orchestra. Seventh grade students add Music Theory to their coursework and can audition for Symphonic Orchestra. Grade 8 students add Chamber Ensemble with the opportunity to audition for Symphonic Orchestra.

**Vocal**: Beginning in 6th grade, all vocal students take Chorus I and Music Theory courses, and if the male vocal students voice has matured, he will also be placed in Boys' Chorus. Rising 6th and 7th grade students have yearly juries to determine if they are placed in Intermediate or Advanced Girls Chorus, Boys' Chorus, and/or, Girls' and Boys' Ensemble. Vocal majors and non-vocal majors can audition to take Chorale which is considered the elite and top performing vocal group on campus.

**Communications**: As a group, the Communications Majors are the highest academic achieving students on campus. They have the most "academic-like" coursework, which automatically translates to the high academic achievement (reading, writing, research, and technology). Communications Majors also have the most diverse coursework of all the other art majors. Sixth grade students have the following mandatory courses to provide background knowledge for future learning: Speech, Computers, Video Production, Broadcast Journalism, Photojournalism, and Creative Writing. In 7th grade, students must take two semester courses: Speech and Electronic News Gathering. And like 8th grade students, they are given a menu of courses that they may take based on their particular interest (semester and year-long courses): Bak MSOA Today - TV Production, Advanced Video Production, Marketing Communications, Speech, Advanced Photoshop and Digital Media, Advanced Graphic Design, Advanced Creative Writing, Advanced Speech and Debate, Yearbook, Newspaper, and Advanced Radio.

**Dance**: Throughout their three years at Bak MSOA, dancers rotate through a series of dance concentration classes: ballet, modern/contemporary, and jazz. In addition to those dance classes, dancers that audition and are accepted in Repertoire 1 or 2 courses, dance for three hours every school day! It is this dedication, discipline, and attention to detail that aides them in their studies and have a positive impact on their academic achievement. Even those that are not strong in academics, persevere and are able to reach their

greatest potential.

Theatre: Bak Theatre students hone their reading skills, interpretation of written work, and ability to analyze multiple texts. Because the Stagecraft and Costume Design courses require students to measure, complete scale drawings, make maps, and charts for scene design, their math is supported and strengthened. The play produced each year not only educates students in literary works (e.g., Antigone, Edgar Allen Poe), but promotes cooperative learning. Students grow in their art through a series of courses: Theatre I, II, II, Stagecraft, Play Production, Costuming, Movement and Direction, and Musical Theatre.

Visual Arts: Creativity and the ability to analyze and interpret illustrations/visual representations are strengths of our visual arts students. By taking the following courses, students not only learn the skills and methods, but they learn art history/culture associated with each discipline: Sculpture, Drawing, Painting, Photography, Printmaking, Digital Arts, and Digital Media.

Six world language courses are offered at Bak MSOA: in addition to Beginning French and Spanish, Spanish I and II, and French I and II are offered for high school credit. We are one of the few middle schools in Palm Beach County that offer Spanish II and French II. Students can satisfy their foreign language requirements before leaving middle school. The rigorous yet engaging coursework is taught with a multicultural approach that incorporates the arts, technology, and hands-on activities. The highly effective instruction and preparation enables our students to take Honors, I.B., AICE, and A.P. level courses when they get to high school. Bak offers other electives in art, academics, and athletics (usually semester courses): Physical Education, Arts Exploration and Design Thinking, Software and Web Design, Robotics, Civics Action Project, World Mythology, America at War, Critical Thinking, Beginning Piano or Tap, Mock Trial, Art for Non-Majors, Intro to Computer, Advanced Computer Graphics, Theatre for Non-Majors, Film Studies, Multicultural Dance, and Science, Engineering, Communication, Mathematics, and Enrichment (SECME).

Bak students are multi-talented and have so many other interests outside of their chosen art major. We ensure they continue to grow in all facets of learning, knowledge acquisition, and skill building. The diverse curriculum not only sparks students' interest and creativity, but also has a positive impact on student achievement now and in the future!

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

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

Bak Middle School of the Arts works diligently to empower students with the necessary knowledge and skills to reach their academic potential each year. Because each student has different academic abilities and unique needs, we measure our academic successes by student growth and progress, just as we do for our above grade level achieving students. We want all our students to be performing at or above grade level before going to high school, but learning gains are the true measure of a student's success.

In 2019, Bak's School-wide English Language Arts (ELA) learning gains were at 76% and the lowest subgroup, Black or African American, were at 71%. This is only a 5% difference between the school as a whole and the lowest scoring subgroup. In math learning gains, there is more than a 10% gap between the school's overall math learning gains at 88% (second highest score in the state) and the lowest subgroup, students with disabilities, at 72%. When compared to other schools in the state, Bak's SWD math learning gains outperformed the overall math learning gains of 91% of all middle schools in the state of Florida. We will continue to work to close the gap within our own school, and we are very proud of the efforts and learning gains of our students with disabilities!

Numerous strategies and programs are implemented to help accomplish this goal - After School Tutoring, Academic Tutoring in our After Care Program, smaller classes sizes, referral to School-Based Team - Response to Intervention, inclusion classes, learning strategies, intensive reading classes, intensive math classes, and placing these students with teachers who have a documented record of being able to increase achievement with struggling students. Taking these actions ensures that the students are provided with daily

supports designed to increase achievement.

Counselors meet with parents and students to model needed organizational skills, provide supplies (including technology if needed), explain homework strategies, and empower parents with strategies to support their student at home. Daily check-ins and weekly counseling sessions are provided for our students most in need. The students who were unsuccessful and earned an “F” grade for final quarter grades are required to attend after school course recovery. Students attend the program after school, receive personal one on one instruction, and complete coursework to remediate their quarter "F" grade. This program serves many purposes. Students are retaught the material, which increases knowledge and skills. Students are given an opportunity to earn a passing grade, earning quality points needed to pass the class for the year. Finally, students know that with hard work and effort they can learn and pass the course. The majority of students do not have to take course recovery again. It is a matter of developing a growth mindset – effort and perseverance will prevail!

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

One third of Bak's student population are identified as gifted and fifty percent of all students are performing above grade level. To meet the needs of these students and challenge them, we offer advanced, gifted, and high school credit courses. The six high school credit classes are Algebra I Honors, Honors Geometry, French I, French II, Spanish I, and Spanish II. Other high-level classes like SECME (Science Engineering Communications Mathematics Enrichment) and Robotics provide students an opportunity to work on engineering design projects all year. Our teachers use technology, flipped classrooms, and resources like Khan Academy and Math Nation (Algebra and Geometry) to vary instruction.

To meet a variety of interest, we offer an industry certification Software and Web Design class prepares candidates to take the CIW Site Development Associate exam, which, if passed, earns the student the CIW Site Development Associate certification. This lead to other pathways in the field of technology. In addition, we offer Advanced Graphics where students learn Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Illustrator; these real-world software applications are considered advanced even for “techy adults”.

Beyond the high-level courses, we provide a highly trained staff in gifted education. Twenty of our instructional staff are gifted endorsed; thus, they are skilled at using project-based learning for their students. In addition, twenty-three members of our staff are Google Certified (level 1 & 2) and/or Trailblazers. These teachers have undergone extensive training and can lead other staff members in using digital classrooms. In turn, our teachers have more student engagement, can offer differentiation, and use varied monitoring tools in the classroom. Ultimately, our teachers provide unparalleled instruction.

Outside of the classroom, clubs like the National Junior Honor Society, the Robotics Club, the Battle of the Books Team, the Chess Club, the Academic Games Team, and the Debate Team offer learning with a competitive edge. Our Battle of the Books Bak students have taken 1st place, seven out of the last eight years. This year, they won 1st place out of 85 middle school teams. In addition, seven of our students qualified for Nationals in Academic Games. Our Debate Teacher was the National Debate Teacher of the Year- our teachers, like our students, are competitive!

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

The Bak faculty and staff are dedicated to ensuring that Bak's Exceptional Student Education (ESE) students get the services and support needed to flourish in the arts, academics, and in their personal growth. To accomplish this for all our ESE students, we must consider every facet of their education and home life. ESE students new to Bak, attend a two-week summer prep-class to go over expectations, to get help completing summer assignments, and to learn organizational skills. Getting to know our students and giving them socialization time so the students start with some familiar faces before school begins is a beautiful byproduct. To acclimate our parents and develop a rapport, we meet and review any concerns they might have and discuss expectation. Each year we craft a specialized schedule considering the individual students' educational and social-emotional needs. Based on research, it is very important for an ESE student's academic growth to have an ESE teacher in each inclusion classroom for the entire class period and to

provide a Learning Strategies Course; this would be impossible to implement with the one district allocated ESE teacher (even though we are only six students short of being budgeted the additional ESE teacher). Not one to settle, Bak made a commitment to allocate other school funds to purchase an additional .5 ESE teacher so we can provide our students with the maximum support. All school personnel have very high expectations for our ESE students, as we do for all our students. Through best practices, support, services, on-the-spot interventions, and the use of technology, we provide students with a high-quality education. It is these opportunities and experiences that prepare them to succeed in high school, in college, in a career, and in life. Based on the Florida Standards Assessments in ELA and math (learning gains), our ESE students outperformed all middle schools in Palm Beach County and 90% of the middle schools in the state of Florida. We are proud that our ESE students, since the inception of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), have met and exceeded expectations, receiving an "A" grade every year!

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

We have a very small number of ELL (English Language Learner) students and only a handful of designated LY students (LY= a student who is an English Language Learner and is enrolled in classes specifically designed for English Language Learners). Therefore, we are not provided district personnel or specifically designed classes for ELL students. However, we are very successful at helping these students learn and grow in their language acquisition and academic ability. Being an art school, these students find immediate communication success and connections as their talent breaks any language barrier. Capitalizing on our students' passions, we do ask their teachers to concentrate on vocabulary, reading, and writing within the art area and promote "conversations" with their classmates. For example, a visual art student will be asked to explain his or her thought process, techniques, and use of materials to the class. This "pushes" the student to speak English but in the context and comfort of their art passion. On the flipside, our academic teachers incorporate the students' art area strengths to inspire success in their core subjects. Over the past seven years, 99% of our ELL students have tested out of their LY status before leaving Bak MSOA. Our ELL students, since the inception of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), have met and exceeded expectations and received an "A" grade every year. This subgroup has earned 79% of the possible ESSA percentage points, outperforming most of the middle schools in the state for native English-speaking students.

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

In any school setting, homeless students present unique challenges. All school personnel are dedicated and determined to find resources and community support to ensure these students get to school each day and that their unique needs are met. Our goal is that these talented students become successful, not only in academics, but have the services and support to thrive and grow as individuals. We work with the district and community to arrange special transportation, provide supplies, and food to take home on a regular basis. Our dedicated Bak PTO provide gift cards so the entire family can buy back to school clothes and clothes for special events. We wrap our arms around these students with daily check-ins, counseling, and crafting a special schedule so they have access to technology and time to begin homework at school. In addition, we work with the parents to ensure they know how they can support their child and how we can support them. Through a multitude of resources, students can participate in county, state, and out-of-state field trips that they would not normally have access to at other schools. On an average, we have reduced the absentee rate of our homeless students by twenty-eight percent. Even more importantly, all our homeless students have completed their middle school education in three years and have gained the necessary skills, knowledge, and self-confidence to be successful in high school.

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

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

Bak MSOA Today News Anchors say it best on air at the end of each broadcast: at Bak “you miss a day, you miss a lot!” Our students are empowered with fierce independence and responsibility. For example, our dress code is nonrestrictive; students are free to be unique and dressed for their art and interests. It is not unusual to see dance tights, blue hair, hair buns, or jeans adorned with sharpie drawn doodles. Student engagement begins with a choice schedule. Students enjoy at least one art major class every day, even with an alternating block schedule. Whether it is modern dance, 3-D art, Musical Theater, Newspaper, Orchestra, Jazz Band, Boys Choir, or Piano, to name a few, students are excited about where they are headed that day. Having 8 classes affords many students up to 4 classes in their major and an opportunity to branch out into something new like beginning tap for non-majors.

Our School-wide Positive Behavior Support System (SwPBS) rewards are numerous. Eighth grade students have the privilege of sitting outside in our courtyard with umbrella covered picnic tables to enjoy the Florida sun. Students inside our cafeteria are rewarded with Fun Music Fridays, where it is not uncommon to see a spontaneous “Cha Cha Slide.” In October, the Visual Arts Department sponsors The Fall Thriller, complete with a haunted house, costume contest, DJ, food and games. Come November, we celebrate our students’ talents and share with “Artsgiving.” Students spend the day performing for each other and sharing their amazing talents. A football field sized live chalk walk art installation is completed by the end of the day by our talented student visual artists. Spirit days lead up to our big Winter Pep Rally where students compete by Grade Level to win the Spirit Stick. Student field trips include art areas performing at festivals from New York to Los Angeles. The school calendar is filled with concerts, performances, socials, club meetings, and more! The end of year Pep Rally literally rocks the school. The student body sits with their art area and the 8th grade students enter with much fan fair to compete in games and best theme for the coveted Art Area Trophy. Bak is so enticing that former students have had trouble staying away. The tween heart throb and former Bak student, Noah Centineo, who has starred in two Netflix hit movies and recently did a cameo in a Charlie’s Angels movie, came back to surprise our students!

All of these activities incentivize our students to be at school and there is a clear correlation between attendance and academic achievement. But even with a litany of motivating events, interventions and supports are imperative to ensure our students success. Our students are buoyed by the same counselor and assistant principal team for their three years at Bak. This collaboration fosters a real connection between our students and their support team. Counselors are available to our students for a lunch time hangout daily in the media center. Our administrators are strategically placed in at least one lunch period, at buses, the train station, and our courtyards to create a safe place for our students to feel free to be themselves. It has been said more than once by Bak students that they would rather be here than anywhere else!

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

As stated previously, Bak MSOA is truly a tight-knit school community (really a big, extended family) that is dependent on all stakeholders working together to ensure that our students receive a high quality arts and academic education, while having unique experiences and opportunities that will benefit the students and the school as a whole. To make this happen, we need the support and commitment from many organizations, our parents, faculty, and staff. We are fortunate enough to have a very active Bak Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), the Middle School of the Arts Foundation, and our various business partners.

The PTO plays a tremendous role at Bak MSOA. They host a 6th grade social for parents and students, organize the 8th grade dance, hold breakfast meetings for parents and volunteers, put on teacher and staff appreciation events, purchase instructional online programs, provide grants to our teachers, and organize Starfest (a community-based arts event) – you name it, they do it. The Middle School of the Arts Foundation is a 501c3 organization that raises the funding needed to provide Bak MSOA with the resources, opportunities, and experiences required for the highest quality arts education. The MSOA Foundation also organizes and seeks business partnerships that further brings our community together and provides funding.

With the strong support and financial assistance from the Bak PTO, the MSOA Foundation, our business partnerships, dedicated parents, students, faculty, and staff, Bak is the unique and successful school that it is today.

The Bak School Advisory Council (SAC) is a school-based group comprised of parents, students, business, and community members that shares in the responsibility of guiding the school toward continuous excellence. SAC participates in our schools' planning and decision-making process to meet the educational needs of every student. Specifically, they help craft Bak's School Improvement Plan and collaborate in budget and other school-based recommendations. Bak's Student Government empowers student leadership and serves as voice for the student body. Whether it is a seat at the SAC Meetings or monthly meetings with the principal, student input is valued and is considered in the decision-making process. The student body is well-informed and they are effective communicators to their families and community.

The stakeholders stay informed about the school, student academic and arts achievements, events, and performances through the Bak SchoolMessenger page (school website), school-wide call outs, text messages, and emails. These communications to parents/guardians, students, and community members have been an effective method of delivery important and time-sensitive information. Individually, students and parents have their own Student Information System (SIS) where all academic, assignments, grades, and other student information are housed in real time. Administration, counselors, and teachers call, email, and Google Meet with parents to keep them informed. Additionally, the Bak PTO and the MSOA Foundation have both Facebook pages and website pages to inform parents and community about the school and its events. Our students live county-wide (some 56 miles away), so it is essential that we provide numerous ways to communicate with all stakeholders.

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

One way to gauge if your staff is feeling valued and supported is to ask; it is through this open communication that we foster our professional culture. Bak administrative staff has an open-door policy where teachers are encouraged to share ideas, concerns, and ask for help. Teachers and staff are included as stakeholders with a voice in our Student Advisory Committee, our Professional Development Committee, and our Department Instructional Leader Committee. Recognizing teacher's successes is another way we maintain a positive work place.

Bak's Professional Development Committee is composed of teachers from various disciplines to ensure that professional development is equitable and practical for all stakeholders. As an arts school we try to infuse humor to build camaraderie and model effective teaching practices. Staff still talk about our professional development, titled Bak Monitoring Games (think Hunger Games). Family Feud was another staff favorite that while fun, still provided important staff development on best instructional practices. Professional development is not limited to in school or even district offered choices. Teachers are encouraged to seek professional growth opportunities unique to their subject matter and the school needs outside of the school district. For example, all of the Music Department attends the Florida Music Educators Association Conference. The FMEA Professional Development Conference is one of the largest music education professional development events in the United States.

The professional growth at Bak is evident; in the last seven years, six of our teachers have been awarded the Dwyer Award by the Economic Council of Palm Beach County. Another measurement of a positive staff culture is our retention rate; only a handful of teachers have left prior to retiring. Collectively our current instructional staff has been at Bak MSOA for 916 years. While new hires do not occur often, our Educator Support Program is ready to onboard them when they do!

As a solution to the recent Covid-19 pandemic, we created a Virtual Classroom for our staff, Bak One Stop Shop. It is an online platform for teachers to share tech tutorials, ask questions, and collaborate within subject areas. Our teachers became cohort leaders for their peers and the professional collaboration has been nothing short of successful and inspiring.

Another way we keep the lines of communication open with staff is through our Department Instructional

Leaders; these leaders have a voice at regularly scheduled meetings with administration to share their concerns, questions, and/or suggestions for each department of the school. As a team, the school recognizes individual, collaborative, and school wide successes. For example, we tout our staff accomplishments and awards through student news, social media, parent robocalls, emails, Bak School Advisory Committee, Bak Parent Teacher Organization and the MSOA Foundation. It is our honest communication and or growth mindset that create are unique home. Consequently, a common adage used here is “We are a Bak Family!”

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

The student-centered leadership philosophy at Bak MSOA is focused on high expectations, clear and consistent communication, trust, respect, collaboration, and accountability. To accomplish our mission statement, all stakeholders must be unified in their knowledge, support, and resources. Every student and parent reads, agrees to, and signs the Standards of Excellence and Statement of Commitment when they accept their choice seat and again, each year thereafter. This document clearly identifies the roles and expectations of the school, parent, and student; additionally, it sets the minimum standards for the students’ arts education. School-wide academic goals are set before the school year begins through the collaboratively crafted School Improvement Plan. These academic goals are rigorous, challenging, and achievable. They are clearly communicated to school personnel, parents, and students. Additionally, each student sets academic goals for the year with input from their teachers, counselors, and parents.

To maximize student achievement and growth, it is essential that students have a schedule that matches their academic and social-emotional needs with the right teacher, course, and support. Knowing this, the principal takes a very active role in this process. Teaching assignments are assigned based on data, observations, teacher strengths and knowledge and student feedback. To ensure students new to Bak (about 500 per year) are properly placed in their core academic classes, the principal reviews each student’s previous coursework, report cards, standardized test scores, attendance, other pertinent student information, and consults with ESE school personnel. Based on all this information, the students are scheduled in their academic courses. Returning students’ academic placements are based on previous coursework, grades, standardized test scores, and teacher recommendations. During the first month of school, formative assessments are given to determine students’ knowledge and skills. In turn, teachers get a chance to know their students’ strengths, weaknesses, and learning styles. If changes are needed, this is discussed with the parent and student to determine the best course of action.

To ensure policies and procedures are followed, teachers and staff meet before the school year begins to go over the Faculty and Staff Handbook, data, academic goals, the School Effectiveness Questionnaires (SEQ), and participate in some type of social-emotional/relationship building professional development. Teachers do a deep dive on the previous year's data and have data chats with administration to reflect on what can be done to improve and what practices should continue. We celebrate our successes and acknowledge the need for continual improvement and are constantly raising the bar. Once school begins, assistant principals, along with the principal, conduct daily walkthroughs to monitor the standards-based instruction, share in the learning with the students, and then provide feedback to the teachers. This is in addition to the observation and evaluation process. Department Instructional Leaders (DILS) in each academic and art area, meet as a group with administration once a month to discuss school issues, make decisions, and are informed about school, district, and state policies and procedures. These DILs are the voice of the other teachers in their Department and participate in decision-making processes. Once a month, the entire faculty meets as a group to discuss school issues, get information, and provide their feedback and opinions.

Student-Centered Teams and School-Based Teams meet twice a month to evaluate data, discuss students, look at school-wide instructional practices, and determine next steps. These groups are comprised of administration, counselors, the ESE Coordinator, the Magnet Coordinator, teachers, the school psychologist, and a mental health professional. Each year the faculty meets to evaluate and determine what academic resources are needed so school leadership can seek funding to acquire those resources. For example, technology has become an essential and invaluable tool in the classroom. Knowing that, Bak made the commitment to ensure that each student has a Chromebook in every class. It took about four years, starting with 25 Chromebooks to now having over 1750 Chromebooks! We did not know it at the time, but this also made transitioning to distance learning manageable and successful!

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

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At Bak Middle School of the Arts (MSOA), we create a unique and diverse arts community designed to foster growth and creativity in order to reach each child's potential. How is this accomplished? By establishing and cultivating a Bak Family Culture! Though not related by blood or marriage, we are forever connected by our love of the arts and the experiences, successes, failures, celebrations, shared goals, and dreams that life brings. We establish a common language, institute a set of expectations and rules, build trust, have open communication, provide support and services, share aspirations, and plan for the future. As all families do, we have disagreements, but we conduct ourselves with a mutual respect, an acceptance of all, and an unspoken understanding that we will always be there for one another. We are able to cultivate this unique culture with planning, clear communication, flexibility, and lots of hard work and dedication. The Bak Family unit stays intact because 99% of Bak students remain with us for the entire three years. The Bak Family is committed to the success of every student and the school, and each member contributes to the journey!

Bak is recognized as a leader in arts education and one of the highest academic achieving middle schools in the state of Florida, but we are also well-known for our nurturing, safe, and welcoming environment. Parents and students are enthusiastic about the chance to be part of this dynamic family. New family members are "adopted" each year and before the students even attend school, parents and students participate in the following events: New Student Registration, Welcome Orientation, Parent Reception, and Student Social. Students and parents receive and sign the Bak MSOA Statement of Commitment and Standards of Excellence, which outline the commitment and collaboration required from each stakeholder and define the expectations and level of dedication and efforts needed for each student to reach his/her potential in the arts, in academics, and in their social-emotional development. During orientation, valuable information is provided, questions are answered, and stakeholders have the opportunity to meet administrators, counselors, and teachers. This strengthens the family bond and prepares the new members for their three-year adventure. To support the family philosophy and ensure students gain a greater understanding of the culture and expectations at Bak MSOA, all students take the same electives – Arts Exploration and Design Thinking courses. These courses are designed to foster teamwork, build comradery, gain an understanding and appreciation for all art areas, and cultivate creative problem solving. Administrators and counselors visit these classes to provide support and answer questions, so a rapport is built and all students know where they can reach out for support.

We do not forget about our other family members. Returning students attend a First Day Orientation and all Bak stakeholders receive a First Day folder and video presentation to welcome them back to school, give pertinent information, and remind them of the Statement of Commitment and Standards of Excellence. The 80 to 100 performances and events that are held on campus each year are like family gatherings. Participants enjoy the moment, celebrate successes, share in small talk, and create new memories. The Bak PTO, MSOA Foundation, business partners, and alumni contribute to the family structure by volunteering, providing financial assistance, and giving support and resources to our students and school.

While students are learning and growing, the culture at Bak doesn't require them to change who they are; it requires them to be who they are. Bak's unparalleled success in the arts, academics, and reaching each child's potential would not be possible without cultivating this family culture - the cornerstone of Bak Middle School of the Arts.