

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

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

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

Official School Name Pyrtle Elementary School
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 721 Cottonwood Drive
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Lincoln State NE Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 68510-4308

County Lancaster

Telephone (402) 436-1162 Fax (402) 458-3262

Web site/URL https://pyrtle.lps.org/ E-mail kfinley@lps.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. Steven Joel E-mail sjoel@lps.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Lincoln Public Schools Tel. (402) 436-1000

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

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

Date _____

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

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

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

PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION

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

1. 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

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):
- 39 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 12 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 6 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 57 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	23	17	40
K	39	43	82
1	35	35	70
2	39	31	70
3	35	34	69
4	38	31	69
5	35	34	69
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	244	225	469

*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
 - 1.6 % Asian
 - 1.9 % Black or African American
 - 9.1 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 80.4 % White
 - 7 % 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: 5%

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.

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2018 until the end of the 2018-2019 school year	20
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2018 until the end of the 2018-2019 school year	4
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	24
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2018	469
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.05
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	5

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

Spanish, Vietnamese, Korean, Arabic, Hindi

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 1 %

7 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 23 %

Total number students who qualify: 108

8. Students receiving special education services: 15 %

70 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>7</u> Autism | <u>1</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>2</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>6</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>15</u> Developmental Delay | <u>11</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>4</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>34</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>1</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: 2

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:

	Number of Staff
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	21
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	9
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	5
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	1

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 22:1

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%	97%	97%	97%	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 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.

Pyrtle's community inspires and empowers learners for the future. We work to meet the needs of all students to help them become productive citizens.

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

Pyrtle Elementary School is the 16th largest elementary school (out of thirty-nine elementary schools) in Lincoln Public Schools (LPS). LPS has over 42,000 students K-12 and is the second largest district in the state of Nebraska. Pyrtle Elementary is currently serving about 470 students Preschool-5th Grade. We serve three sections of every grade level except for kindergarten which has four sections and preschool which has two sections.

Pyrtle's student demographic population is steady and we work hard to meet the needs of all learners. Over the past four years, our students living in poverty have hovered around 26%, students participating in gifted education 9%, and our ELL population at about 1%. Areas that are growing in size are students with 504 plans which have increased from 0.3% to 2.6% and students identified with a special education designation which have also steadily increased the last 4 years from 13.7% to 16.3%.

We have worked diligently the past two years to build a program to support our students not meeting grade level expectations. We take great pride in the growth that many of our students are showing by using research based interventions. This is evident through state assessments, nationally normed assessments, classroom and district assessments, and report card data. Administration meets with teacher teams each quarter to monitor all students and have a laser sharp focus on the student population participating in academic interventions. We guarantee that all students not meeting grade level expectations have one or more interventions in place to get them to grade level standards. We think outside of the box to ensure all students have the learning opportunities they need. For instance, all specialist teachers (art, PE, music, library, and computer) take turns delivering these interventions throughout the day to support our intervention program.

Pyrtle has built a culture of learning and growth with students and staff. We have studied positive, collaborative teams and have been able to put that into our daily practices. We have focused on the work of Simon Sinek, Daniel Coyle, and Dylan William to name a few. Teachers meet weekly to collaboratively plan lessons and plan upcoming business for their grade level. We do everything possible when planning to preserve instructional time. Teams are always professional learning communities however we put aside 80 minutes the last Tuesday of the month to focus on our school improvement goals of increasing math number sense and student effort. During these times we focus on the four guiding questions of: 1) What do students need to learn? 2) How will we know if they have learned it? 3) What will we do if students had difficulty learning it? 4) What will we do if students already know it?

The foundation on which Pyrtle is built is that we believe that all students can learn at high levels. If students have not learned something, it just means they have not learned it yet. As a staff, we rally around students and help them to be their best. We do this by having high academic expectations and high social-emotional expectations. We use our multi-tiered systems of support for both. Students receive instruction about the common area expectations and have opportunities to practice missing skills with behavior and academics. We believe that misbehavior is a missing skill, just as students would need more practice in reading to increase fluency. Our staff is dedicated to helping students be well on their way to being college and career ready when they leave Pyrtle. Students find success because the adults are predictable and use common language in all areas of our school. We want our students to be able to compete with others in any program to reach their dreams.

Pyrtle is rooted in tradition and is a welcoming neighborhood school. At this time, we have students that are third generation Pyrtle Panthers. Some activities that bring our community together are a yearly walkathon, holiday sing-a-long, bike rodeo, family fun night and an end of the year family picnic. Parents choose to send their children to Pyrtle even when they do not live in our neighborhood. Every single day, volunteers are present at Pyrtle. They are parents, grandparents, university, and high school students to name a few. These people are committed to Pyrtle's success and support our public schools system. We take pride in the passing of a bond issue only one month ago. Through our community's support, LPS will be able to build two more high schools and another middle school.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

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

The students of Lincoln Public Schools are provided with the important knowledge and skills necessary for success in school, preparation for post high school education, and entering the work world. We review curriculum and instructional practices periodically for the purpose of keeping current and relevant to the needs of our students, community, and society. The learning characteristics and needs of students are taken into consideration when making curriculum and instructional decisions. Curriculum is developed and provided for a wide variety of student learning abilities. Students learn at high levels at Pyrtle Elementary because teachers teach a guaranteed and viable curriculum with fidelity and on pace with district standards.

1b. Reading/English language arts

To ensure that all students read with meaning, write clearly, and speak and listen effectively, our district provides a comprehensive, balanced, and inclusive language arts program. The Wonders Program and the LPS Writing Curriculum use the Gradual Release of Responsibility framework and align to the Nebraska standards. This comprehensive curriculum encompasses learning to read, personal reading, reading to learn, writing for multiple purposes, and speaking and listening. The instructional program focuses on direct, explicit systematic instruction in foundational skills including phonological and phonemic awareness, alphabet knowledge, and automatic word recognition of sight words. We use a writing workshop approach that includes a daily mini-lesson, independent writing time, one-on-one and small group conferences, and a sharing time. All seven modes required in the state standards are taught. Strategies such as trait-based writing and the writing process enable students to write to different audiences for a variety of purposes. Teachers use a variety of instructional technology tools to engage learners.

1c. Mathematics

The mathematics program has four broad goals for students: become mathematical problem solvers, learn to value mathematics and the quantitative nature of our world, develop an understanding of fundamental mathematical concepts, and acquire mathematical skills, including the ability to perform routine computations. In order to meet these goals, we have adopted the Math Expressions curriculum. These curriculum materials support the balanced use of purposeful learning tasks and mathematical discourse to develop conceptual understanding, followed by guided practice and appropriate independent practice to help ensure mastery, fluency, and retention. Core concepts at each grade level build in-depth understanding of major mathematical ideas. By focusing on a small number of mathematical targets for each grade level, students using Math Expressions have the time to develop critical understandings.

1d. Science

Our science curriculum is based on the Nebraska State Science Standards and the National Science Standards. The program stresses hands-on activities to develop an understanding of practices, disciplinary core ideas, and crosscutting concepts of science. It is structured to help students realize that science is part of everyday life and affects all individuals. The Stemsopes curriculum utilizes technology to bring inquiry-based scientific thinking into our classrooms. The three themes studied in our elementary school are living things and the environment, the physical world, and space/earth. Embedded within these themes are connections to engineering, technology and science. Students study the scientific process and all of our fifth graders conduct a scientific experiment and create a display for our school's science fair.

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

Social studies education engages all students with the knowledge and skills necessary to be informed and active citizens, while also contributing to our diverse and interdependent world. The curriculum is guided by

the Nebraska State Standards. In addition to content, teachers expose students to historical thinking through the use of visual images and short texts. These methods teach students how to "read and think" like historians, which emphasize important literacy and critical thinking skills. In grades K-3, students become familiar with their community, nation, and world. Students begin to explore elements of effective citizenship and study the United States Constitution. To reinforce economic concepts such as financial literacy, Junior Achievement volunteers teach curriculum that provides real world experiences for students. In grades four and five, students study the history of Nebraska and the United States in greater detail. Students learn about individuals who made an impact on our state and nation, while also exploring how they can make a difference in their schools and communities. Students are engaged through field trips in many grade levels. All fourth graders participate in a full day immersion experience as a student in a one-room school.

1f. For secondary schools:

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

Our Early Childhood Program prepares children for kindergarten and beyond. We know that high quality preschool programs have a significant impact on achievement in elementary school. Pyrtle provides a comprehensive program where all children learn through play, making choices, gaining social skills, and having opportunities to build confidence. Our preschool staff use the research validated Creative Curriculum for instruction and the Gold Assessment to measure progress. The Second Step social skills curriculum is taught for social-emotional skill development. Our preschool serves children with diverse backgrounds and learning needs. Teachers partner with families and complete home visits which focus on the family. Parents also have opportunities to volunteer in the classroom and on field trips.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

We are fortunate at Pyrtle to offer additional instructional opportunities to help our students acquire essential skills and knowledge. Kindergarten through fifth grade students participate in art, technology, music, and physical education classes for 50 minutes a day, on a four-day rotation schedule. We are also able to offer weekly library lessons and check out sessions for grades kindergarten through fifth grade.

Visual Art

Through the participation in the visual arts, students develop critical-thinking skills and draw upon core academic areas to solve problems through creation, design, and execution. Students develop individual expression, perseverance, and the ability to work collaboratively to achieve common artistic goals, while preparing for a lifetime engagement with the arts. Students who attend art classes acquire skills to be able to analyze, reflect, understand, and communicate their ideas. Students identify and understand cross-cultural understanding that happens within art. As global interdependence between people and societies continue to develop, art helps students understand the diversity of cultures, as well as commonalities. Student artwork is displayed throughout the school and community.

Vocal Music

Lincoln Public Schools offers a comprehensive and sequential K-12 music curriculum. This curriculum provides experiences through continuous and systematic instruction in areas of music congruent with the music framework outlined in the National Core Arts and Nebraska State Fine Arts Standards. Each grade level has essential learning outcomes that focus on skills and knowledge of music literacy. Music literacy is defined as reading and notating music, listening and responding to music, performing music, and creating music. It is our goal to enrich the lives of all students through the experiences of creating, performing, and responding to music. The fourth and fifth grade choir meets before school and performs twice a year. Fourth and fifth grade students have the opportunity to take lessons during the school day on a band or string instrument. The students meet for group practice before school and perform concerts twice a year.

Physical Education

Students participate in a comprehensive program of physical activity that contributes to the total development of students and promotes healthy, active life-styles. Children in primary grades participate in physical activities which help them learn to manage and control their bodies in a variety of situations. These movement experiences include large muscle activities, such as running, skipping, climbing, rolling, throwing, catching, and kicking. In the intermediate grades, body management skills are refined as children mature. Participation in activities, in the areas of games, sports, physical fitness, dance, and gymnastics, provide opportunities for students to practice a variety of physical skills. Acceptable social behavior is encouraged through group participation. Pyrtle students have the opportunity to participate in the Pyrtle Walkathon in September, in a district organized running race in October, a food drive walk in April, a field day in May, and other wellness challenges throughout the school year. Students are also able to participate in the Pyrtle Bike Rodeo sponsored by our K-Kids (Kiwanis) at the end of the school year.

Computer Science/Library/Media

Technology is a strong emphasis in the Lincoln Public Schools. Computer science classrooms are active places that encourage exploration, creativity, collaboration, communication, persistence, and problem solving. We use Code.org as the foundation of our students' experiences, and supplement that with a wide variety of other resources. Digital citizenship and technology expectations are taught, practiced, and reinforced at all grade levels. Parents have access to teachers' classroom webpages, where teachers post current information and activities that parents can do at home with their children.

Pyrtle's library mission is that "We will collaborate to prepare responsible, independent users of information who embrace the joy of reading." The Pyrtle library empowers learners to be curious, critical, and creative thinkers, enthusiastic readers, skillful researchers, and ethical users of information. Our librarian studies classroom curriculum therefore she has a unique view of the focus across all grade levels. This allows her to fill in the gaps between subject areas and help students gain confidence in transferring these skills from one curricular area to another, ultimately teaching them to be lifelong learners. In addition to these roles, our librarian works as an instructional partner as she collaborates with teachers to create meaningful, student-driven projects.

3. Academic Supports:

3a. Students performing below grade level

We identify students not performing at grade level every quarter after report card grades are submitted. Teams of teachers meet to discuss individual student needs and plan accordingly. At those meetings, we dive deep into what is causing the student to not meet grade level expectations. For instance, we will analyze the district reading assessment and figure out what area of reading (e.g., fluency, comprehension, accuracy, or self-corrects) is causing the student to fall behind. We then will choose a specific intervention to increase each student's achievement in that area. Students are always given the opportunity to receive additional instructional opportunities that are research based and are provided by a highly qualified staff member.

We utilize other tools to identify students that are struggling academically all year round. During the summer, we analyze and prepare for individualized instruction in our Tier 1 and 2 reading programs for the fall by looking at numerous data points. We look at MAP Growth and Fluency scores three times per year, study our state testing information, fluency benchmarks, and district assessments to monitor student growth. We are constantly in contact with our district level curricular consultants and coaches to get a second opinion of our practices. This allows us to learn the most current practices from experts.

At Pyrtle, we offer a multi-tiered system of supports for academics on a daily basis. We offer reading intervention programs, such as Reading Recovery, Corrective Reading, Exemplary Center for Reading Instruction (ECRI), Heggerty Phonological Awareness, Sonders System, Tier 2 supports from our Wonders reading program, WonderWorks, Rewards, and Lexia. We focus on math pre-teaching and reteaching during our daily allocated intervention time. We always use research and/or evidence based practices and have the opportunity to learn all of these programs through staff development with Lincoln Public Schools.

3b. Students performing above grade level

The Lincoln Board of Education recognizes that the student population includes students with exceptional academic abilities. These students have a need for educational services which are consistent with their ability levels and learning characteristics, such as thinking abstractly, having the ability to study a topic in depth and learning rapidly. These students are provided appropriately challenging curricula and instruction which match with their learning abilities and styles. The instruction is provided in classes composed of these students, taught by teachers trained to recognize and meet the needs of these students. Students have the opportunity to request placement in advanced classes and this is based on approval from the Gifted Steering Committee.

At Pyrtle, we offer courses for gifted or high ability learners at every grade level in reading and math. This allows students to spend at least 60 minutes of reading and 60 minutes of math instruction each day with like peers. For students who meet the criteria for a highly gifted learner, they have the opportunity to meet with a mentor daily for 50 minutes in the academic area of their choice.

3c. Special education

Lincoln Public Schools has a special education policy that maintains the District's compliance with all applicable laws affecting special education services and programs. The policy follows the intent of Nebraska Rule 51, that outlines all special education laws and regulations. The District will abide by all state and federal laws relating to special education.

At Pyrtle Elementary, we meet the needs of 70 identified students in grades kindergarten through 5th grade with three resource teachers, one speech pathologist, one administrator, one school psychologist and four paraprofessionals. These individuals collaborate as a team and with their grade level teams that they work with daily. We offer inclusive programs for all students and use pull-out programs when necessary to focus on individual student needs. Our special education teachers focus on individual goals and growth while working to have all students meet grade level standards with accommodations.

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

At Pyrtle, English Learners enrich our school culture and share their own unique experiences with us. Lincoln Public Schools is proud of its diverse student population and is committed to meeting the needs of these multilingual students at all grade levels. Our goal is to empower multilingual students and families by creating a welcoming environment that utilizes culturally responsive practices and relevant content that will equip students for success in school, community, and beyond. At Pyrtle, we have a limited number of ELL students because of a cluster site model used by the district. The students, we do have, are immersed in regular education classrooms all day and work with like grade level peers to increase their language acquisition skills.

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

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

We have created a positive learning environment at Pyrtle by modeling vulnerability, kindness, and genuine care for students. We are using the theme, “All are welcome here. We are kind in what we say and what we do.” This is present in our school, in our classrooms, in the hallways, on bulletin boards, in student work. We learn about it at our quarterly assemblies where all students hear a message about being kind and always giving their best effort. Each grade level has an effort rubric that they teach their students. We have the common language building-wide so that students understand to do your best, you are giving level three effort. To go above effort standards, it is necessary to give level four effort. We focus on student engagement during staff development and use the strategies from Kagan Cooperative Learning Methods and focus on Explicit Instruction Strategies from Dr. Anita Archer. We ensure that teachers are using the strategies that they are learning through the evaluative practice. Teachers are given feedback on what opportunities students are having to respond verbally, in writing, or with gestures. Teachers focus on giving specific, two-part feedback that allows students to make changes to their work to do their best. Teachers and students focus on the learning target of each lesson. Students are able to identify what they are learning, why they are learning it, and how they will know they have mastered the learning target for each lesson. We encourage a culture of reporting bullying and not being a bystander and teach social-emotional skills through the Second Steps Curriculum.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Pyrtle Elementary has an active Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) that works directly with teachers and administration to organize school engagement activities for parents and students. PTO meets monthly and offers presentations to parents such as how to effectively communicate with your child, and digital safety. The PTO offers fun activities throughout the year such as family fun night, school dine-outs, and enrichment clubs for students. Pyrtle communicates weekly with our families through an all school newsletter and grade level teams enhance that with their own newsletters. We offer parents help with finding community resources through our social worker, administration, and school psychologist. Some of these resources help with mental health and medical needs, housing, parenting skills, and childcare. We work hard with our community to transition students into preschool and kindergarten. We offer incoming kindergarten parents and students multiple opportunities to attend activities to help ease the stress of the fall transition. We communicate with parents about student achievement multiple times throughout the school year with report cards, state and MAP testing updates, Healthcare Response meetings, IEP meetings, Student Assistance Process meetings, and 504 meetings. We partner with the Kiwanis to meet the needs of our families who need food backpacks each week and they also sponsor a K-Kids group each month. The K-Kids participate in many service activities throughout the year for the school and community.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

Each year, teachers are offered professional learning opportunities at the district and school level. Some of these opportunities are required and some are optional which allow teachers some choice in what they want to learn for that year. All teachers at Pyrtle are treated with dignity, respect, and their individual strengths are recognized and appreciated. The teachers have opportunities to use their strengths and talents at staff meetings and staff development by presenting information, leading, or taking part in building wide committees and on their teacher teams. We recognize our colleagues as an asset and we are able to be vulnerable by trusting and being honest with one another. This has been an area of focus over the past two years because there were five different principals in ten years at Pyrtle. We have focused on the work of Simon Sinek and Daniel Coyle to learn how other successful groups can overcome differences or conflict. The greatest growth with the Pyrtle staff the past two years, has been their ability to be vulnerable and grow professionally to be the best teachers for their students. We make decisions about instruction and students based on data which takes emotion out of decisions that we make. We appreciate and recognize teachers in different ways such as providing special meals, having treats, having a staff appreciation week, and recognizing special moments in each teacher’s life.

4. School Leadership:

Each year the Pyrtle administration develops and shares a building focus centered on adult and student growth. This theme guides the staff as a cohesive unit that is always striving for the same goals. The administration lives on the belief that all students can learn at high levels, and therefore provides learning opportunities for adults to enhance their teaching strategies to meet the needs of our diverse learners. Modeling of collegiality, collaboration, and shared leadership takes place on a daily basis; there is investment in our community through trust, honesty, and the building of strong relationships.

The leadership team provides opportunities for teachers to lead through shared leadership. Teachers chair committees of school improvement, multi-tiered systems of supports for behavior, technology, gifted services, and the social committee. Teachers are also provided leadership through liaison positions for all curricular areas at the district level and in providing staff development. The specialist team are leaders in our school by providing extra activities to our students that support our building theme of kindness. They are direct consultants for the building schedule and supervision. Our student services team meets weekly to meet the needs of our students' social-emotional needs. There are high levels of collaboration through the leadership team, social worker, health office staff, and school psychologist through this process. Through teacher leadership, there is a level of buy-in to the projects and systems that are in place that would not be successful without it.

The past two years have been a growing experience for the leadership team and the teachers of Pyrtle. Much work had to be done to ensure teachers were feeling valued and heard. The leadership team has made changes that the staff asked for and this has built trust through the “walk the talk” mentality of doing what was promised.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

The foundation for our success at Pyrtle is based on our belief that all students can achieve and learn at high levels. We achieve success by using a sharp focus to look at the needs of each individual student and providing specific support for those students. We use only research- and evidence -based practices to ensure success and growth for all, including adults. Just as we use data to make decisions for students, we use Hattie's Effect Size chart to focus on teaching strategies that we know work.

Our school community sees all students as "our students." Teachers of all grades and curricular areas are willing to collaborate and work together to meet the needs of the learners at Pyrtle Elementary. Our school team is willing to go above and beyond our job description to work with students. We use a wrap-around approach when finding ways to reach all students. Teachers build relationships with students of different grade levels than they teach. They willing to offer contribution activities, to be check-in/check-out partners, and have their doors open to all students. Teams are willing to give up their time each month to plan for students that may not be at their grade level but are considered "our" students.

We have specific systems in place to help students achieve academically and behaviorally. We give students what they need through a belief of grace and accountability. Pyrtle staff want all students to leave elementary school with the best tools to compete in the world and to become productive citizens in our community. Staff at Pyrtle see the success of all students as a reflection of their own success.