

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

[] Public or [X] Non-public

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

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

Official School Name Waldron Mercy Academy
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 513 Montgomery Avenue
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Merion Station State PA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 19066-1214

County Montgomery

Telephone (610) 664-9847 Fax _____

Web site/URL https://www.waldronmercy.org/ E-mail principal@waldronmercy.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* _____ E-mail abraca@waldronmercy.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name _____ Tel. _____

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. James McGovern
(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):
- 0 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 0 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 0 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
 - 0 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 | 26 | 31 | 57 |
| K | 19 | 20 | 39 |
| 1 | 19 | 25 | 44 |
| 2 | 16 | 24 | 40 |
| 3 | 20 | 22 | 42 |
| 4 | 25 | 20 | 45 |
| 5 | 24 | 13 | 37 |
| 6 | 21 | 12 | 33 |
| 7 | 22 | 19 | 41 |
| 8 | 18 | 14 | 32 |
| 9 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 11 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 12 or higher | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total Students | 210 | 200 | 410 |

*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
 - 3 % Asian
 - 20 % Black or African American
 - 0 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 1 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 66 % White
 - 10 % 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: 3%

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 | 6 |
| (2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2018 until the end of the 2018-2019 school year | 6 |
| (3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)] | 12 |
| (4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2018 | 410 |
| (5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4) | 0.03 |
| (6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100 | 3 |

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

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 1 %

Total number students who qualify: 4

8. Students receiving special education services: 2 %
8 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>1</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>5</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>2</u> Developmental Delay | <u>9</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>2</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>1</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>0</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 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 | 7 |
| Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher. | 33 |
| Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc. | 14 |
| Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students. | 8 |
| Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc. | 2 |

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 12:1

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 | 98% | 97% | 98% | 97% | 0% |
| 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. 2009

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

Waldron Mercy Academy is a diverse, faith community where we learn in the spirit of Mercy, rooted in hospitality, openness, trust, and outreach.

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

Waldron Mercy Academy, a private, Catholic, co-educational, elementary school in suburban Philadelphia, has its roots in the work of Irish heiress Catherine McAuley, foundress of the Sisters of Mercy. Waldron Mercy Academy (WMA) is situated in Merion Station, Lower Merion Township, an affluent suburb close to the city of Philadelphia. The school, built in 1923, has since welcomed students of every socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, and religious group. In 1967, the first student of color graduated from Waldron, and today approximately a third of the student body identifies as non-white. Waldron Mercy Academy maintains its commitment to socio-economic diversity by providing scholarship money to 25% of its student body and continuing to increase the levels of economic aid offered. In the early years the students were primarily from the surrounding areas of Overbrook, Chestnut Hill, and Lower Merion, but now students at Waldron Mercy come from the city of Philadelphia, its suburbs, and New Jersey via twenty-one different buses.

Today the diversity of WMA's student body is not just evident in socio-economic or racial areas, but more importantly in the wide range of learning needs students display. WMA has recognized the importance of addressing both the larger number of students needing support and their impact on the whole class. To that end, WMA has added staff who support students above and below grade level, scheduled an advisory period for the seventh and eighth grade students, and just created a new support room for the MCIU use and the Patricia Waldron Achievement Center for the upper grade students.

In programs, Waldron Mercy has always recognized the importance of developing in its students a recognition of those less fortunate along with the cultivation of a desire to help others. WMA has a long history of serving people in need by first providing Thanksgiving meals to local families, connecting to Project H.O.M.E. and Mercy Neighborhood Ministries, seeing parents become more involved, including driving students to various sites, leading to parents and students doing service as a family. Outreach has become grade-specific, with each grade connecting with an organization, and partnerships continue to be added. The school has seen the results of service learning through the many causes the students choose to support on their own time and the continued participation in outreach by WMA's graduates.

As the outreach experiences have grown, the school recognized the need to have students and teachers connect these experiences to classroom learning. They find ways to use a service-learning model to reach beyond outreach by directly tying service to classroom learning and engaging in a cycle of reflection, dialogue, and action. The goal of WMA is that as students work their way through the process, they will "serve to learn" as well as "learn to serve". By linking curriculum to service opportunities, teachers enliven the curriculum and make it relevant to real world experiences. The curriculum grounds students in understanding the need for, the rationale behind, and the options for being people of mercy, called to live the gospel, and to have the background to become "agents of change for justice." In recognition of these efforts, in 2017 Waldron Mercy Academy was acknowledged as the first recipient of the Middle States Service-Learning Program of Distinction Award.

Also unique to WMA is the sense of community which can be best seen in the weekly Community Gathering celebrations, which are student-led assemblies attended by the entire faculty, staff, administration, and student body. Parents are welcome and many make Community Gathering a part of their Wednesday morning routine. Student accomplishments, outreach activities, and curricular projects are shared with all who gather. This is also a perfect venue for WMA's older students to lead us in prayer, recite our Mission Statement, and present topics about students for students. The weekly use of these student leaders has allowed them to develop and regularly practice public speaking skills in front of large crowds. These gatherings have also built a strong sense of connection between our students and between students and the adults around them. That sense of connection is also a critical component in WMA's efforts to build resilience in our students, which is mentioned later in this report.

While Waldron Mercy is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Elementary Schools, one of its most prestigious accomplishments is that it has been twice recognized as a Blue Ribbon School of Excellence, in 2001 and 2009. Between and after these recognitions, WMA continued its tradition of celebrating and marketing these triumphs while committing to the academic excellence and ongoing innovation that led to these awards, as is noted above and below here. WMA realizes that to be acknowledged as the best of the best by the federal government is a goal that propels one into a continuous state of forward momentum that is always in the best interest of the students we serve.

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

Waldron Mercy Academy strives to fulfill its mission by providing a quality education where the joy of discovery inspires serious study, social responsibility, and strong faith. WMA’s educational program includes a three- to five-year old Montessori program, and a traditional Preschool through eighth grade program.

Across the grades, WMA aligns the school’s curriculum with core standards outlined by state, national, and archdiocesan guidelines, and provides academically challenging, developmentally appropriate, nurturing, and faith-centered instruction. Schoolwide curriculum is adjusted based upon changing state, national and archdiocesan standards, Terra Nova results, and group discussions of experienced teachers and the curriculum director meeting to evaluate curriculum scope and sequence both horizontally and laterally.

An interdisciplinary approach to teaching is used with an emphasis on thematic instruction where students scaffold learning and are taught to make connections among literature, current and historical events, the scientific process, and mathematical reasoning. Emphasis is also placed on project-based learning, in which students research and demonstrate understanding of essential knowledge within well-planned projects. The academic program consists of rigorous courses that promote collaboration, creativity, innovation, critical thinking, problem solving, empathy, moral reasoning, and resilience.

WMA uses differentiated instruction and multiple learning strategies and resources to assist students to overcome individual challenges and develop to their full potential. Teachers adjust content, process, and assessment in order to meet students’ needs and skill levels. Flexible use of support staff, instructional materials, block scheduling, small groups, interactive whiteboards, and the aid of resource professionals further allow teachers to engage students in meaningful learning. Technology enhances lessons and broadens the learning experience.

Administration and faculty use student assessment data to inform decision-making for student placement, addressing student needs, and developing and adjusting goals and outcomes. The staff identifies and assists students that might have special needs for learning.

1b. Reading/English language arts

Waldron Mercy Academy (WMA) prides itself on providing students with the instruction and opportunities necessary to engage with the world around them as able readers and writers, speakers and thinkers. Teachers have the freedom to approach lessons in the manner that best meet the needs of the academically diverse student body. Terra Nova scores, qualitative reading assessments, and teachers’ formative and summative assessments are used to guide curriculum delivery.

Pre-reading instruction begins in preschool as students develop literary awareness by listening to and discussing stories, drawing and dictating sentences about their experiences, and identifying letters and sounds. In grades K-5, Houghton Mifflin’s Journeys Reading series is used as a skills-based approach but supplemented with teacher chosen literature/novels and writing assignments. Weekly skills tests, online resources, and the ability to progress monitor and adjust instruction to meet individual needs allows for curriculum to be supportive or enhanced. Beginning in grade four, students participate in novel study, engaging with the author’s message and tone, determining purpose and theme. Every year our students benefit from various author’s Skype sessions in which they gain access to the process behind the writing they read from the authors themselves.

Students have a minimum of ninety minutes of language arts instruction daily, emphasizing WMA’s strong regard for the art of communication. In addition, Waldron has a Writing Across the Curriculum expectation,

another form of summative assessment, which emphasizes the necessity of students writing in every class. Students at Waldron continue to build on their vocabulary and grammar knowledge in every grade level. While these skills are integrated into the writing and reading instruction, they are also introduced and enforced with direct instruction that takes a variety of forms. By the middle school level, students have a dedicated vocabulary book: Sadlier Oxford Vocabulary Workshop. They learn three hundred new words a year by eighth grade.

In grammar, students begin using the web-based platform NoRedInk in sixth grade, which allows teachers to differentiate instruction per student. It provides pre and post assessments allowing a clear and precise reporting of students' abilities. In writing, the students learn the various modes and writing styles necessary to be an adept writer. By the end of their eighth-grade year, students write a 7-9 page argumentative research paper, learning the skills of paraphrasing, summarizing and note-taking.

Finally, students at Waldron Mercy Academy demonstrate mastery in the realm of public speaking. Classroom experiences are enhanced by the school's weekly tradition of Community Gathering. Once a week, as the entire school community gathers in assembly, students as young as kindergartners begin speaking in front of the group of students, faculty, staff, and parents. By eighth grade, the students run the gathering, from working the sound board and technology to standing as leaders in front of a group of up to 500. Many upper grade students participate in the school's award-winning Forensics program, and all seventh and eighth grade students are required to present first a well-known and then an original speech.

The expectations at Waldron are high and the students rise to meet them.

1c. Mathematics

The primary goal of Waldron Mercy's mathematics program is to best meet the needs of each student and to develop a love of mathematics in all.

Preschool math instruction begins with play and experimentation as students are measuring and building in activities such as construction and baking, and when they are sorting, creating, and identifying patterns and shapes. The primary grades then help students acquire an understanding of basic but necessary problem-solving skills, along with an awareness of the building blocks of addition, subtraction, measurement, time, money, and number sense.

WMA's math program Progress in Mathematics provides rigorous content focused on building a deep conceptual understanding of key math skills and concepts at each grade level, using manipulatives as much as possible. The program culminates with above-grade level instruction in Algebra I for as many eighth-grade students who are ready to understand the abstract concepts.

Beginning in fourth grade, student instruction is differentiated more significantly, allowing struggling students to receive push-in support, and advanced students the ability to excel. From fifth to eighth grade, students identified as gifted in math through standardized test scores are gradually accelerated to a full grade ahead, while struggling students receive the support to remain on grade level.

Across all grades, teachers use direct whole group and individual instruction, repeating and revising as necessary. Through immediate formative assessment, teachers know who has mastered a concept and who is ready to move on. Daily math class includes time for reteaching of previously learned concepts as necessitated by homework inspection. Students regularly engage in cumulative review, either through paper-based assessments or the online program IXL, which is available to all students. WMA offers activities across ability levels to enhance the math program.

Students in first through third grades participate in the math explorations hands-on activities where parents are invited into school multiple times a trimester to play educational math games with the students, increasing parent engagement and student enjoyment of the math program. In fourth grade, students participate in a year-long stock project where the student who "purchased" the most profitable stocks is declared the winner. Students in fifth through eighth grade participate in the Pennsylvania Mathematics

League Competition which is both challenging and educational. Eighth grade culminates in the Life Project, a long-awaited opportunity where each student chooses a career, applies for a job and budgets their salary. Students learn how to write checks, pay bills and deal with real-life issues.

Teachers identify students who excel or struggle and offer them specialized instruction and support as needed to prevent math anxiety from developing. In the upper grades, students can take advantage of a quiet testing area if they have difficulty concentrating in a classroom environment, use the advisory period built into the upper grade students' day to ask for help from their math teacher or the math specialist, or join study groups held after school, free of charge, in fifth through eighth grades.

1d. Science

Science education is an evolving process at Waldron Mercy as WMA has adopted the NGSS (Next Generation Science Standards) and is using a new program for grades five through eight that supports these standards and focuses on increasing critical thinking and hands-on activities.

WMA's full-time science specialist assists the teachers in inquiry-based science, managing and coordinating a well-equipped science lab. Hands-on science begins in preschool with age-appropriate exploration and experimentation of science concepts through traditional classroom room instruction enhanced with interactive science lab visits, nature walks, visiting professionals, and smartboard activities.

While kindergarten through third grade students use the lab weekly, in the classroom kindergarteners explore their senses, weather, the human body, and plants while first grade investigates the properties of matter, animals, the solar system, Earth's resources, and ecosystems. Second graders examine environmental changes, types of energy, weather, and plant life cycles while third graders study sound, electricity, and ecosystems.

Beginning in fourth grade students have a specified science teacher along with the science specialist. Fourth grade introduces all the sciences the students will see going forward while fifth grade focuses on physical science, plants, and animals, sixth grade students learn Earth science, seventh grade covers biology, and eighth grade introduces physics and chemistry.

Scientific study is further supported by each child doing three STEM projects a year spotlighting robotics, engineering, and programming, and by students engaging in skype sessions with actual scientists to virtually enhance the curriculum.

Lab reports begin at the earliest ages and continue throughout the eighth grade where the students write formal high-school-level reports. Formative tests, lab reports and quizzes coincide with summative projects, presentations, and trial and error hands on activities.

All these activities help Waldron develop students who are ready to question what they see, and to know how to investigate answers to these questions.

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

It is WMA's goal that all students are prepared to become leaders who are critical analyzers of structures and agents of change for social justice. Social studies classes provide each student with insight into how we all, not just a few leaders, play a part in improving the lives of people. The social studies curriculum is based on Archdiocesan, state, and internal standards formed to meet these goals.

In the lowest grades, students develop an age-appropriate awareness of historical events, people, and beliefs, such as Thanksgiving, Pilgrims, Native Americans, to make connections to current events and people. Grades two through four include the study of neighborhoods, community, Pennsylvania, regions, and map skills as students broaden their awareness of their world.

A focus on geography and how it influences inhabitants and histories is added as fifth grade looks at

continents, specifically Central America, Canada, Mexico, Caribbean, and South America and sixth grade studies Ancient worlds. Seventh and eighth grades study United States History and the problems and solutions their forebearers faced.

Current event discussion where all points of view are accepted and respectfully debated is an important part of the upper grade curriculum. Seventh graders all participate in a student congress where they create bills and then as “senators” actively argue and present ideas to make significant improvements in their world, learning taught that it is important to not just accept things but to investigate and try to solve problems. The eighth grade all participate in the World Affairs Council Model UN program, learning that it is important to listen to what people from other places think and believe.

Many social studies’ assessments are performance based, such as participation in skits and outside activities, drawing of maps, presentation of historical and cultural events, peoples, and documents, and recitation of speeches and poems. Assessments, including summative tests, are used to gauge knowledge and interest and adjust teaching.

1f. For secondary schools:

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

Waldron offers both a traditional and Montessori approach for three- and four-year old students. The traditional programs include science, social studies, and cultural activities but are academically centered on the Pre-reading and Pre-math skills which successfully prepare the students for the expectations of the rigorous demands of our kindergarten program. WMA believes that preschool academics should be great fun and that skills can be mastered with purposeful lessons, hands-on activities, lots of creativity, and daily celebration of God's gifts. Students use smartboard activities and hands-on applications to explore and apply the math concepts of counting, measuring, and identifying and creating patterns. Students build their literary awareness through experiences in listening and sequencing stories, engagement in role playing, drawing pictures and dictating sentences about experiences, and identifying and generating rhymes. Students also learn introductory handwriting skills.

WMA’s Montessori program is an interdisciplinary and interactive curriculum based on the philosophy of Maria Montessori. The children engage in concrete, purposeful activities in the areas of practical life, sensorial, language, mathematics, science and culture and enter kindergarten well-prepared to take on the traditional classroom challenges. These activities allow students to learn individually, at their own pace, the same pre-math and pre-reading skills noted above that are necessary in kindergarten.

All students are introduced to specific instruction in music, art, gym, Spanish, and yoga. The whole child approach to learning assists the child in realizing their full potential within a nurturing, supportive community of learners. Age-appropriate outreach opportunities are provided for students to learn about their community, the needs of others, and their place in it.

Because of the rigorous nature of WMA’s program, students entering kindergarten are ready and willing to take on new and more challenging tasks. This foundation allows WMA to develop each student’s strengths and address individual student challenges at early ages

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Waldron Mercy Academy’s Visual Arts curriculum focuses on both the production of art using different media, and the appreciation of art. A different theme is chosen each year, e.g., Art of Ancient Egypt, European Art, African Art, American Art, and Art in Spanish-Speaking Countries. The art teachers collaborate with the grade teachers to integrate the theme in the various content areas. Students in Montessori, Preschool, and Pre-Kindergarten have art class once every five days. Students in Kindergarten through grade eight have art class once every six days. The school sponsors an art show that features works from every student in the spring.

The Performing Arts program is an integral part of the school. Through singing, playing instruments, listening to music, and composing their own tunes, students discover and use their own musical abilities and develop an appreciation for different genres of music in music class. Students in Montessori, preschool, and pre-Kindergarten have music class twice every five days, kindergarten has music once every six days, and students in grades one through eight have music class once every six days and choir class once every six days. Students in grades four through eight can also audition for one of two honors choirs. All students in grades two through four can participate in the lower school musical theatre production while older students in grades five through eight are able to audition for roles in the middle school theatre production. In addition, approximately 40% of the student body participates in instrumental lessons offered either before, during, or after the school day.

In physical education class, students focus on learning how to improve and maintain their physical fitness through active sports and games. The students are given the tools to understand how physical activity plays a vital role in growing into a healthy adult. The class also focuses on teamwork, sportsmanship and respect, to aid in forming a bond between peers and to help make fitness fun. Students in Montessori, Preschool, and pre-kindergarten have physical education class twice every five days. Students in Kindergarten through grade eight have physical education class once every six days.

All students in Montessori through grade eight study Spanish as a foreign language. The curriculum focuses on reading, writing, listening and speaking skills as well as fostering an appreciation of the customs and culture of Spanish speaking countries. Students in Montessori, Pre-Kindergarten, Kindergarten, and grades one and two have Spanish class twice every six days. Skills are developed through prayers, songs, skits, and vocabulary. In a six-day cycle, third grade students have class twice, fourth grade students have class three times, and fifth through eighth grade students have class four times. These classes focus on the acquisition of vocabulary and grammar. Students in grades seven and eight can compete in the National Spanish Exam. In addition, students in grades seven and eight have Latin class once a week where they study vocabulary, grammar, roots, and derivatives as well as are exposure to and appreciate ancient Roman culture.

Students in grades one through three have computer class once a cycle, focusing on using software and digital tools to support the classroom curriculum, basic computer skills, and digital citizenship. Students in grades four and five have a keyboarding class once a cycle while computer skills for fourth through eighth graders are taught and integrated into content areas. Montessori and preschool through second grade students have Library class weekly, where they learn about authors, illustrators, and literary genres and have an opportunity for book selection. Students in grades three through eight have Citizens class once a cycle, learning library and research skills, digital citizenship skills, and study skills.

The STEM curriculum focuses on robotics, engineering, and coding skills. Students in grades one through eight participate in a STEM activity once a trimester. These hands-on activities promote creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving skills needed for success in the classroom and the workplace. The curriculum for all students aligns with the ISTE (International Society for Technology in Education) student standards. Students use Google Suite for Education tools to collaborate, innovate, communicate, think critically, and demonstrate their learning. Other digital tools are also used to enhance student engagement, support learning, and offer student choice and are integrated into their academic curriculum.

In addition to the above, WMA focuses considerable effort on service-learning and building student resilience, which is discussed elsewhere.

3. Academic Supports:

3a. Students performing below grade level

While Waldron Mercy does not have a significant special education population, WMA does have many students who need support to succeed in this rigorous prep-school environment. In preschool, students can receive early intervention support from Elwyn.

WMA employs a full-time certified reading specialist who screens all kindergarten students three times a

year with the DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) program and supports students who are identified with weaknesses in small group pull-out programs. This specialist continues support and tracks progress through fourth grade with programs such as Wilson, Read Naturally, Visualizing and Verbalizing, QRI (Qualitative Reading Inventory), and WADE (Wilson Assessment or Decoding and Encoding).

WMA also receives reading, math, and speech and language support through MCIU staff on-site. Students from kindergarten to grade five who exhibit weaknesses as noted through teacher or parent observation are recommended for screening. These students are assessed through MAP Growth, Acadience Math, and Acadience Reading three times a year to determine the intervention required and monitor growth in reading and math. Students falling below grade level are supported in pull-out groups no larger than six students, twice a week for 30 minutes. Speech and language support is also provided weekly.

While WMA realizes that earlier intervention is better, programs also exist in the upper grades to address either diagnosed or suspected learning issues or to close achievement gaps noted in standardized testing.

In grades four to eight, Waldron has a part-time Mathematics Specialist and two half-time teachers who staff the Patricia Waldron Achievement Center, providing small-group, one on one, or in-class assistance with additional instruction and practice to reinforce necessary skills. Support teachers collaborate with the classroom teachers, present strategies to students challenged with executive functioning issues, allow tests or quizzes to be taken in a quiet, distraction-free setting, and provide an afterschool study and support program free of charge.

WMA employs a full-time school counselor who assists students with issues that interfere with classroom performance and coordinates academic support services, including psychoeducational testing.

3b. Students performing above grade level

Waldron Mercy prides itself on its ability to meet children at their level and provide a learning plan specific to their needs. In reading, beginning in kindergarten, teachers use formative and summative assessments to identify the different levels of student's abilities and provide daily instruction at the students' reading level. Students in grades kindergarten to four who are reading independently above their grade and can work successfully in a small group and transition from homeroom to that small group, are eligible for a reading enrichment pull-out program. In grades five to eight, the reading instruction intensifies for all students and is also differentiated inside the classroom to successfully challenge the strongest students. These talented students are often offered more difficult reading choices to challenge them. Additionally, WMA offers the Reading Olympics program and encourages these talented readers and thinkers to participate and enjoy the opportunity to discuss literature outside the classroom.

In the area of math, students who show an affinity and talent for math that surpasses their peers are offered differentiated instruction inside the classroom up to grade three. These students receive particular attention when their struggling peers leave the classroom for support. Beginning in grade four students who excel are offered additional content.

In grades five to eight, talented math students are identified and offered separate instruction a full grade above their current grade. In social studies, science and religion, teachers differentiate assignments to challenge students. Also, in the upper grades many students accept the opportunity to prepare for and take the National Spanish exam, while others participate in forensics to create personal challenges.

In exceptional cases, beginning in third grade, students excelling two grade levels above or more are offered individual learning plans and possible instruction in an upper grade class or supervised online learning.

3c. Special education

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

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

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

Waldron Mercy Academy’s Mission statement proclaims our community is rooted in hospitality, openness, trust, and outreach, because we realize that positive relationships and connections to others are pivotal for student success. This mindset is why each August Waldron Mercy students receive personal letters from their teacher and have an opportunity to meet him or her in person. It is also why the school year opens with two days where students engage in activities designed for them to form connections with their classmates and each of the adults who teach them.

WMA recognizes that a teacher must first express that hospitality and then show a willingness to be open and trustworthy before students will do the same. Students are more likely to be motivated and remain engaged if their relationship with their teacher is positive.

At WMA, teachers and students share a mutual respect which creates a positive environment where everyone learns from each other. When a WMA student is asked what they like most about their school, the overwhelming response is “the teachers”, “the teachers really care about you”. Teachers are available during advisory period, and before and after school every day, to assist students. The students and WMA adults work collaboratively through academics and extracurricular activities such as athletics, clubs, and theatrical, public speaking, and musical events. There is a palpable spirit in our hallways. One feels the relationships by just walking down our halls.

In delivering instruction, WMA’s teachers use best practices such as growth mindset and reciprocal teaching, in which students’ understanding improves due to the input of another, and collaborative learning, which argues that students learn more when they are able to engage with their peers during the learning process, and differentiated instruction, which acknowledges the wide range of abilities students have.

WMA adults also create activities specifically to help students grow socially and emotionally, such as outreach/service opportunities, grade specific team building opportunities, the Parent Association’s Bingo, the Father/Daughter Dance, the Mother/Son event, and the Big/Little Buddy program that fosters care for one another and develops a familial bond among our youngest and oldest students.

The intentional creation of a safe and positive learning environment coupled with the use of best teaching practices are key strategies that keep students engaged and motivated.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Parent commitment and involvement are vital to Waldron Mercy Academy. A strong partnership between faculty and parents helps create and sustain the most productive work environment where all students achieve the greatest academic success and emotional growth. Teachers invite parents to join them in that partnership at their back-to-school presentations.

Trust is established through continued open lines of communication. WMA teachers begin each year with a positive correspondence about each child before any situations arise that might cause some concern. During the school year, teachers openly engage with parents on a regular basis inviting feedback and concerns. Via WMA’s online grading system and, in the lower grades, take-home folders, parents are kept apprised of their student’s progress. Significant or recurring concerns are addressed in face-to-face meetings held for the purpose of discussing strategies to help the student to become more successful.

Parents are made aware of student success stories school-wide through daily social media posts on Instagram and Facebook, the weekly school email, weekly Community Gatherings that are open to all, the regular TigerPaws Principal’s email, and the bi-annual parent and alumni magazine. Teachers share their individual students’ successes with their parents as they occur.

Parents are active participants in all aspects of WMA: volunteering to read and assisting in math explorations, coordinating homeroom activities and outreach projects, volunteering in the library and art studio, judging forensics, and organizing fund-raising events. Parents also volunteer to serve on WMA's Board of Trustees, Parent Teacher Association, Waldron Fund committee, and fundraising events such as Spin and Win and the Tigerfest auction.

This year Waldron Mercy began a partnership with three of the local faith-based high schools, asking them to join us in helping WMA parents understand the high school admission process. One school, Merion Mercy Academy, has been providing their National Honor Society students to tutor WMA's struggling math students on a weekly basis after school. Another group is offering an after-school science program in their high school lab. WMA expects to see more develop in this area as the year progresses.

Waldron's biggest community partners are in the outreach partners used in the service-learning program. WMA partners with Project H.O.M.E, Mercy Neighborhood Ministries, The Aquinas Center, Hayes Manor, the Bethesda Project, Catholic Worker, the Missionary Sisters of Charity, St. Frances Cabrini School, St Francis Inn, and of course, the Sisters of Mercy. These are the grade-level partnerships that help WMA students with their own personal development, encouraging personal and social responsibility, commitment to causes, interest in politics, and altruism.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

The supportive, dedicated, and experienced faculty and staff of Waldron Mercy Academy are one of the greatest strengths of the school. The men and women on staff work together to continue the rich tradition of academic excellence and keep the Mercy charism vibrant. WMA supports its staff through offering strong sick policies and medical insurance, dedicated prep time, Thanksgiving and Christmas gifts, and a Christmas and end-of-year party. Additionally, the school supports staff-developed ideas to build camaraderie on and off site.

While administration maintains an open-door policy encouraging conversation with all faculty and staff, employees can also voice their ideas through the newly formed Innovation Group consisting of teachers and administrators. Members provide a positive approach to problem-solving, develop some fun activities for the staff, and are accessible to their colleagues to present and debate new ideas.

WMA recognizes that not just the students but also the staff need to be life-long learners. Professional growth is vital to strengthening the mission and academic excellence of Waldron Mercy. A significant portion of the school's budget is dedicated to funding professional development and each teacher is encouraged to attend at least one workshop or conference annually, become members of professional organizations, and subscribe to online and print journals. The Montgomery County Intermediate Unit provides workshops and courses for professional growth through which the state mandated Act 48 credits may be earned. Opportunities for attending workshops are either emailed to faculty/staff or posted in the workroom. Additionally, all full-time employees are reimbursed for continuing education courses at colleges and universities. Monthly in-service days provide additional opportunities for professional development.

During in-service meetings, teachers and administrators present information gained from attending workshops and share an area of expertise with colleagues in a "Teachers Teaching Teachers" model. A WMA wiki is also utilized to share information learned through attending conferences.

In addition to attending external professional development, the faculty and staff establish yearly professional goals to help them focus on their growth. These goals are monitored and supported by the administration who help provide the resources for teachers and staff to meet their objectives. The faculty also has common prep time each day with the same grade level teachers where they can share new ideas or technologies. The directors of innovation, curriculum, and religious education also meet at this time to keep the teachers informed, plan, and share best practices.

WMA believes that teachers who are always learning and are engaged in the school community make the best teachers.

4. School Leadership:

The Waldron Mercy's 18-member Board of Trustees oversees the management of the school for the community, hiring a principal who reports to the Board of Trustees and runs the day-to-day operation of the school. Members of the Board include parents, community members, past parents, business leaders, and Sisters of Mercy. Both the Board and the principal serve as guided by the mission set in place by the Sisters of Mercy and the Mercy Education System of the Americas (MESA).

The school Leadership Team consists of the Principal and Vice Principal, the Lower School Director, and the Directors of Finance and Operations, Admission, Innovation, Religious Education and Outreach, and Athletics.

The school's governing body and leadership act ethically and consistently to ensure an atmosphere of mutual respect, purposeful effort, and a productive environment for teaching and learning while demonstrating adherence to the school's mission. The governing body and leadership maintain timely and open communication with the school's community of stakeholders. The governing body and leadership provide the vision that drives strategic planning and day-to-day operations. They ensure the integrity, effectiveness, and reputation of the school by establishing policies, providing necessary resources, and ensuring the quality of the school's educational program.

A major focus of the Board and leadership team is supporting the commitment to the education of all of WMA's students. The Board supports the leadership team's efforts to staff the necessary personnel and fund the necessary materials and facility space to provide support to all students, including those who struggle. The Board is aware that the leadership team established a Student Support Team this year to focus on student achievement. The Board of Trustees' Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee works to support the Mission by assuring that the school's policies, procedures and operations recognize and reverence the dignity and uniqueness of every individual who touches or is a part of WMA's diverse community. The leadership team finds programs to support the diverse student body and is in the process of hiring a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Director for the school.

The Board and leadership team of WMA also support the school's initiative of educating resilient students, and they have recognized the importance of committing the necessary resources of time, energy, and funding for this effort. The Board's Principal Support and Evaluation Committee receives regular reports from the principal on student programs and student achievement and is responsible for closely monitoring the health of the school.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

For the past two years WMA has been discussing our students' focus on perfectionism versus high achievement, and how that impacts their learning and their mental health. The consensus was that the need for perfectionism was producing students who were afraid to fail and who found it difficult to rebound after they did so. In reflecting on individual student struggles and successes across all grades and genders, it became abundantly clear that a major priority of Waldron Mercy Academy's educational philosophy had to be providing strategies to better equip students to become mentally healthy adults. This reflection and subsequent research of Kenneth Ginsburg's *Building Resilience in Children and Teens* (2015) through developing the 7 C's led us to an action research plan for Building Resilience in Children, which is an approved part of our current Middle States Re-Accreditation process.

The overarching question was what does current research suggest regarding the importance of student connection, competence, and confidence in the learning environment, and how will implementing targeted programs and strategies at Waldron Mercy Academy improve the students' resilience in the classroom, as well as their overall emotional well-being? We believe targeting these areas and continuing the programs we have in place for students to build character, contributions, a sense of control, and coping mechanisms (the 7 C's) will indeed improve their resilience.

We knew that WMA's service-learning program and leadership opportunities develop that necessary sense of personal contribution and control, while WMA's guidance offerings and religion curriculum helps students develop coping skills and build character. So WMA began implementing specific programs to build student-teacher connections in September 2017 and has been steadily increasing the intensity ever since. For the past three years, teachers have spent the first two days of school getting to know their students. As each year has passed, the teachers have embraced this more and more. The rule of the day is fun, engaging activities designed to let the students become more comfortable with each other and let them see the teacher as their ally. This year teachers added weekly classroom meetings and daily morning check-ins to their schedules.

So far the results are very encouraging. No significant student behavior issues have arisen, and minor behavioral issues are at an all-time low. Parent phone calls to administrators that bypass teachers are almost non-existent. Student anxiety issues have decreased. And students, and therefore parents, appear happier. WMA will keep tracking this program over the next three years, continuing with the action plan we have developed.

PART VII - NON-PUBLIC SCHOOL INFORMATION

1. Non-public school association(s): Catholic

Identify the religious or independent associations, if any, to which the school belongs. Select the primary association first.

2. Does the school have nonprofit, tax-exempt (501(c)(3)) status? Yes X No
3. What is the educational cost per student? \$19280
(School budget divided by enrollment)
4. What is the average financial aid per student? \$4715
5. What percentage of the annual budget is devoted to scholarship assistance and/or tuition reduction? 9%
6. What percentage of the student body receives scholarship assistance, including tuition reduction? 25%