U.S. Department of Education
2017 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

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

Official School Name Albany Middle School
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 1259 Brighton Avenue
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Albany   State CA   Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 94706-1336

County

Telephone (510) 558-3600   Fax (510) 559-6547

Web site/URL http://ams.ausdk12.org/   E-mail   dbrill@ausdk12.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*Ms. Val Williams   E-mail vwilliams@ausdk12.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Albany Unified School District   Tel.   (510) 558-3750
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. Paul Black
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

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

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

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

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

Part I – Eligibility Certification

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

1. The school configuration includes one or more of grades K-12. (Schools on the same campus with one principal, even a K-12 school, must apply as an entire school.)

2. 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 and all subgroups, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.

3. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2017 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.

4. If the school includes grades 7 or higher, the school must have foreign language as a part of its curriculum.

5. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2011 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.

6. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, or 2016.

7. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's application and/or rescind a school's award if irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state.

8. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as "persistently dangerous" within the last two years.

9. 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.

10. 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.

11. 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.

12. 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 (2016-2017) unless otherwise stated.

DISTRICT

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

                                         5 TOTAL

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located:

   [ ] Urban or large central city
   [X] Suburban with characteristics typical of an urban area
   [ ] Suburban
   [ ] Small city or town in a rural area
   [ ] Rural

3. Number of students as of October 1, 2016 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying
   school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	0	0	0
1	0	0	0
2	0	0	0
3	0	0	0
4	0	0	0
5	0	0	0
6	149	144	293
7	147	173	320
8	171	125	296
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	467	442	909

4. Racial/ethnic composition of   0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
    the school: 27 % Asian
                                          3 % Black or African American
                                          17 % Hispanic or Latino
                                          0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
                                          39 % White
                                          13 % 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 2015 – 2016 school year: 10%

    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 *to* the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	42
(2) Number of students who transferred *from* the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	51
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	93
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2015	909
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.102
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	10

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 18 %
                                                      165 Total number ELL

    Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):
    Mongolian, Nepali, Norwegian, Thai, Tibetan, Mandarin, Spanish, Korean

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 17 %
        Total number students who qualify: 157

8. Students receiving special education services: 7 %
                                                        67 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.

    9 Autism   0 Orthopedic Impairment
    0 Deafness   6 Other Health Impaired
    0 Deaf-Blindness   25 Specific Learning Disability
    2 Emotional Disturbance   17 Speech or Language Impairment
    0 Hearing Impairment   0 Traumatic Brain Injury
    3 Mental Retardation   0 Visual Impairment Including Blindness
    5 Multiple Disabilities   0 Developmentally Delayed

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: <u>4</u>

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

	Number of Staff
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects	45
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	3
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a licensed professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	13
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	5

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   <u>20:1</u>

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

Required Information	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012
Daily student attendance	97%	97%	97%	97%	96%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

13. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**
    Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2016.

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 <u> </u>   No <u>X</u>

    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.

Albany Middle School is a school community dedicated to learning. The mission of providing a rich and rigorous standards-based curriculum is guided by our vision statement: In a safe, engaging environment,

each member of the AMS community strives toward excellence, acceptance of differences, exploration of ideas, and responsibility to a larger world. At AMS everybody teaches; everybody learns.

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

We are the only public middle school in our city.

PART III – SUMMARY

Albany Middle School is the only public middle school in Albany, California. Albany is a unique community, packing a breadth of economic, ethnic, and other diversity into one square mile. Albany is located at the northern end of Alameda County between El Cerrito, Berkeley, and Kensington. University Village provides family housing to visiting professors and students and plays a big hand in contributing to the diversity of our schools. Albany's schools are the focal point of the community. Many families choose to move here, in spite of the high real estate prices, because of the high quality of the schools. Albany combines diversity with a small-town feel and a united commitment to supporting education.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

Albany Middle School has as strong curriculum that has developed greatly in the past couple of years as we have transitioned to Common Core in Math and English and Next Generation Science Standards for Science.

We have a rich English Language Arts curriculum at Albany Middle School. Our reading and English Language Arts program is a novel-based curriculum with various non-fiction sources complimenting the novels. Our curriculum is teacher developed, linked to the standards, and provides students with many opportunities to develop as a writer. We did a full multi-cultural inventory of our literature and have integrated more stories that will be read by the entire grade level from our most recently adopted McDougal-Litell literature anthologies. In addition to the new core and supplementary materials from McDougal-Litell, the staff and the AUSD BOE have also adopted core novels at each grade level.

In 6th grade, all students will read the following core novels: The Watsons Go to Birmingham - (1963) by Christopher Paul Curtis and The Giver by Lois Lowry. Teachers in sixth grade can also choose from the following supplementary novels: The Children's Homer by Padraic Colum, Heroes, Gods, and Monsters of the Greek Myths by Bernard Evslin, The Miracle Worker by William Gibson, Rules by Cynthia Lord, and Child of the Owl by Lawrence Yep. They do a wide range of projects related to the books as well as response to literature.

In 7th grade, all students will read the following core novels: The Outsiders by S.E. Hinton and Of Nightingales that Weep by Katherine Paterson. Teachers in 7th grade also choose from the following supplementary novels: A Day No Pigs Would Die by Robert Newton Peck or Ender's Game by Orson Scott Card.

Eighth graders read The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian Sherman Alexie, Inherit the Wind - Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, and American Born Chinese - Gene Luen Yang. Additionally, 8th graders use a Culture and Identity Reader with many diverse short stories and poems.

Our English teachers have worked hard to have a wide range of cultures, genders, disabilities, and other forms of diverse characters represented in readings.

In addition to the adopted curriculum for Reading/Language Arts, teachers provide a variety of writing and research activities that relate to other content areas such as History and Science. In 8th grade there is a quarter long capstone project called the I-Search that involves an in-depth research project into a topic of their choosing.

We have had an exciting couple of years in our Math department. We just completed our second year of implementing College Preparatory Math (CPM). The curriculum is set up so that students are working in groups, sharing different ways of thinking about math, and exposing one another to a range of approaches to math problems. CPM spirals so that students are exposed to the same concepts in deeper ways throughout the year, and each unit continues to integrate in and reinforce learning from prior units. The teachers have embraced the practice standards including concepts such as perseverance, use of modeling, and constructing arguments. There has been a lot of work put into aligning within and across grade levels. Teachers are continuing to work on differentiating the curriculum within heterogeneous classes to meet the needs of students who are struggling as well as those who need additional challenge.

The Science departments at 6th, 7th and 8th grades have been transitioning to the Next Generation Science Standards using the California integrated science approach, as recommended. Our 60% science teachers on special assignment has been working with all of our science teachers to articulate the transition of units. The transition plan is complicated to ensure that each student gets each unit they need in their three years, given that our 7th and 8th graders have already had middle school science with the old standards. Next year will

be our first year of full implementation but all of the new units have been developed by our teachers using resources that also integrate engineering practices.

The History department in 6th, 7th and 8th grades follow the California State Standards for History. The History teachers use the CA State-Board adopted textbook materials, History Alive, which is published by Teachers Curriculum Institute. In Sixth Grade, the focus is on Ancient World History. In Seventh Grade, the focus is on Medieval History. In Eighth Grade, the focus is on American History. This year, we are using a district-purchased updated version of TCI which provides more Common Core connections. This also includes online resources for students and teachers, which has been a wonderful supplement.

In terms of civic involvement, all 6th graders have a random act of kindness project that they all do and write about. Eighth graders are required to complete community service hours and reflect about their experience.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Our school is also rich in physical education and electives. Students at our school receive physical education daily, far beyond the state requirements. Additionally, 6th, 7th, and 8th graders all have access to music classes: band, choir, and orchestra. We have three foreign languages available to our students beginning in the 7th grade including French, Mandarin, and Spanish. In 7th grade, students also have access to an elective wheel which includes art, creative voices, computers, and drama. In 8th grade, students have access to semester electives, which include art, computers, creative writing and drama.

Our arts program is based on supported student exploration of art materials and formats. Student artists aim to create a wow piece and then write an artist statement. We have a drama elective that explores the key components of drama, and we also have a drama club that puts on a scene showcase and a spring musical.

Our world language program breaks one year of high school world language into two years- 7th and 8th grade. This provides enough time to build familiarity with the language, speaking, reading, and writing skills, as well as time for fun cultural learning and projects, such as Bouche de Noel in French class or Dia de Los Muertos in Spanish.

We have a strong computer program that teaches the basics of school technology literacy, such as Google Docs and Google Sheets, but also teaches basic web design skills. Our creative writing program engages many students in writing who didn't previously see themselves as writers. They put together a quarterly magazine. We also have a newspaper club and comic book club which provides another outlet.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

One of our strengths as a school is that our teachers are always looking to learn about best practices and improve as individuals and as a school. Our school has been working hard this year on differentiation. We have had ongoing professional development for teachers this year to continue to develop lessons differentiated by product, content, and process. Our goal is to both better meet the needs of students who need additional support, but also to provide appropriate challenge for all students.

Teachers worked hard on structuring differentiation into their lessons and have developed menus for certain units, different options for students showing what they know, as well as content differentiation to engage students. They shared these ideas out at a staff meeting and learned from one another. We look forward to continuing this work this year.

Our school is high performing, but it is our belief that as long as one student is not mastering our essential standards, then we have not been completely successful. We have worked hard to perfect essential standards, and this year are completing common formative assessments. Teachers are using formative assessments in two ways. First, they can talk with one another and learn from one another in terms of how different teachers successfully taught materials and borrow different ideas to use when re-teaching. Secondly, formative assessments are used to follow up with students needing additional support. Our next

steps will be to use those formative assessments in a school-wide systemic way. We have intervention programs in place but not one that responds to the individual essential standards in a timely way. This is our next body of work.

1. **School Climate/Culture:**

In terms of our teacher culture, we work hard to attract and retain teachers. The lack of turnover helps teachers to feel connected. We also offer weekly shout-outs in our staff newsletter and in person in our staff meetings. Perhaps the biggest impact is that we provide a lot of opportunities for input into decisions that affect them such as professional development.

Every year we provide training for staff on how to respond to mistreatment when it is witnessed. Teachers also receive training on teaching about expectations and how to treat one another- creating a culture of kindness. We begin the year with a schoolwide assembly in which we talk about the importance of treating each other kindly, and we teach explicitly about our four school rules: Be Safe, Be Responsible, Be Respectful, and Be an Ally. We teach about the specific school rules that support these guiding principles. The cornerstone of our bullying prevention program is our Advisory program. Each week, every student across the school has an advisory period in which they receive curriculum that we designed that addresses topics from how to be safe, respectful, responsible, and an ally in different parts of the school to, diversity appreciation, race and bias, digital citizenship and cyber bullying, gender stereotypes, responding to mistreatment in constructive and effective ways. In the 6th grade, we have trained 8th grade peer educators PEAK: Peers Educating Albany's Kids) who deliver one fourth of these lessons.

We also believe strongly in empowering students to set the tone with peer culture. We use Community Matter's Safe School Ambassador program to train students who are looked to as leaders among their peers in all peer groups. These students are trained on specific actions they can take when they witness mistreatment to shift things to a more positive direction. Students and adult facilitators receive a 2-day training and then continue to meet every other week throughout the school year.

More and more teachers are doing restorative practices and circles in their classrooms. We continue to provide training in these techniques. We also have a strong restorative justice program that a committee of administrators, teachers, classified staff, parents, and students put together last year. This program additionally helps to shift student bullying behavior far more effectively than traditional forms of discipline do.

These various approaches compliment each other to create a strong bullying prevention program. This is work that is never done and can never be stagnant, as it is essential to continue to respond as new things come up.

2. **Engaging Families and Community:**

We bring families in for an orientation at the end of 5th grade and the beginning of 6th. We provide a daily digest to them to get timely information. Our Aeries information system provides up to date information on grades and attendance. In addition to progress reports, teachers reach out to parents/guardians if students are struggling. Conferences happen twice a year and also support this communication.

We also look for ways to engage parents and have them form a community such as sixth grade family potlucks and our Latino Parent Engagement Committee and African American Parent Engagement Committee. We additionally work with parents to help run events such as our sixth grade Halloween Party and Cobrachella, a music festival fundraiser. Many parents volunteer to be Writer's Coaches who work with our 8th graders on the I-Search.

3. **Professional Development:**

The principal of the school has been sent to some pivotal trainings. One of those trainings includes a series of systems thinking workshops that have helped to develop tools to guide the school through bigger school-wide changes and important decisions. Another pivotal training was Dufour's Professional Learning

Communities (PLC). The training reframed for the principal how to guide our school in the work of closing the achievement/opportunity gap. We have brought a team to a condensed version of this each year. We have also introduced the PLC foundational concepts and practices to our entire staff as each team returns.

Each spring, we do a professional development survey and use that input as well as school vision to plan out the next year's professional development. We have moved towards providing ongoing staff development on those key topics. For example, this school year we focused on differentiation. The trainer worked with staff for three hours in the beginning of the year and then returned monthly for an hour with work being done in between. This model seems like a good one moving forward. We also have done pieces each year for teachers on working with students to address mistreatment between peers. We have brought in different focuses such as LBGTQ. Next year race will be one of the primary focal areas.

We always work to balance school wide vision and goals with department curriculum time. The hope is that these meeting times will evolve into ones that have more of a PLC format, looking at common formative assessments and exchanging ideas on best practices and lessons. We have an incredibly hard working and professional teaching staff so one of the best ways we can leverage resources is to provide the time and space for them to learn from one another.

4. School Leadership:

Our school has a principal and a vice principal. Some other key leaders in our school are our Safe and Inclusive Schools Coordinator and our Teachers on Special Assignment. We also have a Leadership Team of department chairs, the vice principal and principal, as well as a student leadership team which includes representatives from every class. The student leadership team is run by 8th grade officers and guided by a teacher advisor and the principal. It is important not to overlook students when we talk about leadership.

There are structures that are in place to support leadership moving the vision forward. We have a student services meeting once a week with all administrators, counselors, and mental health staff. In these meetings we are able to identify students needing additional support and strategizing on how to best meet their needs. Our school Leadership Team meets every other week. This meeting is a formal meeting with the agenda shared ahead of time, norms, and meeting roles. This meeting provides an opportunity for the principal to gather input to inform upcoming decisions. Sometimes just hearing from the leadership team is enough and sometimes the representatives are asked to go back and talk with their departments to bring the input of a wider range of people.

The principal writes a weekly newsletter that includes information that people need to know so as not to waste valuable meeting time. The newsletter always includes an article or video to help provide more data towards the vision we are moving towards. The staff meetings are therefore structured in a way to ensure that our school vision is moving forward. For example, we were working on essential standards and articulating them between grade levels. So instead of asking for those to happen during department time, the entire staff met together to clarify what the criteria were and then there was a shared Google Sheet so that everyone could see each other's standards. We set it up so that members of the same department across grade levels each had a room and the principal and vice principal floated around to support the work being done.

The principal and vice principal work together towards the shared vision in planned professional development, use of meeting times, share research, and even in the teacher evaluation focus of the year. It infuses all the decisions and communications and most importantly drives the focus of collaborative staff time.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Our teaching staff are a very collaborative staff. That is what makes our school successful. That is the foundation for all practices. Our school is stronger than any individual teacher's strengths. We have a strong curriculum with strong supporting practices that teachers share amongst each other. We are developing common formative assessments to further the ability to collaborate to the direct benefit of student learning. In the socio-emotional realm, we believe that all teachers must have a hand in teaching students the needed competencies. This cannot be held in just one department. Students must see that all of their teachers care about this aspect of their development. This "we are in it together" attitude in supporting one another and all taking on key roles in leadership and in sharing resources to support student achievement and success is what works so well at Albany Middle School.