

U.S. Department of Education
2017 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 Mrs. Renee Murry

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

Official School Name Voy Spears, Jr. Elementary School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 201 N.E. Anderson

(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Lee's Summit State MO Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 64064-1287

County Jackson

Telephone (816) 874-3720 Fax (816) 478-9799

Web site/URL https://www.bssd.net/Domain/26 E-mail rmurry@bssd.net

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. Jim Finley E-mail jfinley@bssd.net
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Blue Springs R-IV School District Tel. (816) 874-3200

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. Jennifer Casey
(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 (per district designation):
- 13 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 4 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 3 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 20 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
 - 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	29	38	67
1	35	41	76
2	42	49	91
3	55	45	100
4	50	55	105
5	45	60	105
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	256	288	544

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 1 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 3 % Asian
 - 9 % Black or African American
 - 7 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 1 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 75 % White
 - 4 % 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: 6%

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, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	17
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	15
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	32
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2015	568
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.056
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	6

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 1 %
3 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):
Vietnamese, Spanish, Chinese

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 12 %
Total number students who qualify: 67

8. Students receiving special education services: 8 %
46 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>0</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>13</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>5</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>18</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>7</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>0</u> Mental Retardation | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |
| <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities | <u>2</u> Developmentally Delayed |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 13
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	25
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	6
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a licensed professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	0
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	8

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 22:1
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	95%	95%	95%	95%	95%
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 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.
VSE is committed to providing a nurturing, personalized educational environment that maximizes potential, promotes life-long learning, and prepares productive citizens for a diverse, global society.

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

PART III – SUMMARY

Voy Spears, Jr. Elementary (VSE) provides comprehensive educational services to students through its talented team of 36 certificated and 10 classified staff members and is one of 13 Blue Springs R-IV School District (BSSD) K-5 schools. The BSSD is located in eastern Jackson County, and as a suburban Kansas City metropolitan public school system, provides quality academic programming to families residing in Blue Springs, Lee's Summit, Independence, and Grain Valley, Missouri. The principle community of Blue Springs is comprised of approximately 57,000 residents. The BSSD maintains a student to teacher ratio of 22:1. Of the total educators, 85.6% hold advanced degrees and have taught an average of 12 years. The BSSD has been recognized by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for Distinction in Academic Performance for 16 consecutive years.

As a close-knit neighborhood school, VSE is student-centered, family-friendly, high performing, parent supported, and houses the BSSD K-5 Deaf and Hard of Hearing program. VSE, which opened in 2002, is named after a former elementary school principal and C.O. administrator, Voy Spears, Jr. Due to strong growth within its attendance boundaries, VSE has experienced facility additions, including classroom space, a multipurpose room, and an artificial turf playground surface. VSE also features a walking/running track, which supports its commitment to community health and wellness.

VSE currently serves a diverse, capable population of 544 K-5 students (e.g., 25% minority, 12% free/reduced Lunch, 8% Special Education, 1% ELL). On paper, VSE seems to have few, if any, student challenges. However, as with most schools that are historically high performing, the most significant obstacle faced is finding ways to increase student achievement, teacher capacity/competency, and stakeholder satisfaction. This task's complexity has resulted in a concerted effort to: 1) place teachers in positions that optimally utilize their strengths and most greatly benefit students, 2) professionally develop all teachers into effective instructors, and 3) ensure the best school environment possible so academic potential and learning experiences are fully maximized and successful. This focus has yielded marked gains over the past three school years in relation to overall school performance.

As a Professional Learning Community (PLC), VSE stakeholders have developed a shared vision of engagement and ownership, two-way/open communication, high achievement/performance expectations, and commitment to school excellence. This has led to a common theme – SFA (Success for All). After looking VSE squarely in the eye, a collective decision was made to throw open classroom doors, confer, and collaborate; speak a common language; and work toward a mutual cause – higher student, teacher, and school attainment.

VSE teachers identified the essential learning skills embedded in the Missouri Learning Standards, mapped out and aligned curriculum horizontally and vertically within and between grade levels, paced instruction, and carefully determined the benchmarks necessary for students to demonstrate mastery. Content across the core subject areas – English/Language Arts (ELA), Math, Science, and Social Studies – was broken down to illustrate how concepts were connected and spiraled. Students' growth and progress are tracked and displayed over time, and constructive dialogue about curriculum, student targets, instructional strategies, and interventions occurs frequently. Staff also work directly with district instructional coaches and nationally recognized content experts to enhance ability level.

As a result of concentrated attention to early literacy, writing process, and reading comprehension, as well as math operations, problem solving, computation, reasoning, and proof skills; adoption of the inquiry-based Project Lead the Way (PLTW) STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) alliance initiative; interventions such as before/after-school tutoring and intensive reading supports; and incorporation of social/emotional learning principles (e.g., Zones of Regulation, Positive Behavior Supports, Care Team, BEST, Olweus Bullying Prevention), academic gains have been realized at VSE. High quality, innovative, professional development (PD) and coaching via a train-the-trainer approach are provided, teachers serve on district subject area cadres/committees, and all staff are instilled with the expectation of becoming content experts. VSE also promotes collaboration, pooling of resources, peer observation and pedagogical interaction (e.g., ELA and math labs), daily use of instructional technology, and dynamic partnerships with

contracted, best practices, content experts over time.

VSE has motivated and engaged parents. The PTA unit works tirelessly to enrich the school through curriculum-embedded, cultural arts field trip and assembly experiences (e.g., Arts Partners), family education nights, whole-child health/wellness initiatives (e.g., school walking/running track), recognition events (e.g., Teacher Appreciation and Salute-to-School Week), and fundraising (e.g., student technology, Read-A-Thon Book Nooks). VSE parents also provide individualized (i.e., Difference Makers Mentors) and direct classroom support. Service learning is encouraged as stakeholders openly give back to the surrounding community (e.g., Clean Water Project, K-5 Non-Profit Drives).

In sum total, the VSE school improvement approach is corroborated by research, is data and evidence substantiated, and has been implemented logically, sequentially, and with an eye toward inquiry/ project-based learning. For these reasons, the future is a bright one indeed for VSE students and staff.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

From the first day of kindergarten to the last day of fifth grade, VSE prepares students to be top performers. Key features interwoven into the school’s fabric include standards-addressed and aligned curriculum; high quality professional development (PD); effective classroom organization and grouping patterns; targeted pre-, mid-, and post-assessments to inform and guide practice; inquiry/project-based learning; motivational techniques; current technology; and multi-faceted data analysis processes.

The K-2 reading and ELA framework is distinct and focused, follows a paced, aligned progression, and encompasses a balanced literacy approach (e.g., phonemic awareness, phonics, alphabetic principle, fluency, enriched vocabulary) that turns print into meaning and creates capable, strategic, and joyful readers. In grades 3-5, emphasis is placed on comprehension and extending skills to develop confidence and competency through increasingly complex, sophisticated text. Reading naturally becomes more transformational and metacognitive as students navigate how to make sense of different genres.

From a teacher’s perspective, foundational and independent literacy strategies are acquired and perfected through PD, direct instructional coach and educational consultant support, innovative, evidence-based programming and practices, and use of district designed common assessments. Key components are: Pathways to Reading (Terry Clinefelter), Writers’ Workshop (Matt Glover, Katherine Bomer), Readers’ Workshop (Ellin Keene, Deborah Miller, Tim Rasinski), the SRI (Scholastic Reading Inventory), data teaming, and ELA lab school implementation to effectively establish, practice, refine, model, and share new learning. Enrichment and remediation methodology are available and implemented at all grade levels across the Response to Intervention (RtI) model continuum.

BSSD math curriculum is standards-aligned and concentrates on the “big ideas” and skills necessary to master rigorous content (e.g., numeration, operations, relationships, concrete and abstract representation). VSE teachers differentiate instruction, identify student needs through incorporation of centers and flexible grouping, and write grants to provide innovative opportunities for in-depth exploration. K-5 students see the connections between prior and future learning and develop a sound understanding of concept structure and interrelationships through coherent, spiraled, “chunked” units of study. Clustering provides a global view as grade- and cross-level teachers discuss, investigate, and personalize student learning so no one falls behind. Represented in strands, the big ideas also act as a “lens” for making instructional decisions about lesson emphasis; identifying intended targets; looking at students’ critical thinking/problem-solving strategies; collecting data for anecdotal records, including assessment-related; providing meaningful feedback; determining next steps; and communicating growth and progress. Specific approaches used to achieve success include: Math Workshop (math stations, manipulatives), instructional technology, off-hour tutoring, Math Lab implementation, district instructional coach support, direct contact with content experts (Greg Tang), student-facilitated data and progression tracking, district-aligned common assessments, Go Math, and Reflex Math.

The BSSD strongly believes that students’ attitudes and orientations toward science are formed in the elementary grades. Science curriculum is standards-aligned and inquiry-focused, with emphasis placed on conceptual understanding rather than just facts, integration occurring across the core subjects, and contemporary technology being incorporated to enhance instruction. High quality PD, involvement in Federal grant-funded outreach endeavors (e.g., Science Matters ecosystems study and video production project), partnerships with science associated agencies/organizations/community-based service learning projects (e.g., KC Zoo-mobile, Lee’s Summit municipality water quality), and embedded field trips (e.g., KC Zoo, local nature reserves) strengthens teachers’ confidence and applied/real-world knowledge; adoption of the PLTW STEM instructional approach facilitates hands-on experimentation, investigation, research, problem-solving, and innovation; and direct, on-going contact and support from content experts and district instructional coaches helps refine skill level and pedagogy.

The four social studies disciplines – history, geography, government/civics engagement, and economics –

are interwoven across subject areas and provide VSE students a critical foundational framework for life-long, informed involvement as citizens of a free, democratic society. Content is meaningful, integrative, differentiated, value-based, and challenging. Methodology and context are coherent, comprehensive, and technology-infused; range from self, family, and community to city, state, and nation; require problem-solving/critical thought; and encompass topics such as information literacy and safety, socio-emotional development, and interpersonal interactions. Leadership, responsibility, and caring for the common good are promoted through opportunities such as the Student Council, daily announcements/pledge, flag duty, buddy mentoring, BEST character reinforcement stickers, classroom/ school jobs, and service learning projects (e.g., Clean Water), and special activities enrich the K-5 social studies experience (e.g., DARE, Famous Missourian Wax Museum, School of Economics).

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

A full-time music teacher provides weekly instruction to VSE K-5 students in a dedicated room via engaging, creative, and imaginative content; a wide variety of instruments; and modern technology equipment/applications (e.g., Quaver curriculum, Smartboard). PD is on-going, occurs through conferences/conventions/workshops/in-school or off-site seminars, and offered by local artists or peers. Music concepts are connected and piggy-backed with regular classroom topics and core content using cross-curricular collaboration and integration. Instruction requires demonstration (e.g., singing, dancing, playing instruments), incorporates cooperative learning strategies, and features games, improvisation, and composition. Grade level presentations happen at monthly PTA general sessions to immerse parents in subject matter and showcase student skill mastery (e.g., solos, speaking parts); the choral Music Club meets weekly outside the regular instructional day and performs at school and community venues (e.g., Mayor's Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony), partner projects are conducted between elementary and middle school music educators (e.g., annual 5th Grade "Singfest"), and all K-5 students attend Arts Partners presentations conducted by KC area elite performance groups (e.g., KinderKonzert, Nutcracker, Theatre for Young America, Paul Mesner Puppets).

K-5 arts instruction reflects a similar setting, cross-curricular delivery model, PD, curriculum format, and technology support configuration. Art forms and history, famous artists, book illustration/ production techniques, and world culture are addressed. Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) have been implemented to help students express themselves creatively. Artwork is displayed in classrooms, school hallways, local retail/business centers and offices, and City Hall; used as decorations for civic and recognition events (e.g., Mayor's Prayer Breakfast, Board of Education Appreciation Day, Teacher of the Year); and entered into various fairs and contests (e.g., Reflections Showcase).

Physical education (P.E.) mirrors music and art and is core curriculum aligned. VSE K-5 students are equipped with the fundamental skills, attitudes, behaviors, and understanding of fitness, healthy habits/general wellness (e.g., exercise, sleep, hygiene, staying drug free), and nutrition (e.g., eating right) to ensure effective decision-making, lifelong engagement, and enjoyment (i.e., "Involvement by everyone, not just athletes!"). Emphasis is placed on active participation, anatomy, physiology, motion, movement, body systems, safe practices, good sportsmanship/fair play, positive lifestyle development, and successful interactions with peers in team and competitive settings. Beyond classroom instruction, P.E. programming features clubs (e.g., Walking/Running), awards (President's Physical Fitness, Jump Rope for Heart), swim safety (Swim 2 Success project), and an all-school field day.

VSE classroom and Library Media Center (LMC) staff plan and teach together (e.g., inquiry-/project-/research-based assignments). LMC curriculum features sequential standards, concepts, indicators, activities, and assessments (e.g., Internet safety, digital citizenship). A Library Media Specialist (LMS) helps K-5 students build core content skills; access, evaluate, interpret, and apply information from print and non-print materials; effectively navigate technology and software applications; and meet expected academic outcomes. During weekly LMC visits, students have story-time and learn how to locate and checkout lexile-leveled books, use reference materials/resources, cite sources, and conduct research. Students can also purchase quality literature during periodic book fairs.

A full-time counselor sees students individually and collectively, makes classroom presentations, operates as

a family resource, and arranges district social worker support as needed. Concepts include group dynamics, making friends, stranger danger, body safety, school adjustment, study skills, resiliency, behavior management, problem solving, and college/career readiness.

Exceptional education spectrum services are individualized, RTI tiered, and differentiated. Rigorous gifted education programming is provided to qualifying students one day per week and is ability grouped with grade level peers. Special education and Section 504 programming is inclusionary, least restrictive, mainstreamed, and closely aligned with traditional classroom instruction. Sign-language was taught to staff and students as a result of VSE housing the BSSD K-5 Deaf and Hard of Hearing program.

Technology permeates VSE K-5 classrooms. Computers are mobile (Yoga carts), wireless, Internet-connected, and used for instruction and assessment. Information is posted on the VSE website and shared via teacher webpages, social media, and mass communication formats (e.g., School Messenger, Parent Portal). Smart/White boards have touch screen functionality so teachers can illustrate key points and project/display visual images to improve learning (e.g., virtual field trips, Skype). In addition, online study tools are used to introduce, teach, and reinforce concepts, and learn from home (e.g., Go/Reflex/Greg Tang Math, Newsela, Waggle, Read Works, Brainpop, Reading A-Z, RAZ Kids).

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

VSE staff provide an inclusive, personalized, inquiry/project-based, cross-curricular, data-validated, K-5 school experience through effective integration of strategies such as scaffolding, shaping, connecting to prior knowledge, motivating, constructive feedback, and skill practicing. A variety of methods and tools are used to evaluate, measure, document, and report upon readiness, growth, skill acquisition, and/or students' educational needs. Just as lessons have different functions, performance results illustrate specific elements of learning such as depth of knowledge and/or the ability to comprehend and analyze concepts. Teachers, special educators, guidance staff, administrators, parents, and, when applicable, students and social workers, work together to establish collective understanding about the relationship between instruction, proficiency, and school success. Feedback specific to individual learning is provided frequently, and students self-analyze achievement respective to their predetermined goals. As with all BSSD schools, VSE routinely reports on academic progress to parents, appropriate cabinet level members, the Board of Education, and the greater community.

K-5 instruction is explicit, differentiated, and becomes more rigorous as students transition from the primary to intermediate level (e.g., Pathways, PLTW). The workshop model is used for core content instruction, and technology reinforces, enhances, and personalizes concept interactions. Various grouping configurations, participation approaches, and delivery formats are incorporated into classroom practice, including cooperative learning (e.g., pair-share, small groups, mini lessons, work stations). To build deeper understanding, students across ability and grade levels conduct authentic conversations about key concepts and track their own performance. Teachers act as learning facilitators and collect, monitor, and share student progress data horizontally and vertically.

Off-school hours tutoring is voluntary and invitational, and based on multiple, identifiable at-risk factors such as classroom performance, SRI and MAP (Missouri Assessment Program) scores, and teacher observation. Flex time is built into the daily schedule for focused instruction several times per school week. Higher order learning and instructional intervention strategies, including self-questioning, constructing mental representations, and peer review and feedback, are typically incorporated into the learning process to help students grasp, connect, and reflect upon concepts.

Through a collaborative, multi-disciplinary, problem-solving "Care Team" framework, members (e.g., counselor; minimum of one primary, intermediate, and special educator; support classroom specialist; principal) help classroom teachers with determining the nature, severity, and root cause of students' academic, social, or emotional challenges. Key factors such as attendance, discipline, health/medical background, skill level attainment, environmental conditions, and assessment results (e.g., informal and miscue inventories, curriculum-based measures, criterion-referenced and standardized diagnostic achievement tests) are taken into consideration, with the information being used to identify strengths and

deficits and craft an action plan involving specific intervention and/or enrichment strategies for implementation. The Care Team process also entails systematic observation, progress monitoring over time, data collection from a variety of sources, outcomes evaluation (i.e., RtI and PBS methodology), district social worker assistance, and visually illustrating student results to verify growth and/or whether or not pertinent strategies were appropriately targeted and applied.

VSE's comprehensive assessment plan allows teachers to fully address the distinct learning needs, interests, aspirations, and/or cultural backgrounds of all K-5 students. Pre-assessments establish a baseline for gauging progress; interim formative assessments (e.g., Pathways, SRI, Dynamic Inventory of Basic Early Literacy Skills/DIBELS, Go Math, Reflex Math, A-Z fluency passages) yield in-process feedback and facilitate necessary adjustments; summative assessments denote end of instructional period achievement; placement assessments (e.g., reading/math groups, honors track placement tests) match students with specific, tiered experiences that address distinct needs; screening assessments (kindergarten entrance, special education) identify developmental readiness levels and/or if more concentrated services are required; authentic assessments (e.g., art/music/P.E. skills) delineate mastery of complex tasks via scoring guides, demonstration, or other methods; portfolio assessments (e.g., PLTW lab results, journaling/writing samples, special education) pinpoint acquired knowledge and skills over time; district-developed common assessments depict progression, assure consistent and reliable appraisal, compare results across multiple classrooms, schools, and/or learning experiences, and align formatting with annual state achievement testing; high-stakes, standardized assessments (ELA, math, and science MAP tests, Terra Nova) verify whether or not annual school accountability targets were hit and that lessons are taught effectively by capable teachers; and digital/online assessments provide detailed analytics used to personalize learning and modify education programming and experiences, instructional approaches, and academic-support strategies.

1. School Climate/Culture:

VSE staff realize that school climate and culture have a profound impact on achievement and work tirelessly to sustain an environment focused on academic success free of bullying, discrimination, and harassment. Staff also fully appreciate that the quality and character of school life is based on patterns of stakeholders' experiences and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures.

Climate and culture have been impacted in numerous ways, including achievement (e.g., student/teacher/classroom/school recognition); health, wellness, and personal safety (e.g., Olweus bully prevention program, DARE, Safe Crisis Management de-escalation techniques); governance (e.g., Leadership Team, Student Council); relationship building (e.g., Buddy Program, Difference Makers mentors); diversity (e.g., Ruby Payne training); behavior management (e.g., Zones of Regulation, RtI, PBS, BEST incentive tickets); interventions/enrichment (e.g., Care Team, ELA and math tutoring); work showcases (e.g., Music performances, PTA Reflections contest, Art and Writing Fairs); and reinforcement (e.g., notes, phone calls, and emails home; conferences). Furthermore, learning conditions and supports have been purposefully configured to enhance outcomes (e.g., high expectations; self-directed learning and motivation; rigorous classwork; strong bond between staff, students, and families; positive peer interactions; high degree of parent, school partner, and surrounding community engagement).

VSE teachers challenge students to grow academically and socially and hold them accountable for their learning, achievement, motivation, and conduct. To facilitate this objective, VSE adopted the Zones of Regulation cognitive behavior framework to help K-5 students become more aware of and independent in controlling their emotions and impulses and improve their ability to problem solve conflicts. The systematic "Zones" curriculum incorporates fundamental life skills that are taught and practiced along with visual cues that enable students to identify their level of awareness, understand how their behavior impacts those around them, and more appropriately manage their feelings and/or state when trying circumstances are encountered. "Zones" strategies prevent negative actions and the resulting disciplinary consequences assigned when behavioral standards are compromised; thus, allowing students to accept ownership, do something positive about it, and achieve success.

VSE staff are highly respected, a crucial resource, and absolutely essential in creating and sustaining a school environment that is safe, nurturing, elevates student academic achievement, and bolsters positive social and emotional development. For this reason, they are acknowledged in a number of different ways such as PTA appreciation luncheons, periodic school spirit and achievement rallies, and annual school and district teacher and classified employee award ceremonies.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

To ensure engagement and deliver the full gamut of experiences needed for student success, a concerted effort has been made to bring all VSE stakeholders, including families and the greater school community, together in a purposeful partnership. The traditional parent/volunteer involvement at VSE includes, staff, families, community members, and students when applicable, working together to set, plan, and achieve school-related goals, which benefits everyone and makes the relationship truly reciprocal. Promoting and then witnessing strong stakeholder participation in VSE activities has helped validate their importance and resulted in heightened levels of commitment and dedication. This proactive approach has also created practices and procedures that support student's learning both in and outside the classroom; raised expectations; increased interest in and access to student and school-related performance data; fostered dynamic conversations across and between various school groups; and expanded the pool of key decision makers involved in the improvement process. As the perspectives of more stakeholders have been sought and obtained, it has become clearly evident they are valued and play an integral role in providing quality educational opportunities for students and staff (i.e., establishes a direct systemic correlation between their involvement and VSE's continuing success).

VSE stakeholders assist with school, district, and community capacity building and change initiatives by sitting on Boards (e.g., PTA Executive) and advisory committees (e.g., CAC, PTAC), partnering with non-profit organizations (i.e., to increase awareness, volunteer, raise money); attending forums (e.g., State legislative); and providing survey feedback (e.g., school quality). Parents are kept aware of accreditation and performance requirements (e.g., Missouri Learning Standards; Missouri School Improvement Process), how things are taught and tested (e.g., curriculum, instruction, delivery systems, Missouri Assessment Program); collected, interpreted, and reported data (e.g., performance patterns/trends); system conditions (e.g., resources, facility, environment); and participation opportunities. For diversity and relationship-building purposes, stakeholders engage in meaningful training and interaction to create common understandings about expectations, pending issues, and how to support the school. A sampling of VSE activities includes the Family 5K Run (i.e., to dedicate track); academic, curriculum, and literacy presentations (e.g., Greg Tang Math Night); PTA movie nights; Running and Art Clubs; Choir on Fire, Student Council (e.g., food, funds, and clothing drives); Adopt-A-Family projects; Backpack food program; art fairs; music performances; Good News Club, Read-a-thon, and the School Carnival.

3. Professional Development:

VSE teachers seek out, share, and act upon new learning to enhance professionalism and benefit students. To ensure that the needs of all K-5 students are being met, a PLC Data Team framework was implemented. As a powerful staff development approach and a potent strategy for driving and heightening performance, PLC Data Teams take into consideration a wide variety of operational and environmental workplace factors so that students and teachers feel supported and validated in their ongoing learning and instructional experiences.

The relationship forged between VSE administrators and teachers is shared and collegial, where all lead, grow professionally, and view themselves as a team player working toward a common goal – a better, more effective school. VSE administrators are also seen as learners who ask questions, investigate, seek solutions, and model the notion of continuous improvement. As leadership is a shared process, VSE teachers are encouraged and empowered to both speak and step up (i.e., accept responsibility; be accountable; show/take initiative; proactively respond to the needs of students, peers, and families).

VSE teachers have established a network of open communication, collegial cooperation, and active support. Professional roles have been expanded, with a greater number of VSE staff members now serving as presenters, coaches, and mentors. Subsequently, confidence, capacity, and capability have grown as implemented, research-based practices have resulted in increased student performance.

Through opportunities for collaborative inquiry and learning, staff develop and disseminate a body of wisdom gleaned from their experiences. Coupled with shared decision-making, new and novel ideas are pragmatically applied to problem solving, and innovative, forward-thinking, technology supported solutions are created to address classroom challenges. Other key aspects of the VSE PLC process are a unified vision and facilitative environmental conditions such as common daily time to plan lessons together, complete peer classroom observations, and offer constructive feedback.

The BSSD delivers high quality, research-based, replicable, and sustainable PD. Educational consultants in core content fields provide information and direct support and help ensure that instructional methods are executed with fidelity (e.g., Matt Glover, Ellin Keene, Debbie Miller, Greg Tang). Other components common to VSE are new teacher induction, mentoring, coaching, monthly staff/team meetings (e.g., Olweus, PBS, instructional leadership), topical studies/book reviews/workshops, diversity training (e.g., Ruby Payne), school and district scheduled collaboration days and instructional coach sessions (e.g., ELA, math, science), content area cadre meetings, horizontal and vertical teaming, and learning lab establishment (e.g., ELA and math).

4. School Leadership:

At VSE, school leadership is directly linked to climate, culture, instruction, and performance, and expectations reflect Artisan Teacher (Mike Rutherford) themes in respect to the technical work of teaching (i.e., clear learning goals, congruency, task analysis, diagnosis, overt responses, mid-course corrections), scientific aspects of teaching (i.e., conscious attention, chunking, connection, practice, personal relevance, locale memory, mental models, first time learning, neural downshifting, enriched environments, success, performance feedback), and artistic nature of teaching (i.e., stagecraft, complementary elements, time and timing, personal presence, delight). Key strategies have been adopted (e.g., shared decision-making, strategic planning, PLC leadership teams), and high achievement and quality instruction are viewed as non-negotiable components of the comprehensive focus. Alignment of school and district priorities, continuous tracking and reporting of benchmarks/data points, and marshalling of all available resources to attain positive outcomes are also strongly emphasized.

VSE educators meet as grade levels, content areas, and vertical teams to identify goals addressing individual and subgroup student population challenges, teacher practice, school improvement needs, and craft action plans. In conjunction with district PD programming, effective instructional models are designated for classroom adoption. High quality PD helps establish a central framework for instructional design, planning, and delivery. Consistent language and vocabulary, uniform use of research-based strategies, and implementation with fidelity are commonly incorporated components. VSE stakeholders collaborate tirelessly to support, realize, publicize, and celebrate goal accomplishment.

The district's annual CSIP (Comprehensive School Improvement Plan) review process designates crucial target areas. Under the direction of VSE's lead principal, the school Leadership Team facilitates formulation of an annual CSIP-aligned SIP (School Improvement Plan), with SIP goals being the top priority pertaining to attention and resources. Additionally, the Leadership Team specifies broader, multi-year enhancement initiatives and objectives to elevate growth and performance.

Progress is monitored continuously by the Leadership Team to ensure relevance and impact, and is the driving force behind stakeholders' actions. Data is regularly examined to determine the extent to which desired targets are met and identify new ones. Discrepancies between goal articulation and realization are analyzed to make necessary, ongoing adjustments. As classroom results are the primary indicator of success, differences between methodology, application, and outcomes trigger a call for correction. The Leadership Team also takes into consideration necessary resources – time, money, personnel, and materials – allocated to accomplish predetermined goals, helps ensure that PD supports the school's mission, and provides the requisite knowledge, skills, and competencies needed for goal attainment.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

VSE staff endeavor to ensure proficiency and recognize that specific factors at pivotal times in a student’s educational career – kindergarten attendance and behavior, the ability to read by the end of 3rd grade – have the potential to predict and/or effect the likelihood of on-time, cohort group graduation from high school and postsecondary achievement. While tracing attainment to one aspect, element, challenge, or condition may overstate or simplify the importance of what VSE has accomplished, there is merit to the argument that actionable use of a focused, comprehensive, indicator accountability system – PLC Data Teams – has produced commendable results.

As returning students file into classrooms at the start of each new school year, VSE teachers are already aware of early warning signs and at-risk factors threatening achievement potential. Accordingly, teachers, counseling personnel, and administrators work collectively with parents in a Care Team approach to help mitigate barriers and obstacles to success through early identification and provision of differentiated, personalized learning interventions and/or enrichments.

VSE staff have access to rich data spanning a wide range of indicators and multiple factors used to explain, illustrate, validate, and report academic growth – those with varying degrees of predictive power such as interest and college/career inventories; those pertaining to outcomes such as daily and end of unit grades; and those related to ancillary factors affecting learning such as attendance and behavior. In addition, annual standardized state achievement test scores are used in conjunction with periodic formative, summative, and district-designed common assessments to identify levels of performance, effectiveness of instruction, and degree of core content rigor and relevance.

VSE’s PLC Data Team indicator accountability system provides educators a broad “menu” and “road map” for academic success. Options are delineated and facilitated by level (e.g., individual, classroom, grade); dimension (e.g., quality of instruction, content preparedness, mastery); content mastery (e.g., MAP, TerraNova, SRI, Common Assessments); degree of readiness (e.g., Brigance III); intervention and/or enrichment strategy/tool (e.g., special education); growth tracking process to be used over time (e.g., pre- and post-assessments); means for collecting qualitative perceptions pertinent to meeting student, staff, parent, and school needs (e.g., Interest Inventory, OHI survey); and format for assigning students to instructional groups and/or advanced courses (e.g., 5th grade math, ELA honors track placement tests). Ultimately, the entire VSE instructional team is committed to student, teacher, and school excellence and is proud of what has been accomplished toward achieving its overarching objective of "Success for All."