

U.S. Department of Education
2021 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. Tammy Delaney
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

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

School Mailing Address 1400 10th Avenue East
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Spencer State IA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 51301-0200

County Clay County

Telephone (712) 262-3345 Fax (712) 580-3436

Web site/URL http://spencerschools.org E-mail tdelaney@spencerschools.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* Mr. Terry Hemann E-mail themann@spencerschools.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Spencer Community School District Tel. (712) 262-8950

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. Bob Whittenburg
(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, leave blank.*

PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION

The electronic signature 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 2021 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 must include one or more of grades K-12. Schools located on the same campus (physical location and mailing address) must apply as an entire school (i.e. K-8; 6-12; K-12 school). Two (or more) schools located on separate campuses, must apply individually even if they have the same principal. A single school located on multiple campuses with one principal must apply as an entire school.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2015 and grades participating in statewide assessments must have been part of the school for at least the three years prior to September 2019.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 or 2020.
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 current school year (2020-2021) 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)
 - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 0 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 1 TOTAL

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools. Only include demographic data for the nominated school, not the district.)

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, 2020 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent at the school. Include all students enrolled, in-person, participating in a hybrid model, or online only. If online schooling or other COVID-19 school issues make this difficult to obtain, provide the most accurate and up-to-date information available:

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	88	79	167
7	96	86	182
8	101	76	177
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	285	241	526

*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):
- 0.2 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 0.6 % Asian
 - 1.8 % Black or African American
 - 8 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 88.8 % White
 - 0.6 % Two or more races
 - 100 % Total**

(Only these seven standard categories should be used to report the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.)

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2019 - 2020 school year: 6%

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, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	15
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	14
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	29
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	526
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.06
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	6

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

Spanish

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 43 %

Total number students who qualify: 227

8. Students receiving special education services: 18 %

96 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. All students receiving special education services should be reflected in the table below. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

17 Autism

8 Multiple Disabilities

2 Deafness

2 Orthopedic Impairment

1 Deaf-Blindness

2 Other Health Impaired

8 Developmental Delay

80 Specific Learning Disability

15 Emotional Disturbance

7 Speech or Language Impairment

2 Hearing Impairment

1 Traumatic Brain Injury

13 Intellectual Disability

1 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. If your current staffing structure has shifted due to COVID-19 impacts and you are uncertain or unable to determine FTEs, provide an estimate.

	Number of Staff
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	23
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	10
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	24
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	3

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 23:1

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

Required Information	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016
Daily student attendance	95%	94%	94%	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 2020.

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.

The mission of the Spencer Middle School is to provide exemplary education for all students - Learning today; Leading tomorrow.

16. Briefly describe how your school has been operating during the current 2020-2021 school year (e.g., open as usual, online only, a hybrid model, etc.)? If different grade levels in your building operate in different ways, include this. If the school began with one model and switched to another partially through the year, include this as well.

The plan to reopen the schools prioritized the health and safety of students, staff, and the community. For the 2020-2021 school year, Spencer Middle School has been open for in-person instruction as well as offering an on-line learning option. At the start of the school year, approximately 92% of students attended in-person, and that population has grown to 96.5%. In addition, a 2-week Summer school session was implemented to help close the achievement gap caused by the school closure in March, 2020. For students who were quarantined during the school year, we also put in place a Learning Expected protocol.

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

PART III - SUMMARY

Spencer Middle School is a grades 6, 7, and 8 public school located in Spencer, Iowa. For the 2020-21 school year with a slightly increasing enrollment of 526 students, Spencer Middle School serves the rural community of 11,000+ in Spencer and Clay County. In Iowa, small rural schools are struggling to maintain enrollments, and in some cases are closing. As a result, families are migrating to the larger county seats where they will live and enroll their children to those schools. Some of these students come in with life skills needs. While the city unemployment rate is 2.3%, a large number of parents are underemployed and work several jobs because full-time employment is not available. In terms of student poverty the demographics are shifting, not necessarily improving. Middle school students who qualify for free/reduced meals are over 40%. Church, community, and middle school food banks provide much needed resources for the food insecurity that exists. In some cases, our ESL families also need support to find and navigate community services. There are 17 churches in Spencer and exemplary community services to support these challenges. Providing a quality educational experience is a high priority of our community.

The success of all students is our ultimate goal at Spencer Middle School. Key Kagan academic strategies employed include small group and peer discussion protocols. An example is “Stand Up, Hand Up, Pair Up.” Cooperative learning is used in all curricular areas. We utilize our Homebase structure to address students’ emotional, physical, social, and cultural development. During Homebase, staff and students are able to form strong relationships. Social contracts are written using Capturing Kids’ Hearts; Boys Town Skills and Tiger Expectations are taught; and Tiger Hero lessons are taught based on our middle school core values. Students are also given time to reflect and discuss their development. In grade 7, Homebase clubs give students choice in a non-curricular activity to experience and connect with other students who share common interests.

Spencer Middle School operates on block scheduling to allow for extended instructional blocks of time to teach reading, writing, math, science, and social studies. The 3 grade levels operate on different schedules, allowing for teacher flexibility and fluidity. Operating with no bells also creates a non-disruptive building culture. PRIDE (Practice Reading in a Dynamic Environment) is part of the grades 6-7 daily schedule, providing students with opportunities to practice reading in small group settings with students of similar interest and reading ability. Partner reading, whole group book conversations, and read alouds are also included.

Tiger Team, a program that works with at-risk students to teach life skills in conjunction with community partnerships, is another way the school engages students. Through this program, students are empowered to become confident, young adults while they connect with their peers and are introduced to life-skills such as personal hygiene, meal preparation, gardening, and mental and physical health. Due to protocols, student council is paused for the 20-21 school year, but in a typical year, student council members would plan assemblies, food drives and fundraisers, and morale-boosting activities.

As the school year began many mitigation strategies were put in place to ensure a successful return. These strategies included wearing masks by everyone, limiting access to the building, structuring student entries and exits, adapting the learning environment for social distancing and mask breaks, temperature checks, strategic seating arrangements at lunch and within learning spaces, providing sanitizing materials for all staff and students, and increased janitorial staff working diligently to create as safe of an environment as possible. IEPs, Parent-Teacher Conferences, and Mentor Meetings, have all conducted virtually.

Social Emotional Health continues to be a priority, especially as students returned to school in this unprecedented time. The River of Feelings is a tool we use to teach students about the continuum that is their emotional well-being. By using a weekly check in form, students are able to recognize and communicate a need for support in a private manner. The School Counselor, Dean of Students and Principal connect with these students to best meet their needs. The Learning Expected protocol established the process for students who were quarantined at home and/or chose virtual learning to re-assimilate back to in person learning. These supports for re-teaching and student work completion on a 1-1 basis have proven effective.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

1a. Overall Approach

Through a continuous, rigorous curriculum review process, Spencer Middle School teachers work diligently to provide a guaranteed and viable curriculum. Standards review with extensive scope and sequence revision has been put into place. For every course, a completed course template with subsequent unit plans is laid out. Each unit template includes concepts, standards, essential questions, emphasis on high order thinking and HOT questions, disciplinary skills and processes, accommodations and enrichment, disciplinary vocabulary, formative and summative assessments, digital recordings, readings, and instruction notes. Assigned student tasks, student work and teacher instruction are scored using the Authentic Intellectual Work (AIW) rubrics during monthly meetings. Formative tasks are revised after scoring individual student work; summative tasks, labeled Anchor Tasks, are revised and scored for each unit, in each course. Best practices provide a foundation for each course. Student data is analyzed during our Professional Learning Communities (PLC's). All courses adhere to National Core Standards. As a work in progress, each course, curriculum, coursework, instruction modules, and interactive activities can be found in Canvas.

Distance learning in March 2020 posed challenges. Teachers arranged Google Meets and then met with students virtually. They also recorded instruction and reached out to their students through Canvas and email. Teachers also established virtual office hours and that has continued through this school year. During the summer, teachers adjusted curriculum units to include content and processes that were lost last spring. Great efforts were made to add more recorded instruction and digitalize activities because of the ongoing uncertainty if we would return to in-person learning in the Fall of 2020.

1b. Reading/ELA

In Language Arts, reading strategies are taught to improve fluency, comprehension, and the love of reading. Each grade level emphasizes certain strategies; by the end of grade 8, students have a miscellany of reading strategies. Literature Circles are also taught. Each grade level uses the Writing Process to focus on expository, persuasive, and narrative writings along with 6+ Traits of writing. Journal writing and quick writes through longer papers are written at each grade level. IXL, Interactive Online Learning along with Study Island have been used during this school year to strategically diagnose strengths and weaknesses in the strands of reading, writing, grammar, and vocabulary.

1c. Mathematics

The Math Department has multiple tracks of instruction to meet the needs of all students. Students are placed in various levels of math instruction based on an annual review of data. Course paths include basic, accommodated, or accelerated learning with the opportunity for students to earn high school credit by the end of 8th grade Algebra. All course work is available online via Canvas. All instruction is available on video. Students have the opportunity to work through the curriculum at their own pace with a true 24/7 curriculum. Small group instruction and re-teaching opportunities, as well as small group problem-solving and critical thinking activities make up the math block. Pre-tests and post-tests for standards (via Edulastic) allow the teachers to evaluate student progress and make necessary adjustments.

1d. Science

The Science Department uses Scientific Inquiry; each grade level focuses on all 3 branches of science: physical science, life science, and earth science. The knowledge and learning from year to year supports the students' progress from 6th-8th grade. We adjusted the curriculum to accommodate for lessons lost in the spring of 2020. While social distancing, we continue to teach hands-on, phenomena-based science to enhance the learning. Many of our digital activities are interactive to enhance the experience for the students.

1e. Social studies/history/civic learning

In the Social Studies Department, developing lifelong learners who are prepared to take on their role as informed, active citizens is our goal. We teach students to think like geographers and historians who ask questions and investigate to solve problems. Our PLC has worked together to create common rubrics for the Inquiry Standards and assessments. Teachers have used Google Meet and WeVideo with our in-person and online students.

1a. For secondary schools (middle and/or high school grades):

The middle school incorporates a curriculum that supports college and career readiness. All students are introduced to and taught the Citizenship and Employability Rubric: academic conduct, academic drive, work completion, and working with others. These skills will help prepare students to be good citizens in our school and community.

During Roads to Success class all 8th graders complete Interest Inventories and Skill Assessments. They use the results to explore careers and look at post secondary options. Each spring, 8th graders experience an on-campus visit to a local community college and attend sessions where professionals share career information and learn about post-high school education. This year, plans are being made to offer students the same experiences using a combination of virtual and in-person activities. Every 8th grader creates a resume and participates in a mock interview with a community leader who provides feedback to the student. In addition, 8th graders fill out a four year course plan to aid in their transition to high school.

All 6, 7, 8th graders enroll in STEM, a 12-week exploratory class. Spencer Middle School has been a distinguished Project Lead the Way school since its inception; STEM focuses on design and modeling of products, architecture with a focus on green products, and robotics and automation. Students use problem solving and STEM principles to enhance their middle school experience.

Tiger TV is an after-school STEM program where students write, film, and edit weekly news broadcasts for the middle school. Using an on-site studio equipped with state-of-the-art cameras, microphones, lights and a green screen, students record the newscasts in an authentic studio atmosphere. During the pandemic, we have relied on this program greatly.

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

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

The Visual and Performing Arts Departments provide the foundation to successfully proceed to the secondary level as members of their arts communities. During 2020-21 the music department offered performing opportunities via livestream. Our connections widened the scope of our audience to national viewing with relatives across the United States. We are fortunate to have a wide variety of school instruments for students to use to provide access for every student who wants to participate in band.

Physical Education and Fitness for Life are essential to student growth and development. Community speakers address nutrition, CPR, and healthy decision making to our students. The curriculum includes team games, individual/partner and lifetime activities. We have had to modify some of our activities to adhere to social distancing.

During a 12-week exploratory class, 8th graders experience an introduction to Spanish, providing opportunities to explore the language, culture, and geography of Spanish-speaking countries. This is a foundation for high school foreign language requirements.

Spencer Middle School is a 1:1 school with a dedicated Chromebook for each student. Many classrooms have been upgraded to Smart TVs for wireless projection as a teaching tool. All 6th and 8th graders are

enrolled in a 12-week computer coding class. We use Scratch and CS First (a program provided by Google). Student selections include: music and sound, art, sports, fashion, storytelling, game design, and friends. Students do not need a background in computer science or coding to be successful in this course. Then students apply their skills through presentations and critical thinking skills in all of their classes.

Through exploratory experiences, students are introduced to perseverance, leadership, collaboration, communication, and building a strong work ethic. During the Financial Literacy class, 21st century skills are covered: creating a saving and spending plan, analyzing credit and debt levels, evaluating savings and long term investments and measuring risk management tools. Students are continually assessed on the employability skills rubric. Roads to Success classes use a research-based curriculum for Social Emotional Learning about Mindsets & Goals, Recognizing Bullying & Harassment, Thoughts, Emotions and Decisions, and Managing Relationships and Social Conflict. In our Teen Leadership exploratory class, students are given opportunities to build skills through self and social awareness. Career pathways are embedded through our core curriculum. Students take interest inventories, explore careers matching their interests and use this knowledge to begin planning for high school coursework and their futures beyond secondary school.

3. Academic Supports:

Daily, grade level Core, Special Education, Challenge/TAG, and ELL teachers have both a common planning time and a common team meeting time where they study the data from the (MAP) Measure of Academic Progress Test which compares each student within their grade band to a national sample of students and the (ISASP) Iowa Statewide Assessment of Student Progress. All grade 6 students take the (FAST) Fastbridge Assessments. ELL students take the ELPA test. In the Spring 2021, each student will take the Universal Protocol for Accommodations in Reading (uPAR) test to identify the way students comprehend text. Data from summative course Anchor Tasks, which are aligned to Iowa and National Core standards, are used to determine if students are making academic progress towards competency on the standards.

3a. Students performing below grade level

Daily, each grade level has Callback, a scheduled intervention (MTSS) period where students receive targeted tier 2 instruction in reading and math. All core teachers help students to monitor their grades, address missing and late work, and develop skills needed to advocate for themselves. In addition, grade 6-7 teams have daily small group differentiated reading interventions.

3b. Students performing above grade level

The Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT), in addition to the other assessments, is used to identify students who may benefit from participating in our Challenge/Gifted Program. At SMS, 33 students participate in the Challenge/Gifted Program, and approximately 35% of our students participate in advanced math classes.

3c. Special education/students with disabilities

A targeted achievement gap of 10% points was identified in Grade 7, Special Education students in the 2019-20 scores. To close this gap, we built-in specially designed daily instruction. Students with IEPs are not pulled from their tier one classes. Each grade level has co-taught classes in Language Arts and Math. In addition, most classes embed a para educator to aid students on IEPs. We are further supported by a behavior consultant and an academic consultant from Prairie Lakes Education Association to aid us in developing accommodations and modifications.

3d. English Language Learners (ELLs)

To integrate ELL students, we use the push-in and pull-out model. Our ELL teacher and teacher associates push-in to differentiate curriculum, so the students can acquire the skills needed to succeed in the general education environment. Then we pull students during the MTSS period to provide specific supports. Students who are new to our country or have very limited English skills are placed in our ELL Academy for the first 90 minutes of each day to receive individualized and small group instruction in the areas of math, speaking, reading, and writing in English.

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

At SMS we serve 2 homeless students; a Homeless Liaison provides training to the staff. We provide free meals, exempt school fees, and use of the on-site food pantry. School counselors provide a contact list to families containing information about agencies and organizations and where to obtain rent assistance, utility assistance, food, and clothing.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

Engaging students in their learning is a high priority for all staff. A variety of initiatives including: Kagan Cooperative Learning, Capturing Kids Hearts, Tiger University, and Tiger Expectations are utilized throughout the building. Tiger Expectations exemplify our middle school values: Treat others with Respect, Invest in Kindness, Great Attitude, Empathy for Others, Responsible Behavior, and Striving for Excellence. Monthly lessons created by our school counselor are taught in homebases. Students vote for peers who exhibit these core values. The top 3 student nominees from each grade level attend a special luncheon and display items in the Tiger Showcase for the month. To recognize students and encourage their positive growth, staff and students “Shout Out” student academic, social, and extracurricular successes. These students are recognized in all-school assemblies every other month; because of the pandemic, these assemblies were paused and will resume for the 2021-2022 school year. These shout outs are posted throughout the building and on social media via TigerTV to celebrate our students’ success. A reward system, Cat Cash, is another method of recognizing students for modeling Tiger Expectations and performing acts of kindness.

Many middle school students, grades 7 and 8, are engaged in extra and co-curricular activities. In choir and band, 41.5% of our students participate. Band and vocal music solo and ensemble contests took place this year with judges coming into the school for the competition.

In the fall sports, cross-country, volleyball, and football, 48.1% of our students compete. In the winter sports--girls and boys basketball and wrestling--30.1% of our students participate. Students in Mock Trial have a .05% participation rate. Our Mock Trial students practiced in person and virtually participated at the state level. 28.5% of the students are track athletes.

To engage students in our community, we have created the Golden Tiger Award. The SMS Golden Tiger Service Program encourages students to become connected to the world around them, and to recognize that they have a responsibility to contribute to a cause greater than their own. Recognition will be given to students who do a minimum of 20 service learning hours during a school year, and for students accumulating 60 hours while at Spencer Middle School. Recognition will be given either in a grade level assembly or virtually at the end of the school year.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

We have started a mentoring program to partner adults in the community with students who need positive influences. The goal of the program is to give youth extra support from a caring adult to help them have a successful experience at the middle school, be prepared for high school, and to be responsible citizens of the Spencer community. To maintain these relationships during the pandemic, we implemented virtual mentoring. Mentors and students were given project boxes where they could continue to interact through positive, fun activities while engaging in meaningful conversations. Usually mentoring sessions are held weekly.

Working with local philanthropic clubs, we are honored to have invited guest speakers and community leaders virtually teach our students about financial literacy, leadership, and future academic planning for success. Every year, 8th graders travel to a local community college to experience an on-campus visit to encourage post-high school education. Eighth graders also participate in a mock interview with leaders from the community to gain interview and letter writing experience. This year the experience will be a hybrid experience.

Recognizing that during the pandemic students were placed at a higher risk of loss of education, Spencer Schools prioritized technology and access to meals by partnering with local businesses and local donor families to provide hot-spots for connectivity and free meals for students throughout the spring and summer. Summer school was provided to help students transition back into the school year.

Spencer Middle School has collaborated with Lutheran Social Services, and 8th graders use their LSI 3 R's program (Rights, Respect and Responsibility). This program helps students learn ways to prevent bullying, increase positive healthy relationships, and build communication skills. Respect, boundaries, gender roles, and topics regarding sex education are also included. Voluntary homework and activities aid parents and children to talk about choices. In 6th grade, the LSI instruction is about Hygiene, and for 7th graders the instruction is about on-line safety. In addition, Draw the Line/Respect the Line is presented to our 6th graders. It is an evidence-based curriculum that uses an interactive approach to show students how to set personal limits and meet challenges to those limits.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

Spencer Middle School takes pride in creating a professional learning environment that continually develops excellence in our teachers. We gather feedback from teachers on the specific professional development they need based on building goals. In addition, staff members are offered opportunities to attend professional development that fits their level of expertise. Teachers are able to participate in coaching cycles with Instructional Mentor Coaches; the IMCs use the Jim Knight model to facilitate the teacher driven cycle of instructional growth.

An integral component of professional development is our Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). In our PLCs, student data drives conversations and instructional design as we work to fulfill our mission of helping students reach their full potential by Learning Today, Leading Tomorrow. Another component of Professional Development is our Authentic Intellectual Work (AIW). In conjunction with PLCs, teachers are able to take the work of the PLC and incorporate it into taking specific instructional components and working to improve the task, instruction, and student work to ensure authentic higher level learning experiences for students.

Classroom visits and the Instructional Practices Inventory (IPI) have been key components to our professional development as well. Due to the Pandemic, we adhered to strict protocols and therefore these components were paused and will be implemented again in the 21-22 school year.

The master schedule provides time for daily grade level team meetings. Weekly, teachers collaborate with administrators, the school counselor, special education teachers, and Area Education Agency consultants. Teachers build Canvas modules to make the curriculum accessible to all students. The teams also use this time to work on the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) process, identifying student academic, social, and behavioral needs and adjusting instruction and intervention to meet these needs.

MTSS is a collaborative problem-solving approach that is data driven and implements multiple tiers of instruction and intervention. This process includes general education teachers, special education teachers, the guidance counselor, and AEA. The MTSS team utilizes many data collection tools, including universal screeners, Personalized Learner Profiles, and progress monitoring of research based instructional strategies to evaluate student needs and progress.

4. School Leadership:

Our leadership structure is the teacher leadership model. Teacher leaders are the backbone of the success of Spencer Schools. At the middle school, 19 of the 34 certified staff members (56%) hold leadership positions. At the building level, 3 Instructional Mentor Coaches (IMCs) lead professional learning. The Building Leadership Team (BLT) consists of the IMCs, Building Principal, district TLC Coordinator, and the Director of School Improvement. The team implements effective, research-based professional learning that revolves around district goals and teacher-determined needs. IMCs also serve on the District Leadership Team (DLT) consisting of the Superintendent, Administrators, and district IMCs to share concerns and make decisions incorporating the middle school perspective. The DLT Leadership also helped to develop mitigation strategies to successfully open our schools. Also, IMCs coach teachers using the Jim Knight coaching model. We had 46% of teachers participate in at least 1 coaching cycle last year and are on track to have a higher percentage this year. IMCs also serve as mentors for new teachers and experienced teachers

new to the district and to facilitate their learning and integration into our district.

In addition to the IMCs, we have Strategists that lead our PLCs. Each strategist meets with their administrator before and after the PLC meeting in order to review the goals, data, and direction of the team; however, the administrator only acts as a facilitator. The Strategists determine the SMART goal and data to review; the goals fall within the limits of the district PLC flowchart based on the Marzano High Reliability Schools model. We have incorporated a unique strategist position called the Data Strategist, who specifically organizes data with a focus on behavior data to determine at-risk students and then works with teachers to implement strategies to support those students.

Furthermore, we have Authentic Intellectual Work (AIW) Team Leaders that facilitate teachers in revising and improving tasks and teacher instruction. This is the other half of the data-driven professional learning communities.

We have Technology Teacher Leaders who both support teachers in their implementation of new instructional tech tools through co-teaching as well as lead whole-group professional development. Since we utilize the co-teaching model to support students on IEPs, we also have a Co-Teaching Strategist who supports co-teaching instructional strategies. Finally, our MS Climate & Culture Strategist focuses on the climate of the students, staff, and community through highlighting achievement and building relationships among all groups.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

A great concern in our community is supporting low income families. By acknowledging food insecurity in some students and their families within our community and surrounding area, SMS partnered with the Food Bank of Iowa to house and manage a food pantry, open to any student or family with children within the school district. Staff volunteer to work in the pantry. Local businesses and service organizations have held drives to keep the pantry stocked. During the pandemic, we found ways to continue to meet the needs of our families by packaging food for safe outdoor pick-up and scheduled visits.

When school closures were announced in Iowa in March 2020, the Superintendent and Administrative Team planned and implemented a daily breakfast/lunch pickup at each district building that continued until schools reopened in August.

To serve the needs of our English Language Learners, the Spencer Community School System has implemented our ELL Academy. The ELL Academy helps students acclimate to the language, culture, school, and community. Our ELL Academy serves students in a small group setting that builds community and differentiates their needs. This approach is especially effective for our new students. ELL students receive 90 minutes of intervention daily in the areas of language acquisition, reading, writing, and math. This small group intervention allows our students to progress much faster and become more comfortable in the general education environment. The ELL Academy helps our students build the confidence they need to be successful in their academic, social, and school community experiences. In addition, during the school shutdown our ELL staff delivered food and other necessities to ELL students and families. Each year summer school is provided for ELL students and outreach programs are provided for the families to help them assimilate into our school system, community, and culture.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

When faced with a global pandemic and the growing needs of students and families, Spencer Schools continued to work toward the commitment to make education accessible for all. The district provided Chromebooks and hotspots to allow equity for students and their ability to learn from home with the support of teachers. Long range planning provided for learning options and mitigation strategies to return to in person learning and to keep students and staff safe and in school.

All teachers were introduced to Canvas prior to the Pandemic. However, not all teachers were fluent in creating modules and in instructing using this digital format. In the spring of 2020, each teacher began to implement Canvas with support from tech teacher leaders, peers, and district leaders. Using Canvas allows all students, whether they are at home, at school, or on the bus, accessibility to the curriculum at all grade levels and in all content areas. Parents also have the same accessibility to curriculum as the students.

Canvas has helped students by leveling the academic playing field by allowing for differentiation for in-person learners, quarantined learners, and online learners all at the same time. It was especially helpful that our special education department was at the forefront of adopting Canvas. Their expertise provided us with much needed support.

These programs and interventions have helped students to build confidence and have improved the overall achievement performance of Spencer Middle School, which has been listed by the State of Iowa as a high-performing school for 2 of the last 3 years on the Iowa Schools Report Card.