

U.S. Department of Education
2021 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

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

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

School Mailing Address 8751 Willow Street
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Avoca State MI Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 48006-7702

County St. Clair County

Telephone (810) 387-3231 Fax (810) 324-2843

Web site/URL
<http://ypsd.us/index.php/schools/mainmenu-schools-avoca> E-mail myelle@ypsd.us

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. Kurt Sutton E-mail ksutton@ypsd.us
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Yale Public School District Tel. (810) 387-3231

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. Peter Bullard
(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):
- 3 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 1 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 5 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	6	3	9
K	15	15	30
1	27	14	41
2	18	19	37
3	29	23	52
4	17	16	33
5	19	22	41
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	131	112	243

*Schools that house PreK programs should count preschool students **only** if the school administration is responsible for the program.

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 0.1 % Asian
 - 0.1 % Black or African American
 - 0.1 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 99.6 % White
 - 0.1 % 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	8
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	9
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	17
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	298
(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):

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 63 %

Total number students who qualify: 152

8. Students receiving special education services: 30 %

74 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.

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| <u>1</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>1</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>13</u> Developmental Delay | <u>7</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>1</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>41</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>10</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 1

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.	12
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	5
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	7
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 20:1

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	93%	93%	94%	96%	94%
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.

Our mission is to be an innovative, positive, and encouraging school that offers exceptional education, and opportunities to learn and excel for all students. We recognize the importance of teaching the whole student and value family and community involvement.

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.

Avoca Elementary School (AES) has successfully maintained two operating models for Kindergarten through fifth grades for the entire 2020-2021 school year. We successfully maintained our traditional face-to-face model of instruction with abundant added safeguards against COVID-19 transmission. We also successfully offered a completely online option that was taught by our teachers, who utilized an existing online instructional delivery platform to supplement our district curriculum. In response to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services orders, AES did completely switch to all online classes for a brief time between the Thanksgiving and New Year holidays. Our teachers successfully delivered innovative online instruction to all students and maintained a daily average student attendance rate of 97 percent throughout the entire shutdown. To protect against learning loss during the mandatory shutdown, we provided devices to all families in need and installed outdoor internet availability on our campus. We also held fully staffed learning labs in the building and established in-person library times for each class during the face-to-face shutdown. These services were offered on alternate schedules, so that we could provide services at convenient times during the day and early evening for our families. These innovative offerings allowed us to ensure technological, academic, and social support for our students and families. To address the mental, emotional, and behavioral needs of all students, we also maintained face-to-face and virtual counseling and social work availability by appointment.

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

Our building participates in the school of choice program.

PART III - SUMMARY

Avoca Elementary School (AES) is located in the heart of the unincorporated Village of Avoca, in Kenockee Township, Michigan. AES is one of three elementary schools in the Yale Public School District. The Village of Avoca was founded in 1884 and received its name from one of its founding fathers, O'Brien J. Atkinson. Pride in his Irish ancestry encouraged him to name Avoca after a peaceful river valley by the same name that is located in County Wicklow, Ireland. Early Avoca inhabitants were hard-working people who were dedicated to the success of their community and deeply connected to their land, religion, and families. Residents today tend to continue to exhibit these values.

In the early 1800s, the lumber industry, farming opportunities, and abundant wildlife originally attracted families to the area. Many families today continue to enjoy these traditional outdoor activities, such as hunting, fishing, and farming. By 1882, the railroad was the main contributor to development and economic opportunity in Avoca, as there was a station located in town that provided daily passenger and mail service, as well as freight for the goods that local farm families generated. By the early 1900s, Avoca was a bustling village and commercial center that was home to many modern conveniences. Abundant commercial activity attracted businesses to Main Street, including a hotel, a pharmacy, a hardware, the post office, the phone company, barber shop, creamery, flour mill, pool room, dance hall, and numerous specialty shops and stores. In turn, these modern amenities and amusements attracted families from surrounding areas, and necessitated the process of centralizing the original six independent school districts that served the Kenockee Township school children. To finally accomplish this task, the Yale Public School District opened the current AES building on January 6, 1958 to welcome all 325 former students from the Avoca, Gillis, Fargo, Oatman, and Plaisted rural schools. From the very beginning, AES was a central unifying force in the community, as it continues to be today. Although times have changed and many of the economic opportunities have moved outside of the immediate Avoca area, families choose to commute to work and still reside in the area in order to enjoy the strong sense of community and to benefit from the high standard of educational excellence that they have come to expect for their children from AES. Our reputation for quality education also attracts students from outside the district.

AES is an attractive school of choice option for many families because of our reputation for excellence and high academic standards. Based on our at-risk indicators, we drastically overachieve in our performance on state assessments. Overall, 72 percent of AES students are identified as at-risk, and 63 percent of our students qualify for free or reduced lunches. Out of all our students, 31 percent receive special education services. Additionally, two percent of our students are foster children, and two percent are identified as homeless. Despite our large at-risk population, our state assessment results place Yale Public School District's elementary schools' scores at number one overall in St. Clair County. Our most recent overall school index score of 95.85 percent, as reported on the Michigan School Data Parent Dashboard for School Transparency, reflects our commitment to and achievement of high academic expectations for every Avoca student.

Despite the many challenges and uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have continued to expand this reputation for educational excellence. Currently, our building is home to 280 students, of which 12 percent are school of choice. Our general education program consists of thirteen Kindergarten through fifth grade classrooms. Many innovative curricular programs and instructional initiatives contribute to the overwhelming success of all our students, especially during this unprecedented time. Academically, Avoca staff focuses heavily on literacy and mathematics goals. After a previous identification as a "Focus School," Avoca staff planned and executed a monumental comeback that included pioneering the early adaptation of MAISA (Michigan Association of Intermediate School Districts) reading and writing units and Math Expressions curriculums. Avoca's talented staff and their admirable success with implementing these curricula was instrumental in spearheading these curriculum adoptions throughout the district's other two elementary buildings. The subsequent growth in student achievement scores also quickly impacted surrounding districts as they attempted to achieve similar results using the same curricular approaches and teaching strategies Avoca had chosen as the basis for the improvement plan. Avoca then served as a teaching site that hosted visiting educators who were interested in watching how Avoca was making such monumental student achievement gains using these tools.

This year, Avoca continues these focuses, but staff is making monumental efforts to increase improvement by necessarily shifting focus from class and small group differentiation to meeting each student exactly where they are and differentiating for individual student needs. The pandemic has created greater individual learning gaps and highlighted specific educational inequities that Avoca staff have become skilled at identifying and successfully addressing at the individual student level. This shift in professional perspective has allowed Avoca students to experience minimal learning loss and to demonstrate resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. We swiftly adapted to provide economic support to our families by providing food services during shutdown. We designed and implemented a plan to bridge technology gaps by providing Chromebooks, hot spots, and Wi-Fi accessibility to our families. We maintained and expanded social, emotional, and behavioral supports as we offered many after-hours services to families, such as learning labs, library accessibility, therapy-based counseling services, counselor and social worker appointments, speech and language services, and physical and occupational therapy.

When these fundamental pieces are added to the many different levels of Positive Behavior Initiatives and Supports programs that are offered in our building, the Accelerated Reader program that encourages independent reading, and our strong focus on social and emotional education in and out of the classroom, our building culture really shines. Ultimately, our success boils down to the fact that we are a family of learners who create a warm and inviting environment for the foundations of student success to flourish. We value students as individuals and foster a sense of belonging and community within our schoolhouse walls. Avoca students and staff are connected and supported, which creates a solid foundation from which to take the academic risks that foster meaningful learning.

Our Student Needs Assessment Committee (SNAC) is a great example of this culmination. The SNAC team meets on a regular basis to discuss academic, behavioral, social, and emotional needs of identified students. Our committee consists of the student's classroom teacher, our resource room teacher, our school counselor/social worker, our speech and language pathologist, the principal, and the child's parent(s). Through these meetings, the student's strengths are highlighted, and their weaknesses are identified. Targeted interventions are discussed and implemented for each child. These supports provide students customized opportunities for positive learning experiences that facilitate increased achievement within our proven curricular and instructional frameworks. Our systems approach to identifying student needs allows our community of learners and educators to routinely focus on the whole child as the means of growth and development.

In addition to our K-5 general education responsibilities, AES is also the centralized location for many of the district's special services programs. We house the Avoca Children's Center that provides preschool and latchkey services to our community. We also house the district's Early Childhood Special Education Program that provides special education services, community wrap-around supports, physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech and language services for two- to five-year-old students. AES is also home to the Kindergarten through fifth grade Cognitively Impaired Program that provides these same services for the district's K-5 special education students. We not only extend the previously mentioned curricular and instructional approaches to students in these programs, but we also continue to focus on the whole child, which results in the same extraordinary student outcomes demonstrated in the general education environment.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

Our core curriculum for reading and writing comes from the Michigan Association of Intermediate Administrators (MAISA) program that was developed by the Oakland Schools Literacy Team and piloted by teachers statewide. This program is aligned with the Common Core Standards and is vertically aligned across grade levels. AES staff chose this curriculum as a part of their growth plan following their designation as a Focus School. MAISA curriculum was chosen because of the Universal Design for Learning Framework that is embedded in the units of study. This program provides every student with the opportunity to learn and demonstrate their knowledge and skills. It allows teachers to have high expectations for every student, regardless of the student's reading level, and contains a blueprint of success for all students.

Our mathematics curriculum utilizes the Houghton Mifflin Math Expressions program. This curriculum is inquiry-based, and it builds on deep understandings of mathematical relationships and foundational concepts. Our teachers continuously work with our regional educational service agency consultant to broaden their understanding of the program and the instructional practices best suited to the content. The program is vertically aligned across grade levels and is also aligned with the Common Core Standards. It was chosen specifically because it develops critical thinking skills for students by instilling an understanding of the “why” within mathematical computations.

Our science curriculum comes from the Project Lead the Way curriculum framework. It focuses on providing real-world applications of standards and performance expectations found in the Next Generation Science Standards. It is vertically aligned across grade levels and was specifically chosen for its focus on modern scientific challenges and the inclusion of problem solving and critical thinking strategies. This approach teaches students how to use communication, collaboration, and perseverance skills when something does not work the first time. It also prepares teachers to engage students in hands-on learning experiences by empowering them to develop in-demand knowledge and skills that are necessary to thrive in science career pathways. AES also uses Mystery Science to supplement our other curriculum to enrich our students' conceptual understanding.

Our social studies curriculum is currently a work in progress as we look to emulate the vertical and Common Core Standard alignment we have achieved in other content areas. This year, we use the Michigan Citizenship Collaborative Curriculum as the foundation of our social studies instruction. This gives us a research-based approach to instruction and assessment through grade level content spirals that focus on individual and family responsibilities in the lower elementary grades, local and state government topics in the middle elementary grades, and national government and history issues in the upper elementary grades. Additional curriculum resources used by AES staff include Social Studies Weekly, Scholastic publications, the Michigan Open Book Project, and many other resources, including primary source documents and online resources. CommonLit cross curricular strategies in all core content areas are utilized to help build connections between social studies information and real-life application opportunities. Our district is in the active process of developing a cohesive plan of action around social studies curriculum.

Instructional approaches in all content areas involve Kagan Cooperative Learning Strategies and Talk Moves. As a district, we adopted Kagan Cooperative Learning Strategies as our fundamental instructional approach. This innovative pedagogical shift led to further student achievement gains as our staff became skilled educational facilitators and our students became independent learners who were more actively engaged as influential stakeholders in their educational progress. Through the adoption of Talk Moves as another instructional pillar, our building creates a safe platform from which students are empowered to take intellectual risks and to discuss their findings. Through this inquiry-based discussion approach, our students can take further ownership of their learning and drive future instruction.

AES uses summative assessment data, such as our results from the Michigan Student Test of Educational Progress (M-STEP) to guide our systems approach to comprehensive instructional alignment. We formatively use our Renaissance Star 360 results to determine each student's baseline performance and to

track student achievement and growth throughout the year. We use Star Progress Monitoring to track how students are progressing in relation to their individual learning goals and the Diagnostic Report to identify each student's strengths and weaknesses. This formative assessment data provides the opportunity for our teachers and support staff to make quality decisions on future instructional trajectories and practices that would be most beneficial for future use with particular cohorts. Use of this summative and formative data increases our capacity to meaningfully differentiate instruction in targeted ways, to create tiered instructional practices that speak to our students' current performance levels, and to develop appropriate explicit instruction models for our students' abilities and interests. We managed to maintain our traditional assessment schedule for both virtual and face-to-face students during the pandemic.

The challenges presented by COVID-19 have made maintaining the fidelity of our systems approach to curriculum and assessment even more critical. We could not afford to abandon our proven approach to data analysis if we hoped to minimize learning loss and to continue the student achievement gains we had worked so hard to facilitate. Therefore, to continue our student achievement ascent throughout the pandemic, we did not deviate from the systems approach to data analysis. However, the unique challenges did require us to shift to a smaller data lens by drilling down to the individual student level more frequently than by class or cohort. This was necessary as each COVID-related adjustment that classes had to make, to ensure that the reality of their individual classroom situation was manageable, led to increasingly different learning trajectories. Different modes of instruction, teacher instructional adaptations, various impacts of classroom quarantine shutdowns, and differences in infection rates, etc. now made it impossible for grade-level cohorts to progress through curriculum in lockstep. It became immediately apparent that our differentiation had to shift to meet each individual student exactly where they were, as COVID-19 protocols and numerous instructional modes created disparities that were too great to bridge if viewed through the wider data lens of grade-level cohort.

Even though we have managed to maintain many of our traditional programs, the pandemic's cohort restrictions significantly limited our ability to offer our usual before, during, and after school programs. We instead found innovative ways to alternately provide urgent interventions for students who were below grade level benchmark performance based on data from district assessment tools. We targeted English Language Arts, Literacy, and Mathematics content and skills. We invested in remediation programs and staff to differentiate interventions for individual students, and then worked with students in small, cohort groups within the school day. We creatively leveraged our paraprofessional support time to run grade-level remediation groups and to provide curriculum support time to classrooms. Remediation groups were held in alternate settings that allowed regular classroom instruction to continue, while targeted remediation was safely taking place for other students. We focused on providing best-practice kinesthetic learning opportunities for students struggling with increased mental and emotional stressors that negatively impacted their ability to focus in the traditional classroom setting. While in virtual learning mode, we staffed in-person learning labs four days a week, at three different times throughout the day, to provide internet availability and academic support for struggling students. Our dedication to the development and education of the whole child amid COVID-19 restrictions is also evident in the provision of a full-time counselor, a full-time social-worker, and a school nurse who are responsible for the mental, emotional, and physical health of our students. We have also invested in our playground and recreation areas to make sure that they are disability compliant and friendly for students with sensory processing issues and students with trauma-informed backgrounds during this particularly stressful time. We also strategically leveraged our rural location and large campus to expand our options for healthy instructional spaces. We installed outdoor Wi-Fi access on campus for families without internet access. The outdoor Wi-Fi also created an opportunity for face-to-face classes to engage in virtual learning activities while safely outside. We additionally invested in updating our outdoor classroom space and provided several new cart stations for teachers to use when planning outside instructional activities. We did all this and invested in our available laptop technology to continue our student growth and achievement trends, as well as to accommodate COVID-19 restrictions and to close technology gaps for our students and their families during this unique year. Our community and Avoca families have continued to appreciate and support our efforts during this unprecedented time.

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

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

Our traditional preschool curriculum academically focuses on achieving school readiness through foundational literacy skills and functional mathematics capabilities, including letter and number recognition, phonics instruction, color and shape recognition, and functional understanding of basic numerical concepts. Instruction includes fine and gross motor skill development, language development, communication, and student independence. There is a heavy emphasis on social and emotional development through play and naturally occurring inquiry-based learning opportunities. Our Early Childhood Special Education preschool program focuses on these same concepts through the lens of Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals.

COVID-19 has created many challenges for our preschool populations. We have found the mask requirement to be detrimental to preschool students' progress. Cloth masks make it particularly difficult for our youngest students to interpret facial cues and oral postures. Cloth masks also muffle sounds and make articulation unclear to students, making acquisition of language and vocabulary exceedingly difficult for them. Another challenge created by COVID-19 is the decreased use of manipulatives due to the time and staff required to complete necessary cleaning protocols. Loss of instructional time to additional cleaning needed between instructional centers and restroom breaks is also a challenge. We have adapted to these challenges by providing clear alternatives to cloth masks and streamlining processes and schedules for hand washing and frequent hand sanitizing. We have invested heavily in additional personal protective equipment, such as acrylic table dividers so that preschool students can take mask breaks more safely and frequently. We have directed parents to mask waiver requirements when appropriate for individual preschool students. We also offer virtual and face-to-face appointments with our Speech and Language Pathologists to preschool students.

Preschool teachers, paraprofessionals, and ancillary support staff work very closely with Kindergarten through Third Grade teachers to align curriculum and to make student placement decisions. Staff from these levels cooperate in assessment clinics, progress monitoring meetings, and IEP updates to determine appropriate services and to continuously track progress of all preschool students. Staff also work together to closely monitor the strengths and weaknesses of all preschool students as they progress through the grades to adjust future instruction. The subsequent adjustments to preschool curriculum and instruction strengthen all Avoca students' academic, social, and behavioral foundations. Focusing on the rigor and scope of our preschool programs has resulted in noticeable improvements in Kindergarten success rates and student enjoyment of school. This is most noticeable as Early Childhood Special Education students "graduate" to typically developing preschool programs or general education Kindergarten classes, and no longer require special education supports.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

All Avoca students are fortunate to receive weekly instruction in visual arts, physical education, music, and technology. Kindergarten through fifth grade students all receive one forty-minute session of each class per week, with an extra session of one of the classes for the fifth day. One of the opportunities for Special Education students to receive grade-level general education inclusion time is during these classes each day. All Avoca students also benefit from an hour of weekly library time. Every classroom enjoys thirty-minute Library sessions, twice a week. With teacher permission, students may also visit the library when there is not another classroom scheduled to be there.

Avoca's specials instructors and media technician are highly qualified in their subjects and knowledgeable in their field services. They all work diligently to create cross curricular applications during their instructional time. Our specials instructors and media technician also make efforts to support district instructional initiatives during their content delivery.

Our visual arts program allows Avoca students to creatively express themselves through various mediums. Finished art pieces are proudly displayed throughout our building and on various school social media outlets. We also use our art projects to celebrate holidays and to give thanks to groups like our veterans, nurses, first responders, educators, etc. Students also explore the importance of the historical contributions of diverse groups and explore cultural expression through the study of regional art forms. Our art lessons

introduce students to great artists throughout history and endeavor to develop student appreciation and respect for all art forms.

Our physical education instruction is rooted in the nationally recognized Exemplary Physical Education Curriculum. Avoca's physical education experiences aim to develop positive attitudes and personal habits that will sustain and promote a physically active and healthy lifestyle for all students. Athletic skills are taught and developed through introduction to team and individual sports, as well as structured play opportunities that help to develop gross and fine motor skills, along with promoting appropriate social interaction and community among students.

The music program at Avoca Elementary School immerses students in vocal and instrumental music through consistent exploration of movement, beats, range, pitch, melody, harmony, site reading, etc. These concepts and many others are rooted in the Michigan Merit Curriculum and offer students the opportunity to learn choral and instrumental performance standards as well. We are currently investing significant resources into our music programs to purchase instruments and technology that will allow for immediate expansion of the music experience for all students.

Our technology instruction is not only a stand-alone class but is also embedded within general classroom instruction to create a natural cross-curricular looping of technology skills and knowledge. All students are introduced to and become proficient in the Google suite of applications. They use technology at various levels to collaborate on projects and assignments. Students have abundant access to desktop computers, Chromebooks, and tablets on a regular basis. Technology instruction at Avoca aims to create life and career skills that directly relate to science and technology career pathways, in addition to increased academic achievement. For example, our technology curriculum recently began including exposure to coding through student work with robots. Our technology curriculum stresses competency in computer literacy and digital citizenship. Technology is also used to improve academic achievement by reiterating reading, writing, and math skills through the use of academic applications and platforms.

COVID-19 cohort protocols and limitations on volunteers and visitors hindered our ability to offer our usually robust academic, social, and emotional extracurricular experiences. However, our counseling and social work staff still managed to visit every classroom three times this year to provide character education lessons at all grade levels. These lessons included personal body safety, personal hygiene, and social skill lessons for all Avoca students throughout the school year. The Child Abuse and Neglect Council also visited the school to present their Child Safety Matters program in two, hour-long lessons to all face-to-face and virtual, cognitively-impaired and general education kindergarten through fifth grade students. Fourth and fifth grade face-to-face and virtual students also received puberty lessons, with fifth grade students experiencing an additional lesson on HIV (human immunodeficiency virus). We also added to our staff this year, a Community Mental Health (CMH) Counselor who runs social skills student groups for all Avoca students who demonstrate a need for these skills. The CMH Counselor also provides individual therapy-based services to families and students who do not have access to mental health care outside of the school building. Office hours for therapy appointments extend into the evening to accommodate family schedules. Traditionally, Avoca students also benefit from before- and after-school language arts programs and a summer reading program. However, cohort restrictions and social distancing protocols made it impossible to offer these programs safely. We plan to reinstate our extracurricular programs to full capacity as soon as COVID-19 restrictions allow.

3. Academic Supports:

Avoca Elementary School takes pride in the innovative approaches used to provide student supports. We continuously monitor student growth using STAR assessment data, M-STEP results, MI School Data, and numerous local assessments. We look for student achievement trends in our data that inform our instructional choices. Students and student subgroups, who are performing at and below benchmark levels, are identified so that staff can design and implement appropriate individualized interventions, targeted to close student achievement gaps and facilitate student growth. Using STAR assessment results for 2020-2021, our economically-disadvantaged

population makes up approximately nine percent of our bottom 30 percent in reading and approximately 11 percent of our bottom 30 percent in math. In 2018, according to the most recent year's available M-STEP data, Avoca students ranked impressively when compared to the twenty-six other elementary schools in the county. Avoca's third, fourth, and fifth grade English Language Arts M-STEP scores all ranked in the top four schools in the county. Math scores were equally impressive, with third, fourth, and fifth graders again scoring in the top four schools or better. Avoca's third grade ELA and fourth and fifth Grade math scores were in the top ten percent in the county. Avoca's third grade math, fourth and fifth grade ELA, and fifth grade social studies scores were in the top 20 percent of the county. Avoca and the other two Yale Public School District elementary schools combined for the overall number one county rank for district elementary school scores. Many innovative systems approaches to closing achievement gaps are responsible for Avoca students, with a 72 percent at-risk student population, being able to outperform districts with much smaller at-risk populations.

Our Student Needs Assessment Committee (SNAC) works with students who are identified as needing additional supports (Tier II). The SNAC committee constructs a detailed action plan that is implemented by all stakeholders: student, parent, teacher, counselor or social worker, special service providers, and administrator. Follow-up SNAC committee meetings are held every thirty days for each student's progress monitoring, documentation, and plan adjustments, to ensure that goals are being met and supports provided with fidelity. Classroom teachers and paraprofessionals are responsible for implementing the interventions with Tier II students. They match instructional and intervention strategies to the student's strengths and interests, while targeting their specific weaknesses. Games, graphic organizers, visual aids, and kinesthetic learning experiences are examples of strategies that are implemented with students. Lessons are often delivered in short sessions and assignments are condensed to give students the opportunity to respond and receive immediate instructional feedback that facilitates understanding.

Students requiring one-on-one or small group Tier III interventions receive extended instruction time from our resource room teacher. In addition to receiving differentiated core instruction in the classroom, our Tier III students receive individualized instruction targeting their demonstrated weaknesses. These instructional services are scheduled frequently and over an extended portion of the school year. Student understanding is continuously monitored, and immediate feedback decreases misunderstandings and facilitates rapid improvement. Avoca students requiring Tier III interventions also receive small group instruction from paraprofessionals in the classroom on a daily basis. These small groups target student weaknesses, particularly in reading and math, and provide scaffolded supports to help build specialized academic performance skills. Tier III students also receive additional support through this year's adoption of the Fast Forward reading program by Scientific Learning. Our economically-disadvantaged student subgroup has overachieved as shown by a 93 percent completion rate in their Fast Forward units. The expected standard of completion is only 65 percent.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

In 2020-2021, the importance of engaging and motivating students within a positive environment is not just impacting student potential for academic achievement. Establishing a positive and safe environment for learning is absolutely imperative to the mental and emotional well-being of our students. The new stressors and many sources of uncertainty around the COVID-19 pandemic have increased anxiety and created active safety concerns that limit students' capacity to value their learning opportunities and to fully engage as they did before. Avoca staff have responded by putting existing systems into overdrive, by implementing new strategies, and increasing focus on personal connections for all students.

For example, Positive Behavior and Support Initiatives have been retooled with increased expectations for recognizing positive student behavior, engagement, and contributions. Staff is now purposefully focusing on a five-to-one positive interaction ratio with students. The prizes that can be earned by students have been upgraded; and, the presentation of prizes to weekly winners has been shifted to the classroom instead of taking place in the office. This allows the entire class to be able to celebrate and to share in the positive experience with their peers. The updated version of this activity motivates other students to also engage in classroom activities and to contribute positively to the classroom in order to earn Amazing Tickets and to have a chance at being chosen as an Avoca All-Star.

Avoca staff also strategically chose communication improvement as a goal this year because we recognized the importance of maintaining connections and building strong relationships with students and families in our efforts to establish a positive learning environment in the face of so much COVID-19 controversy. No matter which mode of instructional delivery we were in, Avoca staff made concerted efforts to recognize positive student behavior and to creatively and repetitively celebrate our student successes and growth with parents and our community. We adapted to the restrictions that limited us bringing our community and families into the building to create supportive and positive learning environments by digitally sending our celebrations out into the community for all to enjoy. We leveraged social media and used more frequent communication in increasingly creative modes than ever before to motivate students to engage in our positive learning environments. We inundated our stakeholders with positive messages, affirmations, appreciation, and transparency from the student, classroom teacher, and administrative levels. This consistently positive branding resulted in unrivaled support for our staff and students and in the increase of student engagement and motivation levels.

Student engagement was also increased by our previously mentioned shift in focus from the larger cohort perspective to more highly individualized instruction and attention. One example of this is the way we have strategically leveraged our paraprofessionals' availability through schedule reorganization and cohort group lessons. These shifts have created a basis for more and stronger staff and student relationships that foster academic achievement. Students are motivated by and engage for staff members who are connected and caring. Avoca students are fortunate that staff has purposefully invested in the relationship aspect of our building in order to foster increased engagement that results in impressive academic growth, even in the face of COVID-19 adversity.

Avoca staff also positively impacted student engagement by investing abundant time and financial resources into updating instructional materials available for use in remediation sessions and with Title I paraprofessionals. Much consideration was given to modern student interests, multiple intelligences learning styles, and kinesthetic learning opportunities that would motivate students who were otherwise struggling to engage in traditional classroom settings. These new resources are challenging, yet enjoyable, and students look forward to the time spent with staff, exploring academic content through play.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Engaging our families and community has always been one of Avoca Elementary School's strengths. We have long-standing partnerships with community agencies, businesses, organizations, and families that span

generations. These close connections are and have always been woven into the fabric of AES culture. This year, the painful absence of these established interactions with parents and community members due to COVID-19 restrictions, has been keenly felt by all stakeholders. Prior to the pandemic, Avoca enjoyed strong parent volunteer presence and Parent Teacher Organization involvement in some form, on a daily basis. Family engagement nights were held regularly. Career Day was a time that our roots in the community were highlighted through abundant participation by community members. We celebrated holidays and Veterans Day in grand style with our community. We showcased our students' talents and schoolwork through programs and concerts. We celebrated student successes with awards nights. Our campus was open to community members before, during, and after school hours to provide academic and extracurricular opportunities to our students. All of these activities came to a screeching halt during the 2020-2021 school year. At the very least, they were drastically altered to fit the COVID-19 parameters and some of the essence of community these traditions embodied was lost. To bridge the gap created by COVID-19 restrictions that limited visitors, volunteers, large gatherings, etc., we once again turned to communication.

We were able to continue many of our partnerships with local businesses and community organizations through creative utilization of technology to stream guest speakers and presentations into classrooms. We were able to share our various holiday celebrations with families and the community via videos and slideshows shared on various platforms. We were able to celebrate holidays and honor our Veterans through student-produced literature, artwork, and songs shared via social media. We celebrated student awards in newsletters and the local newspaper. We worked together on traditional fundraisers to develop ways to leverage technology and social media to reach and involve our community. We creatively figured out ways for parents to volunteer outside and in socially distanced ways, like popping popcorn under tents and moving our Halloween parade outside so parents and community members could view it from a safe distance. We created a plan for family movie night to move outside and to use the side of our building and a projector to allow families to spread out on campus to enjoy the event. We held virtual Parent Teacher Organization meetings. We made sure to communicate frequently and creatively via Facebook pages, building and class newsletters, the Remind app, email, Edulink Intouch messages, and Skyward emails. We also shared many events and information with our local newspaper, including student achievements and school initiatives. We also encouraged families to engage with their students in virtual learning activities. Parents were officially called "learning coaches" and had specific responsibilities as part of the instructional team. They worked with teachers to facilitate student learning and were instrumental in virtual learning success.

The local fire department, sheriff's department, Lions Club, Knights of Columbus, Kiwanis, Scouts, and many local businesses have historically provided support for our school through things, such as fundraisers, donations, educational visits, and service learning partnerships. Many of these activities continued in safely altered ways that were heavily aided by technology. Our school gives back to the community by completing community service projects like trail cleanup, providing a Little Free Library in our outdoor classroom, expanding outdoor Wi-Fi access, hosting Little League and Youth Basketball practices, and contributing to community fundraisers.

Our counselor and social worker also facilitate multiple family and community engagement services. During COVID-19, unfortunately we experienced tragedy, resulting in the community relying heavily on our counselor and social worker to provide grief counseling and support in various ways. Positively, they orchestrate the backpack giveaway for students and families in the fall of each year. They plan and carry out the monumental task of assisting needy families through our annual Thanksgiving basket giveaway. Their biggest community engagement activity is through their Julie's Kids organization. Our counselor and social worker, through Julie's Kids funding, provide full Christmas celebrations to families in our building who would otherwise go completely without. This year they have somehow managed to continue these community connections and service projects while struggling with the hurdles COVID-19 put up in regard to all social interactions.

The positive character traits modeled through these partnerships teach valuable lessons about the importance of helping others and supporting the less fortunate in times of need. It allows us to work together to demonstrate just how important and impactful it is to be responsible and contributing citizens who have a

positive impact on our community. Students are able to feel the joy and pride of being a positive change agent through community service and learn from watching school staff give of themselves and their time to make our community a better place. Our ability to continue to work together to offer unique opportunities to our students was certainly challenged this year. However, those challenges were no match for our creativity and determination to continue our strong community relationships and parental involvement for the benefit of our students.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

The 2020-2021 school year presented very unique needs, many of which revolved around the importance of maintaining a positive professional culture by focusing on the mental and emotional health of students and staff. We maintain purposeful practices that positively begin the day for all students and staff. Our students are greeted by bus drivers as they board the bus, and then witness the bus drivers being greeted by the principal with waves and excitement as they pull onto campus in the morning. The principal then greets students in the same way, making efforts to address each student by name and to start the 5:1 positive interaction ratio for students by genuinely recognizing effort and complimenting students in various ways. While making their way to class, students are greeted in the hallways and engage in conversation with staff members and one another. The counselor and social worker are in the halls checking in with students. Teachers are at classroom doors welcoming students into the class for the day. After the buses leave campus and the school doors are secured, the principal visits each classroom for a morning greeting and check-ins with students who have been identified by teachers as needing additional positive attention. The counselor, social worker, and principal help to facilitate universal breakfast offerings. They are seen contributing to the care of the school by straightening the hallways and assisting students with various tasks taking place at the lockers. Teachers welcome the principal into the classroom, and the pair often use enthusiastic greetings and employ appropriate humorous interactions with one another to get students to start the day off with a smile.

The same approach to the beginning of the day is evident between staff members. All staff members greet one another and engage in genuine conversation about family and the private events of the last evening. All staff demonstrate genuine interest in one another and are often engaged in humorous interactions. Staff can be seen in groups, laughing together and enjoying each other's company. Staff freely interact and frequently visit the counseling center, main office, principal's office, and teachers' lounge to engage in professional and personal conversation. Staff are comfortable sharing celebrations and also leaning on one another to vent their frustrations with the current challenges we face during the pandemic. The principal is freely and frequently in classrooms interacting with teachers and students. The counselor and social worker are also in classrooms regularly providing support to teachers. Staff members spend daily downtime and stay after school together, engaging in physical exercise such as walking the halls and around the campus when weather permits.

Counseling and social work staff play an important role in facilitating an environment in which teachers feel valued and supported. The Avoca counselor and social worker complete regular check-ins with staff by visiting the classrooms during prep times to talk with colleagues about professional and personal information as needed. These check-ins create additional professional rapport and the safe space for staff to receive support related to issues, such as personal relationships and family dynamics, grief support, financial concerns, mental health, emotional health, etc. Avoca's counselor and social worker also provided critical support to our teachers during the mandatory transition to virtual learning, as they visited classrooms to provide coverage so that the teachers could leave the classroom to prepare materials for virtual learning activities. Their support expressed the value that our counselor and social worker place on the professional services that our teachers provide. Avoca is privileged to have an outstanding counselor and a social worker in whom we not only have complete confidence in their professional skills, but with whom we are also strongly personally connected. We trust them completely and depend on them for our own mental and emotional needs, as well as those of our students. In a normal year, our counselor and social worker also facilitate staff outings throughout the year that allow us to gather as friends outside of the school day to feel supported and to foster a sense of belonging within the staff. Those activities were heavily curtailed this year, but we expect to fully reengage in collegial fun as soon as COVID-19 restrictions allow.

members. Appreciation is frequently expressed verbally and in writing, in both personal and public ways. Inspirational quotes are often shared in mailboxes with personal encouraging notes included on them. Humorous professional memes that pertain to Avoca culture and/or current events are shared in teacher mailboxes and periodically on weekly staff newsletters. Surprise breakfasts and lunches are periodically provided for staff by the Parent Teacher Organization and the principal. The principal facilitated a staff lunch potluck to bring colleagues together to share food and time during the early part of the year. She also involves local businesses in donating gifts as surprise tokens of teacher appreciation throughout the year. The principal also plans and coordinates extensive teacher appreciation week activities to make sure teachers feel valued and supported for what they accomplish throughout the year. Teachers, the counselor, the social worker, and the principal frequently use technology to communicate to one another during and outside of school hours about official business, private questions and concerns, and personal conversations. Staff is comfortable discussing concerns with and asking for needed supports from one another, the counselor, the social worker, and the principal. The principal immediately attempts to address staff concerns and to provide the requested supports to the best of her ability. Staff is confident that the principal will advocate for their needs and put in the work to remove any roadblocks to their professional practice. If the principal does not have the answer to a question, staff is confident that she will look into finding the answer and communicating it back to them. Staff is also confident in receiving requested supports from the counselor and social worker and know that these individuals will also advocate for their best interests and welfare as needed.

Avoca Elementary School has such a strong professional culture to begin with, that we were able to automatically weather the mental and emotional challenges of education, in the time of COVID-19, with relative grace. During one of the most tumultuous years in the history of public education, we successfully faced uncertainty around every corner. We worked through the growing pains of acclimating to a new building administrator, figuring out virtual learning, adapting face-to-face instruction to comply with COVID-19 restrictions, implementing new initiatives, adapting traditions to fit our “new normal,” managing mask mandates, figuring out how standardized testing would look, transitioning to virtual learning and back again, and orchestrating quarantines and COVID19 infections, etc. Together, we settled into the uncomfortable space between each hurdle, and learned how to effectively operate in constant reaction mode, while continuing to effectively educate our students. Even though the anxiety was overwhelming, we consistently achieved, and we conquered every obstacle. This was possible because of our collective commitment to supporting one another and thinking of the team first. This selfless staff chose to invest in relationships as the basis for teachers feeling valued and supported. We cheered each other on and committed to picking each other up along the way, until we achieved and even exceeded our traditional standard of educational excellence for all students.

4. School Leadership:

The main leadership role at Avoca Elementary School is fulfilled by the principal. Other school leaders include the Superintendent of Yale Public Schools and the Assistant Superintendent. The main day-to-day operation of the school is overseen by the principal, as our school is located some distance away from the district’s main campus. However, all school leaders work together to ensure that the students and staff are successful, supported, and safe on a daily basis. Avoca teachers and support staff also play critical roles in building leadership.

The philosophy of our principal is that healthy, supported, and happy teachers create healthy, supported, and happy students. The principal, teachers, and support staff work together to remind one another of the importance of self-care. All stakeholders are encouraged and empowered to care for our personal families and needs first. This approach was especially critical during the 2020-2021 school year, during which anxiety and workloads both dramatically increased, just as uncertainty and fear also entered the social atmosphere of our country. The principal set clear expectations that staff was to make themselves the number one priority so that we would have the energy and drive to then do the same for our students during the workday. This philosophy was the key to making sure teachers had the stamina and capacity to focus their efforts on student achievement.

relationship between our school leader and the students is one of the important aspects of our school. Each morning, the principal greets students. Each afternoon, she sends them off with a wave. During the day, the principal is doing things, like visiting classrooms, talking to students in the lunchroom, singing Karaoke in the gym, and helping students with schoolwork, or listening to them read. She puts a lot of effort into “catching students being good” and in working behind the scenes to quietly provide necessities to students and families in need. The principal has the added responsibility this year of not only looking after student and staff needs, but also monitoring the needs of entire families in regard to technology, Wi-Fi availability, providing food, securing social welfare services, etc. By ensuring that these types of needs are met, the principal is able to assist teachers in limiting learning loss for students. Even though the mask mandates for the 2020-2021 school year make it difficult to recognize students and the principal is new to our building this year, she still makes every effort to address students by name and to make sure they know that they are all valuable members of our Avoca family.

Leadership at Yale Public School District is likewise focused on building a professional family, and the phrase “family first” can often be heard in all buildings throughout the district. The district leadership team worked together with the counselors and social workers to plan and implement a Wellness Weekend, during which work related in any way to school was strictly forbidden for all stakeholders. Teachers could not grade or plan. Students could not do schoolwork. Families did not have to complete any virtual work. All stakeholders were to take a much-needed break and to focus on their needs and their families. District level leaders supported student achievement initiatives, social emotional programs, and the general well-being of staff and students by pouring unprecedented financial resources into all aspects of the student experience during the 2020-2021 school year. Classroom resources were provided. Extra duty-free work time for teachers was arranged within the school day. Hazard pay and stipends were provided to teachers and support staff in appreciation for their monumental contributions to the care and well-being of our students. The superintendent and assistant superintendent also made sure to include all stakeholders in crucial conversations. The superintendent, demonstrating his understanding of the whole child concept of education, allocated additional financial resources to expand the music programs at the elementary buildings and to update the playgrounds at each building. District leadership extended opportunities for paid time off for employees needing COVID-19 relief due to infection or quarantine. They graciously worked with staff to proactively assist in the Family Medical Leave Act process to secure time so that staff could take care of their families. They worked with county and government officials to guarantee that our staff all had access to COVID-19 vaccines as soon as possible and achieved the highest district vaccination rate in the county. The superintendent and assistant superintendent worked together to accomplish all this in the name of ensuring student achievement, and still managed to maintain sending out their traditional birthday cards to employees and thank you cards recognizing efforts around the district.

The teachers fulfill pivotal leadership roles every year. They volunteer on committees and serve as department heads, school improvement team members, and teacher representatives on Avoca’s Parent Teacher Organization. Avoca teacher leaders coach teams and sponsor clubs. This year they managed to fulfill all these types of traditional leadership roles and then some. The most impressive demonstration of leadership capacity from staff during the 2020-2021 school year occurred while they were learning and implementing new virtual learning opportunities and instructional platforms. Staff owned these initiatives and provided professional development to one another. Staff members created videos demonstrating to one another how to use our virtual instructional platform. Teachers set up how-to documents for various topics and created shared Google-docs for easy access. Their leadership was instrumental in making it possible for Avoca students to continue receiving quality instruction throughout the pandemic.

The capacity for leadership within our district ranks is a strength of our education system at Yale Public Schools. Administration’s support of staff, and staff’s subsequent ability to support students and families has created a strong community based on trust and mutual respect. The special feelings of family, community, and dedication to success that exist within Avoca Elementary School cannot be quantified, but they surely impact the well-being of all our stakeholders and their ability to be the best contributing member of our Avoca family that they can be, every single day. That is the ultimate measure of our success.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

Avoca Elementary School does not naturally experience great diversity within our community and student population. We have recognized that this lack of diversity can be a detriment to the developing world views of our students. In 2020-2021, we are taking purposeful steps to increase cultural diversity exposure for all students. We have committed to including culturally diverse topics in our core curriculum and in our specials' programs. We have also increased our culturally diverse resources that are available to students. For example, a grant we received this year to purchase books for classroom libraries was completely dedicated to buying books that featured culturally diverse authors, characters, topics, locations, races, family makeups, religious preferences, economic classes, genders, etc. Our media technician has greatly increased the culturally diverse literature offerings available to our students as well by dedicating a significant portion of her budget to this goal. She also ensures that all book fairs and opportunities that are sent home for families to purchase books include culturally diverse choices. Our music program purposefully chooses instrumentation from various cultures and backgrounds. By design, students listen to and perform culturally diverse music selections. Our music teacher develops curriculum around the existing cultural identities of our students with the goal of expanding their cultural awareness beyond our small community. Our art program focuses on the study of culturally diverse modes of artistic expression. Students engage in many culturally diverse art forms and make historical connections to the cultural themes expressed in artwork. Our core curricular areas cover topics of cultural diversity and encourage students to utilize Talk Moves to respectfully express their perceptions of cultural diversity topics in order for students to work together to develop their own appreciation for different cultures. We were not able to hold our Career Day this year because of COVID-19 restrictions. However, one of the goals for next year's event is to ensure that our presenters represent culturally diverse backgrounds and speak to career paths and opportunities related to cultural diversity.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Avoca Elementary School employs many strategies for academic success. The positive professional culture evident in the building is the backbone of our cumulative successes. We focus on building relationships with each other, with our students, and with our community as the main avenue to foster academic, social, emotional, and behavioral growth for all our students and staff. AES staff are just as comfortable sharing our professional strengths to benefit our whole team, as we are admitting our weaknesses so that we can help one another grow to become even better educators. Faith in the strength and support of our relationships allows all Avoca Elementary stakeholders to be comfortable in stepping out of our comfort zones to take professional risks that can result in improved outcomes. The strong relationships our teachers develop with their students similarly allow students to feel comfortable and supported in taking academic risks that result in student growth. Relationships are the key to our achievement.

Communication is an integral component of our ability to successfully foster these strong relationships, particularly during the 2020-2021 school year that was dominated by COVID-19 protocols, restrictions, and instability. Communication had to be sent out more frequently, in more ways than ever before in order to reach all our stakeholders who were suddenly disconnected from our traditionally welcoming school. Our communication also had to remain positive in tone, consistently portraying the optimism that we felt within our walls to the outside world that was inundated with negativity. We committed to positive, honest, informational, frequent, and transparent communication as the means of maintaining relationships, which are ultimately the determining factor in our ability to realize academic success.