

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 [] Choice

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

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

School Mailing Address 4875 Reepsville Road
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Vale State NC Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 28168-9771

County Lincoln County

Telephone (704) 276-1493 Fax _____

Web site/URL https://www.lcsnc.org/ues E-mail kdellinger4@lincoln.k12.nc.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* Dr. Aaron Allen E-mail aallen@lincoln.k12.nc.us

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Lincoln County School District Tel. (704) 732-2261

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. Mark Mullen
(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):
- 13 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 4 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 4 High schools
 - 1 K-12 schools
- 22 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	8	8	16
K	21	22	43
1	28	25	53
2	16	24	40
3	25	26	51
4	21	20	41
5	20	25	45
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	139	150	289

*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 % Asian
 - 1 % Black or African American
 - 5 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 88 % White
 - 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: 11%

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	13
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	19
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	32
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	282
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.11
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	11

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

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 3 %
9 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 59 %

Total number students who qualify: 171

8. Students receiving special education services: 17 %
48 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>3</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>2</u> Developmental Delay | <u>16</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>1</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 2
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to the nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below. 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	2
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	16
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	6
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	5
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	2

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 18:1

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%	94%	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.

Union Elementary School communicates a purpose and direction which will engage students in activities, allow them to explore possibilities, and empower our children to be competitive in the 21st century. We will provide opportunities for Union Elementary students to find their wings and soar high above all others. We strive to meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of each individual student by providing a safe and respectful environment. Involving all stakeholders, we embrace these endeavors to teach our students to be lifelong learners and productive citizens.

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.

Union Elementary is currently operating under face-to-face learning five days a week. Parents do have the option to select remote learning if that is best for their family. They have a remote learning facilitator, and they conduct lessons virtually. We currently have fifteen students in our school using this option. The majority of our students are learning in the classroom with their teacher. Students are socially distanced and wearing masks. Students are very successful in the classroom and excited to be at school. Our custodial staff takes extra precautions and cleans touchpoints frequently. Teachers do use desk shields when working in a small group setting to protect their students and self while teaching.

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

Union has been an integral part of Vale, North Carolina for 100 years. Many of our students, parents, staff, and members of the community have attended Union for generations. Union Elementary takes great pride in being the educational foundation for the past, present, and future success of the Vale community. When you enter the doors of Union Elementary, there is an instant sense of home and family. Our school is focused on creating positive energy for students, staff, and the community. Our current school wide theme is "Spreading Sunshine." With that said, our goal is to make each day a little brighter and to spread sunshine wherever we go, through kindness and respect. Throughout the year, Union Elementary provides meals for Hesus House of Hope, a local shelter. In a typical school year, grade levels will arrange for meals, and together with their parents, our students serve Hesus House residents. This type of community outreach fosters a heart of service in our students. Our staff and students also give back to the community in other ways, such as random acts of kindness for frontline employees during the current pandemic. Thank you notes and goodie bags have been distributed to local doctor's offices, hospitals, and law enforcement agencies.

Union Elementary is a PBIS (Positive, Behavior, Interventions, Support) School. As a Positive Behavior Interventions Support school, we promote positive behavior on a daily basis to build strong school wide and classroom management that allows learning to take place each and every day. Our students start each day in a positive environment, and together they pledge that they will O- own your own actions, W-work hard to succeed, L-lead with kindness, and S- show respect (OWLS). To support and fully implement PBIS at Union we have set up incentives for demonstrating OWLS behavior. When the whole classroom demonstrates OWLS behavior, classes receive a magnetic owl. Once a classroom receives twenty magnetic owls, their class will receive a Golden Owl which earns them a class celebration. Individually, students receive tickets for meeting and exceeding OWLS expectations. Each quarter, students are able to cash in their tickets for prizes and rewards. One of the very popular rewards among students is Lunch with the Principal. At Union, going to the office takes on a new meaning. Our students are showered with praise and get to sign the "OWLS of Fame" wall for achieving goals and for going above and beyond. Students get their picture taken, and it is posted to social media to be shared with family and friends. At Union, we love to celebrate successes!

Character Education is an important part of child development and at Union, we combine our character education program with Kiwanis Terrific Kids in order to promote and instill lifelong values. Character traits are introduced monthly through classroom guidance lessons and are reinforced and supported throughout the entire school. Union Elementary is honored to be a Kiwanis Terrific Kids school. Terrific Kids is a student-recognition program that promotes character development, self-esteem, and perseverance. "Terrific" stands for Thoughtful, Enthusiastic, Respectful, Responsible, Inclusive, Friendly, Inquisitive, and Capable. Students are presented with a special certificate to commemorate their accomplishments. In a typical school year, parents are invited into the school for a celebratory ceremony but with Covid-19 restrictions, we have adapted. We record recognition videos and display the students' photos in the video to be shared on social media and with parents.

We also offer our students several leadership opportunities. Fourth and Fifth Grade students are eligible to apply and campaign for election to the O.W.L.S. (Owls With Leadership Skills), Student Leadership Team. The Student Leadership Team is a student organization dedicated to school improvement and community service. The team assists in organizing and planning school wide events and activities, and they participate in school service projects. Student Leadership Team members work together to learn skills associated with leadership, such as parliamentary procedure, decision making, cooperation, and effective communication. Students interested in the Student Leadership Team are tasked with completing an application, requesting references, and filming and submitting a campaign speech. This experience informs students about election processes, prepares them for future job and college applications, while encouraging self-advocacy and teamwork. All students in 3rd-5th grade are eligible to participate in elections by casting their vote after viewing the campaign speeches. Students are taught about the importance of casting their vote and about selecting candidates that are going to best represent our school. Another way students at Union Elementary are given leadership opportunities is through W.O.W.L. news. W.O.W.L. is a student-led broadcast team consisting of all fifth-grade students. Each morning, students present a live broadcast of important events

and other weekly news to students and staff. Students interested in participating in W.O.W.L. news are required to complete an application. There are multiple positions available such as news anchor, video technician, and videographer. Students interested in the news anchor position must try out by completing a mock broadcast. W.O.W.L. broadcast team requires flexibility and self-discipline which helps to foster crucial leadership skills for our students. These students also serve as role models for our younger students as well.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

Union Elementary continues to strive for academic excellence. We sustain high academic achievement by utilizing research based practices, focusing on data driven core instruction, and providing individualized instruction to meet the needs of all students. Our teachers understand that students need strong core instruction and foundation to be successful even through a pandemic. Teachers have adapted their curriculum and instruction to follow state and local guidelines to ensure student success during the pandemic. At the beginning of the school year, we operated at fifty percent capacity with hybrid learning. As a result of this, our K-5 educators had to spend an extensive amount of time not only teaching students but teaching families how to teach students while learning at home. Currently, we are operating at full capacity for five days a week and have been since October. Learning standards are addressed through a combination of the whole group and one on one instruction. Lessons involve kinesthetic learning to support all learners. Formative and summative assessments have been broken down into specific learning targets for every 4 weeks that assist both parents and teachers in instruction. Teachers have focussed on core instruction throughout the year as well as differentiated instruction with the support of teacher assistants and our MTSS team. Understanding the impact of potential learning loss with our first through fifth graders meant taking some time to initially strengthen basic foundational skills. Teachers took review lessons in small steps to spiral foundational skills and transition at an appropriate pace into grade level content. Teaching and learning have evolved tremendously during the current pandemic, and our staff has been instrumental in devising new and creative ways to reach remote learners.

Our school recently received devices to have a one-to-one ratio of Chromebooks in their classrooms this year, and that has allowed them to utilize fun and engaging modes of instruction. They are able to differentiate through technology by using research based programs and various technology tools and/or apps. Teachers learned how to use the technology our school system and PTO (Parent Teacher Organization) graciously funded. Through Screencastify teachers were able to create and push out videos for our students and families during the pandemic. The use of Google Suite tools was so important in reaching our students with lessons that they could access away from in-person learning. The use of Zoom and Google Meet to collaborate with Lincoln County School administration, receive training, and communicate with parents and students was also impactful this year. Lincoln County School Instructional department provided us with well-thought-out GAP documents that guided and embedded curriculum information specifically based on potential learning loss from Covid-19. Looking at the provided document helped teachers plan for when and where to spend more or less time on a standard in order to maximize learning.

Teachers at Union are sensitive to the needs of the whole child and are consistently reflecting on best practices and analyzing academic, behavioral, and social-emotional data. Looking at this data allows teachers to have conversations as a grade level team about what standards they will cover in the learning quarter or semester. Classroom teachers can look at summative data from rising students to help prepare for what their larger needs are, group children intentionally to maximize their progress, and guide larger decisions about curriculum. Teachers use formative data to target specific skills and measure their growth. It helps us identify who is not making growth as hoped, so that interventions can be put in place with our Title I reading program, and/or our MTSS process. Most importantly, teachers use all of this data to drive their daily instruction while adjusting their lesson plans according to students' performance. A key component to our students' success is grade level planning. Our K-5 teachers have a double common planning block one time a week where they are able to formally plan standards based lessons. Then, they meet to discuss how they need to adjust what they have planned based on students' needs after they introduce the new material. They take into consideration things that could have been missed, due to the interruption of instruction from March of 2020 to present. The science of reading has also become a major discussion for our teachers. As they complete professional development in this area they continue to provide a balanced literacy approach while incorporating the new research based practices.

Our school utilizes several programs and resources to teach English Language Arts standards. Saxon Phonics, leveled readers, Pioneer Valley Literacy Footprints, RAZ Kids, Fountas and Pinnell Shared Reading Kits, and Interactive Read Aloud are all used with integrity. K-5 teachers also utilize NC Ready NBRS 2021

Reading, Scholastic News, and novel studies. In addition to these programs, our 2-5 teachers utilize Wordly Wise to emphasize vocabulary instruction. Not only do our teachers focus on reading standards, but they also focus on writing through writers workshop and integration of Write from the Beginning resources in narrative and expository writing skills. From a mathematics perspective, teachers continue to strive to meet students' needs through a whole group and guided math approach. Our teachers use NC Ready Math for all K-5 students, as well as, teacher-created material, hands-on manipulatives, and real-world application through the concrete, representational, and abstract teaching approach. We use Do the Math and Number Worlds research based programs to provide math interventions. Science and social studies are addressed through reading for informational integration and real world experiences. We have two science labs that our teachers utilize to make science real for their students. We also have an outdoor classroom that our teachers use to conduct nature walks and research. We have subscriptions to Scholastic News and Social Studies Weekly to support teachers and students with grade level standards and current events. Our school also partners with multiple outside agencies like Catawba Science Center, Lincoln County Soil and Water, and local park rangers to enhance their learning in science and social studies.

As a school, our teachers appreciate all resources provided, but what truly makes a difference in our student academics and achievement is student-teacher relationships and providing quality instruction. At Union, teachers believe in educating the whole child. Our teachers focus on empowering and fostering an environment that develops confident learners which are accomplished through establishing relationships with children and families.

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

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

Union Elementary Pre-K program uses an approved curriculum that aligns with North Carolina Foundations for Early Learning and Child Development. Creative Curriculum is a research-based curriculum that focuses on “the whole child” to support learning and development. The goals of the curriculum focus on all aspects of development: Social/Emotional Development, Physical Development, Cognitive Development, and Language Development. The classroom environment provides students the opportunities to learn through both child-initiated and teacher planned experiences. Interest areas and centers include Art, Manipulatives, Music, Sand and Water, Library, Writing, Blocks, Dramatic Play, and Technology. These centers provide materials to accommodate small groups of children to promote positive development and learning.

During Covid-19, Union Elementary Pre-K program offers students and families other opportunities for learning on remote days. Remote learning days are days when teachers and students cannot meet for face-to-face learning. To prepare students for a remote learning day, a packet is sent home with the students the day before. The packet contains appropriate curriculum materials that focus on weekly goals of learning development. Technology offers students, families, and teachers another way to connect and communicate during Remote Learning days. Union Elementary Pre-K program uses the educational App ClassDojo. ClassDojo allows the teacher to record up to 8-minutes in video lessons. Teachers can share links to learning sites, and upload attachments of printables for families to work with their children together. ClassDojo gives students and families the ability to upload digital photos or videos to share their child’s progress.

The Creative Curriculum alignment with North Carolina Early Learning Standards provides goals and 38 objectives for development and learning. Teachers monitor student’s progress in an ongoing manner. Teaching Strategies Gold is the assessment tool that is used by teachers at Union Elementary Pre-K program. This type of formative assessment tool is online and makes it easy to capture photos, videos, and digital samples of students' work. It allows observations to be authentic. Each individual student is evaluated on his or her progress. Having Creative Curriculum and Teaching Strategies Gold assessment tool together gives teachers the ability to create individualized learning opportunities for student’s growth. Teaching Strategies Gold objectives, dimensions, and indicators aligns with North Carolina Foundations for Early Learning and Development, as well as the Common Core State Standards for kindergarten in the areas of language arts and math.

Early Education programs can offer school readiness success. The transition to school is a major step in a child's life. Students that have had the opportunity to attend a pre-K program before kindergarten, will likely transition more successfully. Students learning experiences in the Early Education classroom and teacher observations of social emotional skills and early relationships with peers and teachers can enhance a student's academic competence. Also, students attending Early Education classrooms have the advantage of early interventions and therapies when needed. The teachers at Union Elementary Pre-K program have the advantage to communicate with kindergarten teachers at Union Elementary and provide information and reports from Teaching Strategies Gold for each individual student before they enter the kindergarten classroom.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Union Elementary has six additional curriculum areas that our kindergarten through fifth grade students are involved in weekly. Each grade level attends physical education two times a week, and art, music, guidance, and library one time a week. Our second and third grade students receive a social and emotional special and our fourth and fifth grade students attend a STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering Art, Math) special.

During Physical Education students are able to work on locomotor, social interaction, and numerous sports skills with the integration of reading, spelling, and math skills. Students are able to use this time to exercise and build their physical activity. Students receive physical education twice a week to support their physical education and ability to learn. Researching and inventing new games and activities has been a constant task this year in order for students to play while remaining socially distanced and sharing equipment carefully.

In Music, students learn to help develop their language skills through singing a variety of songs, not only can it help teach or introduce a new language, but supports our students in their native language. Music also helps reinforce their understanding of reading and math by learning how to read music notes on a staff. Music motivates our students and helps build positive relationships.

Art class helps our students with the development of fine motor skills. This helps with any skills they will need completing tasks that require controlled movements, such as writing. Cognitive development is another important aspect of visual arts. The students practice skills like patterning and cause and effect through the exploration of materials. Problem solving is always a key ingredient of making art.

Guidance class is provided to help students develop socially and emotionally. During Guidance, students learn about emotional regulation, growth mindset, and essential character development. Character traits like respect, responsibility, honesty, and integrity are just a few of the core traits focused on at Union Elementary. "SociOWL" class is taught to every second and third grade student as an additional special area class. During this time students are learning social skills such as mindfulness strategies, conflict resolution tools, and other 21st century skills. Between the grades of second and third grades, students begin facing more personal and social challenges and, in an effort, to be proactive, it was determined through data that this student population would benefit the most from more social and emotional learning. Together, these two classes are designed to foster interpersonal relationship skills for all of our students and to set them up for a successful future. During remote learning, an online virtual calming room was developed and dispersed to all students to encourage self-regulation skills throughout the pandemic. Our School Counselor also offered weekly zoom check-in meetings for all students.

Media class is provided to our students to build a love for reading and an understanding of resources. Students are able to select books based on their interests and ability. Our fourth and fifth grade students are able to extend their learning through STEAM classes that support student learning by allowing students to explore independently and or collaboratively to design, construct, create, invent, etc. to empower themselves to be innovative thinkers. How to solve real-life challenges through simulation and trial and error opportunities. Through their efforts, students unfold opportunities to build bridges from no prior knowledge and produce products that they become excited about and take new knowledge and apply to other subjects and events they experience.

3. Academic Supports:

An achievement gap is the performance difference between groups of students. As educators, we are always striving to close the gap. At Union Elementary, we believe that individualized student instruction is the key because it allows our teachers to see most clearly what a student has mastered and what they are having difficulty with. Differentiated instruction is a priority at Union Elementary. All learning environments, including remote, hybrid and in person are treated equally. Union Elementary School provides different learning pathways through universal screeners so that all students have the opportunity to meet high expectations and be successful. Our kindergarten through fifth grade students complete an I-Ready Reading diagnostic benchmark throughout the year and our third through fifth grade students also complete an I-Ready Math diagnostic. Also, at Union Elementary we provide an interactive computer on-line program for our kindergarten through fifth grade called Lexia Reading Core5. Lexia Reading Core5 is designed literacy instruction for students of all abilities. Lexia's research based program provides explicit, systematic, and personalized learning in six areas of reading instruction. It also targets skill gaps as they emerge and provides teachers with the data and student specific resources they need for individual or small group instruction. Lexia Core5 and I-Ready can be used from home as part of a remote learning implementation during extended school closures or other special circumstances.

When a student seems to be struggling with academics, behaviors or social issues, the student's teacher, parents, and the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) team meet to discuss and resolve the problem. The MTSS team meets on a monthly basis to review data to see if the research-based interventions are helping and adjust interventions as necessary. We strive to provide academic instruction that is responsive to each student's needs and create a school community where students gain not only a strong academic education but also the self-confidence, emotional support, and social skills needed to succeed outside the classroom. Union Elementary implements a schoolwide approach to student support. Teachers, school counselors, psychologists, social workers, and other specialists work as a team when they assess students and plan interventions. Our success at Union Elementary is mainly due to the teachers' and staffs' willingness to do "whatever it takes" to help each student achieve his or her greatest potential.

Union Elementary strives to meet the needs of all student populations. Within our Exceptional Children's (EC) Department, we have students with speech and language needs and resource EC students that need individualized learning in reading, math, or writing to meet their individual education plan (IEP) that is in place. Our speech language pathologist (SLP) is responsible for conducting initial and reevaluation testing, as well as holding the meetings. She provides instruction per IEP and differentiates for each student no matter what other students are in the group or what level they are each on. Our SLP provides speech therapy targeted at articulation, language, and stuttering. During school closure last year in March 2020, our SLP at Union Elementary began providing speech therapy virtually before we were even instructed to do so. Much additional documentation was done for parent communication, services, and missed sessions in order to ensure that students' IEP services were met and that progress toward goals continued to be made during the highly unusual circumstances.

Differentiated instruction for our English Language Learners at Union Elementary occurs through guidance, practice, and experience. To ensure success with our English Language Learner population at Union Elementary, our ELL teacher and support staff provide different opportunities for ELL students to master the same curriculum. Appropriate practice and experience for learning vary according to the learners, even when the learning goals are the same for all. At Union Elementary, we effectively accommodate differences in culture and language to enrich opportunities to learn by closing the gap between what students know and what they need to know.

Literacy is a priority for our ELL students because it underlies mastery of all other academic subjects.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

At Union, we strive to meet the needs of all our students. We have taken an innovative approach to provide skills to appropriate grade levels. Our kindergarten and first-grade students receive a weekly 45-minute enhancement period, to develop 21st-century skills, gross motor skills, and fine arts. We provide our second and third-grade students with a 45-minute social and emotional skills period to develop their knowledge of emotional regulation and social interactions with their peers. Our Union Owl's Nesting Hub, located in our media center, is a makerspace lab that provides our students opportunities to collaborate and learn through hands-on experiences by investigating, tinkering, innovating, constructing and engineering. Our fourth and fifth-grade students are able to receive a 45 minute Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) period to encourage and empower our students to become innovators.

Our MTSS program is crucial to our overall success at Union. We meet on a monthly basis to review all student data and strategize to meet the needs of students by assessing interventions and enrichment, by creating individualized plans in all academic areas, as well as behavior and social and emotional areas. Our team consists of the administration, interventionist, school counselor, MTSS chair, teacher, and parent. All stakeholders are given the opportunity to provide feedback and suggestions to meet the needs of our students. Our Students with Disabilities, English Language Learners, and Foster students are provided with specialized instruction or support plans to ensure they have equitable access to our curriculum and support programs. Their individualized programs are evaluated on a regular basis to see if the interventions and support provided are making a positive difference in their academics and social/emotional progress.

Union Elementary offers and supports a variety of extra-curricular activities that not only foster academic exploration but promote 21st-century skills in addition to physical wellness. As previously mentioned, we offer leadership opportunities with the Owls Student Leadership team. We also offer Girls Excelling in Math and Science (GEMS) Club after school for our third, fourth, and fifth-grade girls. Through this program, it is our hope that girls will gain confidence in science, technology, engineering, art, and math so they may want to pursue a STEAM career in the future. Students at Union have always taken pride in our Battle of the Books Club and strive to be part of this competitive club. In addition to academic clubs, we offer an afternoon Fitness Club for our students in the spring. Students are able to learn proper techniques in stretching, exercising, and running. This also provides students with an opportunity to promote healthy living and collaboration among peers.

During COVID 19 Lincoln County Schools ensured our students were provided a Chromebook and hotspot for all students to be engaged and successful. Therefore, all students were provided equal access during the 2020-2021 school year. Teachers changed their instruction from a traditional classroom to a COVID friendly environment to keep all students and staff safe. Sanitation has been an emphasis this year and center based activities have been revamped to allow students to receive the inquiry based learning in an environment that is safe. Teachers have created individual boxes of manipulatives for students to use during learning to help them with concrete learning activities. Google Classroom has become a platform that our teachers use to provide instruction for our students. This has been a great resource that our families have grown to utilize to gain understanding of current topics and standards being taught.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Parent, family, and community involvement in education correlates with higher academic performance and school improvement. When schools, parents, families, and communities work together to support learning, students tend to earn higher grades, attend school more regularly, stay in school longer, and enroll in higher-level programs. Union staff and students continue to strive for excellence and to build a love for learning. Students remain at the center of every decision we make. We are currently having to collaborate and partner with families more than ever during the Covid-19 pandemic. Union Elementary is currently serving all students five days a week with five percent of our students served through remote learning for the safety of their families. During this time, we have noticed that our social and emotional support is crucial therefore,

we are reaching out to families and serving our students at school in these areas. There is so much emphasis on performance assessments that people often forget that having a positive school climate is equally important to school improvement.

The experiences listed below serve to model for the students at Union Elementary the importance of valuing the achievements of others while reaching toward their own futures. We believe through the programs, events, and collaboration with our partnerships it is evident to all stakeholders that the Union Elementary staff has a heart for service. In turn, they trust that student achievement and well-being are at the center of every decision made. Title I Family Events at Union Elementary have grown into a collaboration that has strongly enriched and improved student performance. Families that learn together grow together. Our Title I family events help increase the knowledge level of parents and family members, and they provide strategies and tools that can be used at home to help nurture readers, mathematicians, scientists, and students' emotional wellness. This year, we provided our families with a virtual Title I Event that allowed parents to enjoy math games while supporting students in closing the gap and learning new skills. Involving more parents and family members in the education of their children will help them feel welcomed as learning partners. Our community partnerships play an important role at Union Elementary through our backpack program, staff appreciation, Angel Tree, Christmas meal donations, student mentors, and more. In addition to these partnerships, Union strives to give back to the community as well through our partnership with Hessed House of Lincoln County where we adopted the second Thursday of each month to provide meals to the homeless that reside in Hessed House. Our staff and students also participate in an annual "cans-giving" food drive each November with all proceeds being donated to Lincoln County Christian Ministries. Last school year, our school was able to donate over 17,000 items to help those in our community. In addition to our community service and donations, Union also hosts an annual Veterans Day Program to celebrate and recognize our local Veterans as a token of appreciation for their service to our country. Union continuously strives to create a safe and inviting environment for our students, families, community leaders, volunteers, and staff at the "Best Kept Secret in Lincoln County."

3. Creating Professional Culture:

A growth mindset not only for students but also for the staff is key to success. Providing professional development to all staff will continue to help us grow as a school. Union strives to differentiate not only for their students but teachers as well. Administrators at Union strive to individualize professional development opportunities based on their personalized professional development goals. Teachers are able to attend professional development opportunities provided by the district and the school through virtual meetings at this time. Teachers are seeking professional development in all areas, especially social and emotional support.

As a school, we are focusing on Zones of Regulations and providing professional development in the implementation of this program. One success story is our Exceptional Children's teacher and Title I teacher received a five-day Orton Gillingham training last year. The teachers are currently implementing this new training and wealth of knowledge. Students are showing much success with this new program during intervention and specialized instruction and applying this daily in the classroom. As a school, we continue to focus our professional growth on MTSS, and specially designed instruction for students with disabilities, and student emotional wellness. We devote each Wednesday to grow as professionals in one area or another. Our district continues to provide district wide professional development in MTSS to ensure total student support. We also made an impact with our families by providing social and emotional wellness support by creating a virtual calming room for our students. Our student data either academic or behavioral has shown that the professional development opportunities have made a difference in teacher instruction and collaboration, in return making a difference in student achievement in all areas.

We also strive to making our staff feel appreciated and valued at Union. Our school improvement team created task to ensure our staff morale was a target in our school improvement plan. To help with this task, Union created a "Sunshine" Committee that schedules fun activities for our staff. This year our staff is able to participate in "Sunshine Pals" where we treat each other throughout the month. Also, administration created Fun Calendars for the winter months to keep our staff eager and excited about school. Our fun days relate to national days therefore, they may receive food, drinks, duck out early, or jeans day. Our PTO

(Parent Teacher Organization) provides our staff with a meal monthly and during a traditional year, they provide duty free lunch for teachers as well. Most importantly, our administration takes time to acknowledge teachers for the work they do through anecdotal notes and praise.

4. School Leadership:

Our school leadership team at Union Elementary is led by a servant and transformational leadership approach. Union's principal and assistant principal strive to be effective leaders by being servant leaders, in which we put aside the traditional authoritative style and approach leadership as a servant first. One of our goals as leaders at Union Elementary is to serve teachers, students, and the community. Union's servant leaders build strength in a school by encouraging staff collaboration, trust, increased service to others, promoting a sense of school community, and the sharing of power in decision making within the school.

Union has a full time principal and part time assistant principal. They share responsibilities, but most importantly they support each other when needed. The principal serves as the instructional leader, attending grade level planning weekly and supporting teachers with instruction. The principal also manages and conducts all summative evaluations on staff. The assistant principal serves as the schools special needs administrator, LEA for 504 meetings and bus director. However, when the assistant principal is not available or in attendance, the principal steps in and serves in all areas. With the split position, the principal and assistant principal have to work closely to ensure student and staff needs are met and handled. School safety is definitely top priority and both administrators work together with support from custodians and office personnel to ensure safety of all. In additions, both administrators conduct evaluations and walk-throughs to ensure quality instruction is taking place daily. Union's administration definitely takes a team approach to ensure the success of all.

Another school leadership goal we share is to provide leadership at Union Elementary that will foster a school environment that is safe and respectable for children to receive an education that prepares them to be college and career ready. Students are the most important members of a school community. Under the appropriate conditions and with the proper strategies, all students can and will learn even with barriers of Covid-19. Communication and collaboration with families and the community are crucial to the success of our school, especially during the current pandemic. Union Elementary has risen to the top and continues to provide opportunities for parents to work with their children in learning settings. The school leadership team at Union Elementary has an open line of communication that builds trust and collaboration between school and home.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

At Union Elementary, our students, families, and staff represent diverse populations. We serve students and families from varying socioeconomic groups. We also represent a rural geographic location that presents challenges of resource allocation and access to technology not as prevalent in more urban areas. The school addresses the varying needs and backgrounds by providing multiple levels of access. For example, during the pandemic, remote learning has included paper and pencil work, internet/computer work, phone calls, conferences, and meetings to supplement internet based communication. The school has worked with the district to provide Chromebooks and internet access when available. Staff at Union are willing to meet students and families where they are at any given time. The school social worker, principal, and other staff regularly make home visits to assess needs and plan solutions. As barriers are identified, the staff can advocate for those that have needs or feel marginalized. Resources available from the school to meet needs include food, clothing, shoes, and access to mental health services. For the last several years, Union has held an annual event at the school to highlight different countries and cultures around the world. This includes activities to incorporate vocabulary, language, traditions, and holidays from multiple countries and cultures. Union also plans special projects to encourage cultural awareness in students during different times of the year. Examples of these are learning activities for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr holiday, Black History Month, World Kindness Day/Week, and Red

Ribbon Week.

Character development is part of the core curriculum for counselors in our district's elementary schools. Respect is one of the character traits taught, and activities for life application in showing respect include respect for students, families, and people from diverse backgrounds. Our school has a community service focus as well, where students have the chance to be involved in hands on experiences to provide services. Union has partnered with a local homeless shelter, Hesed House of Hope, for several years. They provide meals for residents and (with the exception of limitations during the pandemic) students, families, and staff are able to interact with people experiencing challenges they have not had to face. Regarding current events and social movements, our teachers maintain a willingness to hold discussions and foster a safe environment to allow dialogue for students that ties into the curriculum. Professional development is the means for Union and the district to provide education and application to staff for becoming more culturally aware and responsive.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

At Union Elementary School, academic support offers customized individual instruction for each student, increasing its relevance and student achievement. Our school uses a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) approach to ensure all students are provided with quality core interventions or enrichment to meet individual needs. MTSS is a proactive framework used to provide targeted support to struggling students. MTSS focuses on the "whole child." MTSS supports academic growth and achievement, but it also supports many other areas such as behavior, social and emotional needs, and absenteeism. The majority of our students at Union Elementary get their academic needs met through core instruction through differentiated instruction which is the key to bridging the gap. The MTSS team collects a variety of data that helps determine how students are doing and what specific supports they need.

Our MTSS team at Union Elementary meets to discuss and problem solve ways to help individual students be successful. The team serves as a support group for the regular teacher by providing recommendations for academic or behavioral interventions as necessary. Union has focused its school improvement efforts and goals on MTSS this year and will continue to keep this as a focus as changes occur daily with our state. Our teachers and staff currently receive professional development with research based practices and protocol. Our MTSS team meets on a monthly basis to review student progress and data collection. Parents are invited to meetings when discussing their child's academic progress. Parents are encouraged to participate in our meetings and share ideas to better support their children. Many parents are eager to hear their child's progress and seek support from the school as needed. This strategy has created a whole child outlook for our teachers and parents, therefore, creating relationships that will impact our students positively and effectively.

When our MTSS team meets to review students, the teachers and support staff collaborate to analyze student data and make action plans. It is important to have a process for reviewing data monthly in order to proactively address concerns before they become a problem. By reviewing and sharing data it allows the team to address areas of concern, but more importantly to celebrate areas of success. Those students in need of additional academic or behavioral support are identified, and interventions are planned and monitored with fidelity. Also, opportunities for students exceeding benchmarks or in need of a challenge are developed at MTSS. The MTSS team makes all decisions about tiered instruction. The team is made up of the classroom teacher, administrators, school counselor, exceptional children's teacher, speech/language pathologists, school social worker, and other support staff brought in on an as needed basis. Parents are consulted on all decisions. We believe that parents should be provided with opportunities to be involved in the team processes and be able to contribute important information about their children and family needs, values, and culture.

The MTSS team has been a vital piece to identify students that were/are in need of interventions throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout the year, students would move in from other schools or districts where they were remote only, which impacted their instruction. We as a team were able to identify those gaps and implement appropriate interventions. In addition to our face to face learners, our administrative team were able to assess our remote learners and provide interventions based on data collected through a remote intervention facilitator and online programs based on their needs.