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

[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

Name of Principal <u>Ms. April Reynolds</u>
            (Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name <u>Emerson Elementary School</u>
            (As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address <u>1017 East Harrison Avenue</u>
            (If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City <u>Salt Lake City</u>   State <u>UT</u>   Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) <u>84105-2417</u>

County <u>Salt Lake County</u>

Telephone <u>(801) 481-4819</u>   Fax <u>(801) 481-4914</u>

Web site/URL <u>https://emerson.slcschools.org/</u>   E-mail <u>april.reynolds@slcschools.org</u>

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*<u> Dr. Timothy Gadson III</u>   E-mail<u> timothy.gadson@slcschools.org</u>
            (Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name <u>Salt Lake School District</u>   Tel. <u>(801) 578-8599</u>

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 <u>Ms. Melissa Ford</u>
            (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   28 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
   (per district designation):   5 Middle/Junior high schools
                                          5 High schools
                                          0 K-12 schools

                                          38 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")

   [X] Urban (city or town)
   [ ] Suburban
   [ ] Rural

3. Number of students as of October 1, 2020 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent at the school. Include all students enrolled, in-person, participating in a hybrid model, or online only. If online schooling or other COVID-19 school issues make this difficult to obtain, provide the most accurate and up-to-date information available:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	29	34	63
1	63	32	95
2	31	40	71
3	41	42	83
4	39	49	88
5	31	33	64
6	48	24	72
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	282	254	536

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

4. Racial/ethnic composition of   <u>0.8</u> % American Indian or Alaska Native
    the school (if unknown, estimate): <u>2.2</u> % Asian
                                      <u>1.3</u> % Black or African American
                                      <u>21.8</u> % Hispanic or Latino
                                      <u>0.6</u> % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
                                      <u>66.8</u> % White
                                      <u>6.5</u> % 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: <u>8%</u>

    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 *to* the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	15
(2) Number of students who transferred *from* the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	30
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	45
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	596
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.08
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	8

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

    <u>French, Mandarin, Portuguese, Pashto, Spanish, Tagalog, Vietnamese</u>

    English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: <u>9</u> %

                                                    <u>50</u> Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: <u>25</u> %

         Total number students who qualify: <u>132</u>

8.   Students receiving special education services: <u>17</u> %

<u>91</u> 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>18</u> Autism	<u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities
<u>0</u> Deafness	<u>1</u> Orthopedic Impairment
<u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness	<u>18</u> Other Health Impaired
<u>9</u> Developmental Delay	<u>25</u> Specific Learning Disability
<u>4</u> Emotional Disturbance	<u>15</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: <u>6</u>

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.	23
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	17
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	15
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	5

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1   <u>17:1</u>

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	96%	95%	95%	95%	95%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

13. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**

    Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 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 X

    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.

Emerson is committed to develop a partnership among students, teachers, parents, and community and to promote the educational development of our children. We strive to instill a lifelong love of learning and a respect for everyone in our society.

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.

Salt Lake City School District began the 2020-2021 school year solely online due to high COVID-19 rates in the community. As a school, however, and under the approval of the school board, Emerson did provide the option for special education students to attend in person half the day and the rest of the day remotely. As the school year progressed, students who were the most academically at risk-in the lowest percentile for literacy and math skills, were invited to come on the asynchronous day for small group work with their classroom teachers. In January 2021, the school board decided to provide in-person or remote learning to all families. Thus, Emerson is now providing in person, online only, and hybrid options in all grade levels in order to meet the needs of its families and continue to ensure safety during the pandemic.

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

Parents have the option of enrolling their students on a special permit if they reside out of school boundaries. Students who are part of the Extended Learning Program (ELP) have the option of attending Emerson if they would like to participate in the Spanish Dual Immersion (DLI) strand.

PART III - SUMMARY

Emerson Elementary is a diverse, welcoming, and inclusive community composed of three different programs housed within the school building. These programs consist of a mild/moderate special education hub, a gifted and talented or Extended Learning program (ELP) with a Spanish Dual Immersion (DLI) strand, and a neighborhood general education. While there are different programs, all teachers collaborate as a grade level team rather than only with specific program colleagues. Similarly, despite the program they are enrolled in, all students are considered as part of the grade level. Students are bused in from all areas of the district to attend the program they are enrolled in which enriches the culture not only within each classroom, but for the entire school.

In order to ensure student achievement, Emerson strives to implement strategies that will positively impact academic, socio-emotional, physical, and cultural growth. One of these strategies is utilizing culturally relevant pedagogies where students learn about one another in their classrooms while also learning about how other cultures have an influence in their lives. Teachers constantly provide scaffolds for students to make daily connections with the academic content they are exposed to. Another strategy is the implementation of positive behavior frameworks which encourage pro-social behavior. Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) are also in place at Emerson for students who are struggling and need extra behavior or academic supports. One of these include a check in/check out system known as the Eagle Club where individual students recruit positive interactions with adults through the day. Another incentive is a daily mystery motivator drawing for students who were caught doing positive things around the school. To provide additional support, Emerson has an interventionist to academically help students who are low in their reading or mathematical skills. Another strategy Emerson has adopted is the use of restorative practices to address the issues that arise within the school community. A practice that is commonly used is doing the Peace Path to solve disagreements between students. In addition to these strategies, Emerson also uses inclusive strategies and has been proactive about this not only in establishing collaborative classrooms, but also by implementing structured play such as Playworks, during recess so that every student can participate, remain active and build valuable social and emotional skills. Also, Emerson has developed a strong socio-emotional learning focus which includes several practices into the school day which include morning greetings, class circles, mindfulness, and Kagan structures that help students to stay motivated, engaged and promotes participation during the school day. To ensure that these strategies are functioning, the leadership at Emerson conducts observations and provides feedback to improve the practices that would help students be the most successful. The administration listens to faculty and community input and is committed to always provide the resources necessary to carry out these practices.

While Emerson does have strategies that promote student success in different aspects of their lives, there is one component that makes the school unique from all the rest. Having a special education hub with a high concentration of students who have significant needs and still being able to function as one, close-knit group where everyone supports each other is not an easy task to accomplish. Yet, Emerson has developed a strong collaborative culture which is portrayed through how teachers work across different programs. Although there are differences in programs and the supports students are provided with depending on their needs, the faculty aims to be inclusive and share ideas and design curriculum together. The DLI/ELP teachers are constantly working together as a team to plan for challenging and enriching lessons for their students. It is similar for the special education teachers who work with general education teachers to mainstream when their students when they are ready. They work in conjunction with general education teachers to plan content and differentiation for their students. This further portrays how Emerson prioritizes integration; the special education hub is only in its second year of implementation and there is already a collaborative fifth grade classroom where a general education teacher and a special education teacher work together to provide instruction to their students while still providing the differentiation necessary for each individual student to be successful. The goal is to continue expanding this collaborative classroom model to the rest of the grade levels for more integration to occur as student in special classes become ready to mainstream.

Even though the pandemic posed many unforeseen challenges, the faculty was able to maintain some continuity and structure while on the school dismissal during the first wave of COVID-19. Teachers were conducting community circles even more often so that students could share their thoughts about quarantine

in a safe space and used Kagan structures to encourage students to participate with their classmates even though they were remote. The pandemic did not stop teachers from continuing to provide their best to their students; many of them became literate in virtual teaching and developed a diverse toolkit of educational technology strategies to effectively teach and engage students during remote learning. They did this by self-teaching, collaborating with other colleagues within the school or district, and by attending workshops provided by the school district or other entities. A few teachers took the initiative to teach their colleagues about the tools they had found and how to best utilize those. Special education teachers collaborated with general education teachers to share and adapt content on their Canvas pages to their students' needs.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

Ensuring that students retain the concepts learned in core subjects has been one the highest priorities at Emerson since the school closures in March 2020. In order to make this happen, there several factors at play. The district provided teachers with basic educational technology training and technical support to be able to teach virtually, and the department of teaching and learning worked on adjusting the curriculum to certify that students would receive the most foundational skills through the common core even during the pandemic. At a school level, there was close collaboration with the literacy and math coaches for guidance on adapting Wonders (literacy) and Eureka (math) curriculums to remote learning.

For literacy, Emerson teachers continued to use the Wonders online platform and resources daily to instruct their students as they had been doing prior to the closure. In addition to Wonders, students were also encouraged to continue doing Lexia, an online literacy program, that supported teachers in providing differentiated literacy instruction in all the areas of phonemic awareness, phones, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. Another resource teachers utilized was an online tool - Newsela, to teach social studies through literacy, by exposing students to current events while also meeting the Utah core standards for reading comprehension. Literacy and writing were also taught through science. Students had science journals in which they took notes on experiments and observations they made from the creations of models that they learned about in class which are tied to the science standards. The students were graded on their models and CER (Claim, Evidence, Reason) writing as well. Teachers scaffolded these writing exercises with sentence starters and transition words. Teaching science in this way has helped students to make stronger connections with the content therefore better preparing them for the school and district science fair as well as state testing. Because there has been such a significant academic growth in this area, teachers have continued implementing this teaching practice.

Teachers made modifications to their instruction when they began teaching remotely. This included using new educational platforms through which students could present information such as Seesaw or Zoom whiteboard feature. Despite these online resources, teachers understood that not all their students would be successful through this mode. Therefore, teachers, particularly in the lower grades and in special education, would send home magnetic letters, whiteboards and markers to differentiate for kinesthetic learners. In the upper grades, teacher would use tools that were specific to either Canvas or to Zoom such as polls, Paddlets, and record options in the learning management system (LMS) for submitting assignments. All teachers made the effort to use breakout rooms to provide a space for students to engage with content or receive peer/teacher support in a smaller setting. To promote discussion, teachers began incorporating modified virtual Kagan structures to motivate students to participate whether they were receiving whole class or small group instruction.

To determine how students were performing, teachers relied on informal assessments such observations made when students interacted with content, responses typed into the Zoom chat, thumbs up/down when checking for understanding, or a quick view of the students' whiteboards when they put those up to the camera. Teachers also conducted more formal formative assessments, at the end of lessons, consisting of exit tickets or assignments submitted through Canvas. In addition to these formative assessments, teachers also depend on summative ones such as Acadience Reading, which is administered three times during the school year- at the beginning, middle, and end, to measure how students are doing on important reading skills. From the data gathered from both formative and summative assessments, teachers were able to further differentiate, plan instruction, and provide the necessary interventions to their students.

In math, the district adapted its pacing guide to focus on priority standards while still addressing other common core standards. The math coach worked closely with all teachers within grade level professional learning communities (PLCs) or one-on-one to modify instruction to online learning. New platforms were introduced at the start of the school year 2020-2021, which included Great Minds in Sync which allow teachers to share short videos with students as an additional resource to the concept learned. Teachers would teach the math lesson live and then use the short videos as supplemental material or for students to review on asynchronous days. Teachers would share the virtual strategies that worked to do math via Zoom. Many

of them would spotlight their students as they would explain the process to solving a problem. Teachers also utilized the exit slips provided by Eureka at the end of every lesson and gaged understanding throughout the lessons through various strategies including informal data gathering from student responses throughout lessons. For more formal assessments, they used the Equip assessment as a pre-module assessment that assessed the foundational skills that students may have missed from previous learning either from the school closure in March 2020 or in general. The data gathered allowed teachers to have instrumental information that would be beneficial in planning instruction that specifically targeted these gaps when the 2020-21 school year began. Teachers also administered district interims, four times a year, which assess how students are performing. The data from this assessment is helpful in determining the skills students need additional support in. Aside from targeted small group interventions, teachers relied on ST Math, an online platform, to support students in math proficiency through enhanced core curriculum and embedded assessments.

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

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

2. **Other Curriculum Areas**:

At Emerson, enrichment classes have always been prioritized; students not only need to be literate in the core, but they attain more knowledge and become more attuned to who they are through interactions with other areas such as art, physical education, music, and library. Thus, even when the schools closed in March 2020, teachers who taught these classes were asked to prepare content that students could access remotely to finish off the school year. Knowing that school year 2020-21 would start off completely remote, teachers were asked to provide recorded instruction for students to access every week from home via Canvas. Because students would be remotely learning, teachers assigned tasks that could be completed with materials that were easily accessible at home. In the case that students did not have the necessary supplies, teachers would create packets with the contents needed for the lesson to pick up from the school building. Students would complete these assignments and were held accountable for completing them through the submission of those assignments on Canvas, Seesaw or Nearpod. This school year, following a safety protocol, the librarian set up a schedule through which students can request books to check out from the school. They also deliver grade level instruction via Zoom where they also set aside time to read a story with students. Students continue access to their teachers through Canvas and could set up times to meet with them via Zoom.

3. **Academic Supports**:

Even though adaptations were made to the curriculum to address its delivery mode to provide the best instruction possible, there are still academic supports that had been in place prior to the school dismissal, that continued to be used to meet the diverse and individual needs of various student populations. Based on the data gathered from formative and summative assessments, targeted areas of support were provided for students. During grade level PLCs, teachers discuss the best interventions for their students, and as a team using the data gathered and analyzed, they form small groups for targeted interventions. For example, for students performing below grade level in literacy or math, a trained interventionist provides targeted sessions to address the specific skills students need help with. These groups remain fluid since once they strengthen their skills, they return to tier one instruction. The interventionist attends the PLCs to discuss student progress and serves as an additional resource for teachers. For those students who are above grade level, teachers provide a extension of the concepts being learned in the classroom for students to engage with. These students also participate in a neighborhood extended learning program (ELP) class with the ELP teacher where they work on extension projects. For special education students, the literacy coach in conjunction with the special education district leader, provided a series of professional

development sessions that focused on backward design using Wonder Works and how to plan for the week more effectively to address the most important literacy components while also using their resources such as paraprofessionals, to better differentiate for their students' academic needs. English language learners' needs are met through the core curriculum which has an English Language Development (ELD) component embedded in it. English learners also receive additional supports from the ELD teacher through a pull-out model where they receive targeted instruction in English and are assessed in language acquisition periodically to measure progress and address gaps.

Regardless of the classification students are identified under due to their individual needs, Emerson is committed to always providing good instruction and following practices that are research and practice based. For instance, all teachers ensure that they design their daily lessons with a goal that is specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-based (SMART) and provide students with success criteria that are useful for students to determine whether they have met the goal. Also, Emerson teachers constantly check for understanding throughout lessons and provide students with immediate feedback and address misconceptions to improve learning. Students also receive supplemental support from programs such as ST Math and Lexia that continue to strengthen their literacy and math skills.

Furthermore, students receive support prior to taking tests. Teachers prepare students for end of year testing from the beginning of the school year by using the appropriate academic language taught through the core standards, taking benchmark or interim tests on testing platforms to assist students in familiarizing themselves with test taking and the testing tools. Students are also allowed to receive any accommodations they need to test. For example, students can use a text to speech option when appropriate, have extended time, multiple breaks, and visual supports among others. Additionally, teachers provide students with test taking tips such as reading directions, checking their responses before submission, and using their scratch paper for graphic organizers.

These practices through instruction, intervention, and assessments are the most effective in closing the opportunity gap for the students at Emerson and that has been noted as students have continued to make progress despite the school closure due to COVID-19.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

To keep students engaged specially during the COVID-19 crisis, the school has continued to foster a positive environment that supports students' academic, social and emotional growth. This has been possible through the usage of SEL practices, restorative practices and the continuation of positive behavior supports. For SEL practices, students continued to have class meetings via Zoom where they could share with their classmates their thoughts regarding school or even the pandemic. Teachers try to incorporate at least two community circles a week, but the majority have made it a daily part of the schedule first thing in the morning or to wrap up the school day. Another SEL strategy being used is the incorporation of Kagan structures to keep students engaged through a lesson or a group discussion, whether they are attending school remotely or in person.

Even though the school year began remotely, Emerson found a positive way to show students and families that the school is united as a whole school effort to teach, recognize, and celebrate student success during virtual learning as well as in-person. Emerson adapted some of its behavior incentive tools to online learning to help increase engagement, promote expected Zoom behaviors, build positive relationships, and most importantly increase school continuity when returning to in-person learning. To promote pro-social behaviors, teachers hand out golden eagle tickets to students who are caught doing positive things. Students use those to enter a raffle for the mystery motivator of the day. The school also has implemented a Principal 200 Club also known as Me Club where a student is selected weekly to receive this award when they have been an example of showing the school wide expectation even virtually. Students are nominated to be Student of the Week on a weekly basis for demonstrating the school wide social skill, such as being respectful or kind, highlighted that week.

Also, an essential part of maintaining a positive environment at Emerson is to utilize restorative practices to solve the issues that may arise between students. Instead of punishing students, the school resorts to using, for instance, restorative circles where students have an equal opportunity to speak and be listened to or a conflict-resolution tool known as the Peace Path, that helps students come up with solutions themselves thereby promoting student empowerment by using problem solving skills. For students who are struggling emotionally, the counselor meets with them as needed through a Zoom meeting or in person. Also, the school has two social workers to provide mental health services are also made available to any student who needs them. This school year, given pandemic, the school has also partnered with ASCEND, a program facilitated by the University of Utah's School of Psychology that focuses on mental health, to help increase the well-being of students through virtual supports including socio-emotional group counseling, individual therapy, and tips for teacher and parents.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Emerson Elementary has always had a strong community composed of different stakeholders that includes families and local businesses. In order to keep the community abreast of the events occurring, especially during COVID-19, the school has continued posting important updates on social media such as Facebook. The school website is also kept up-to-date with information that is pertinent to the community such as the re-entry plan, asynchronous and digital days for students, among others. The parent-teacher-association is an instrumental group in connecting the school to the community as well. For example, they partner with local businesses that have delivered dinners to teachers during parent-teacher conferences. They also assist in fundraising for teacher tools that are needed for remote teaching practices. Further, this school year the school has received food bag donations from one of the programs at the University of Utah for students in need. Boxes of coats were delivered as well from a local news channel. Every Winter, the school has a tradition conducting a gift giving initiative where families buy items listed on a snowball, wrap them, and drop those off at the school where they are given to families in need. This year, to comply with safety protocols, a GoFundMe was created for the gift giving initiative; Over $4000 was raised and items were bought online and sent directly to families.

Another way that families have continued to remain engaged has been through surveys sent out requesting their input on different topics. For example, one survey was to determine how to bridge the gap between the online versus in-person Emerson community. The school uses the feedback to plan for events where all students can participate despite the mode they are in. Another survey was sent to families to provide feedback about teachers and the positive things they do for students. The comments were then shared with the respective teacher to boost their morale. In addition to sharing those with the teachers, the school also posted the comments on the school newsletter so that the community could recognize and celebrate teachers' hard work.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

From the moment the pandemic forced schools to shut down physically, the school has actively researched ways to provide its teachers with the support needed to transition to virtual teaching. For example, a questionnaire was sent out to the faculty asking them about their experience level with the learning management system (LMS) that the district had begun using to support student learning. The purpose was to identify experienced users of this LMS to have them support other colleagues through a demonstration during a faculty meeting or PLC. School leaders advocated that teachers receive access to effective and easy to use educational technological applications. During grade level PLCs, the school leaders would ask teachers to share the resources they needed in order to make their jobs more effective which included training on the LMS, collaboration with other educators within the grade level or program, among others.

Prior to beginning school year 2020-2021, the assistant principal conducted a study as part of their capstone to their doctorate, that focused on the supports that special education teachers need from the school and district leaders during a pandemic in order to effectively provide their students the education they need and deserve. The findings from this study helped the school leaders to address several teacher needs, including providing a virtual space, during faculty meetings, where teachers could establish better relationships with one another that would further promote collaborative practices among them.

At the same time, the school district provided two trainings on using the required LMS for teachers to be ready to commence the year. In addition to these, the school leaders provided the faculty with an outside expert on the LMS who provided small group and one-on-one support as teachers prepared their virtual content. They also had the support of the library technology teacher who would model how to use the virtual tools needed and record themselves for teachers to access at their leisure. The literacy coach also provided training to teachers on adapting WonderWorks curriculum to online learning. Also, since the school year began and through its progression, a focus of the weekly PLCs is for teachers to share effective remote strategies with the team. These strategies are then shared in faculty meetings for everyone to learn from.

The school is responsive to teacher requests and is willing to support the teachers and staff in any way possible. Support staff like the paraprofessionals have been provided with laptops to work with remotely if they needed one and were all added to the district Zoom licenses so that they, too, could support students academically while in remote mode.

4. School Leadership:

Part of the philosophy of the school leadership team at Emerson is that schools are only as good as the teachers in them and these are essential to student growth and success. Therefore, teachers need to be provided with opportunities to improve their teaching and continue to effective deliver instruction. This occurs through observation and feedback cycles that are conducted consistently by the school leaders for all teachers whether they are teaching remotely or in person. But, in addition to this practice, another effective way for this to occur is through grade level collaboration during PLCs. The school leaders create the space and facilitate the meetings so that teachers can focus on sharing the strategies that are working or come up with new ideas on how to continue improving their practice. Along with providing a structured space for collaboration, the school leaders have assigned grade level teacher leadership to guide the grade level teams in meeting goals and to provide additional support.

Another part of the philosophy of the school leadership is to provide the faculty with the resources they need

to be effective in teaching and learning. For instance, they advocate for teachers, to the special education district team, to have more support staff where necessary at the school or for more classroom space as the school continues to expand with its various programs. They prioritize the school budget to ensure that teachers have the materials they need in their classrooms or for their professional development. Some teachers have requested Swivl cameras to record their teaching and be able to provide a better learning experience for their remote students when they are ready to access lessons. The school leadership is realistic in their expectations for teachers; they do not expect teachers to do more than the leaders themselves. In other words, Emerson leaders lead by example. Therefore, the leaders made it a priority to familiarize themselves with the LMS, attended trainings on how to remotely conduct observations and provide feedback that would be meaningful, and adapted all of the meetings such as PLCs and faculty meetings to virtual mode as well. School leaders continued to support teachers in all meetings, particularly, special education related ones like re-evaluations for individualized education plans (IEP). It was important for teachers to know that the leaders would always provide the support they needed.

Given the stress the pandemic imposed on people, the leaders were sensitive to the emotional well-being of teachers. They purposefully virtually met with teachers throughout the school dismissal and to inquire about how they were holding up and to offer assistance in any way they could help. They provided mental health resources that were free and accessible to teachers if needed as well.

5. **Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:**

Emerson Elementary believes that all students matter and places emphasis on respecting each student's background. The school has taken several steps to ensure that the diverse needs and backgrounds of students and their families are met. The DLI program promotes learning of different Spanish speaking countries and their cultures as well as how those impact the students. On a wider scale, the school does a Day of the Dead celebration along with the community, for example, to highlight one of ways that a culture can honor the dead. In all classrooms, teachers are expected and evaluated on how they facilitate their students making connections to the content being taught. Students are also encouraged to share who they are and the traditions their families do for other students and teachers to learn from. For families whose first language is not English, documents are translated and if needed a translator is provided when they need to communicate with the school.

Furthermore, Emerson has also incorporated Acceptance Week into their calendar to acknowledge marginalized populations. "Safe Zones" have also been designated throughout the school so that students can talk to an adult in a non-judgmental environment, while receiving support and getting the resources they need to succeed. Additionally, the school conducts assemblies that address bullying, particularly cyber-bullying this school year as instruction began remotely, and also has an anti-bullying drop box where students are able to report incidents anonymously. Teachers use community circles also, to address current events and incidents that happen within the classroom, to problem solve and continue to build relationships. Families are invited to participate in school-wide events such as the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) known as STEMEmerson night where parents or relatives who work in the STEM field are invited to talk about their job duties and how they contribute to the community. All these approaches support students and their families in understanding that they matter as individuals and they are actively contributing to the school's identity.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

When determining the best practice to implement amid a pandemic, one has to choose one that will be the most impactful in ensuring student success. Emerson Elementary has a long, well-established, and strong collaborative culture which leadership was even more committed to when the school closure occurred in March 2020. The school restructured its schedule during remote learning to allow for grade level professional learning communities (PLCs) to continue occurring. PLCs changed from their traditional focus of analyzing student data to plan for instruction. Instead, the PLCs emphasized sharing effective and ineffective remote instructional practices, online resources for engagement, assessing students remotely, identifying students who needed interventions or mental health supports to best meet their needs while meeting virtually. These PLCs have continued to occur since shifting into the different learning options that began in January 2021, and the focus has continued to be on the strategies that are most effective for our students this year while also identifying their academic gaps and designing interventions to address those, while still placing emphasis on students' emotional well-being.