

***U.S. Department of Education***  
***2023 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program***

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

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

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

School Mailing Address 1006 M Avenue  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Grundy Center State IA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 50638-1122

County Grundy County

Telephone (319) 825-5449 Fax (319) 825-5419

Web site/URL https://www.spartanpride.net E-mail mvokes@spartanpride.net

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Principal's Signature) Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Superintendent\* Mr. Robert Hughes E-mail rhughes@spartanpride.net  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Grundy Center Community School District Tel. (319) 825-5449

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.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Superintendent's Signature) Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name of School Board President/Chairperson Mr. Andy Lebo  
(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.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature) Date \_\_\_\_\_

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**

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The signatures on the first page of this application (cover page) certify that each of the statements below, concerning the school's eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education and National Blue Ribbon Schools requirements, are true and correct.

1. 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 2023 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 2018 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for at least the three years prior to September 2022.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 or 2022.
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. The nominated school has, or is subject to, a nondiscrimination policy (provide either a link to the policy or submit a text of the policy), is committed to equal opportunity for all students and all staff consistent with applicable law and does not have any outstanding findings of unlawful discrimination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's nomination and/or rescind a school's award if unlawful discrimination is later discovered.

12. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

**The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's nomination and/or rescind a school's award if one of these eligibility requirements is later discovered to have not been met or otherwise been violated.**

## PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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**Data should be provided for the current school year (2022-2023) unless otherwise stated.**

**DISTRICT** (Question 1 is not applicable to non-public schools. For charter schools: If a charter school is part of the public school system, information should be provided for the public school district. If a charter school is considered its own district or part of a charter district, the information provided should reflect that.)

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 1 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 1 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 3 TOTAL

**SCHOOL** (To be completed by all schools. **Only include demographic data for the nominated school, not for 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 in the school as of October 1, 2022 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 Students
PreK	0
K	0
1	0
2	0
3	0
4	0
5	51
6	54
7	53
8	54
9	0
10	0
11	0
12 or higher	0
Total Students	212

\*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):
- 0.9 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 0.4 % Asian
  - 0.9 % Black or African American
  - 0 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 97 % White
  - 0.8 % 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 2021 - 2022 school year: 4%

If the mobility rate is above 15%, please explain:

N/A

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, 2021 until the end of the 2021-2022 school year	3
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2021 until the end of the 2021-2022 school year	5
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	8
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2021	212
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.04
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	4

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

N/A

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 21 %

Total number students who qualify: 44

8. Students receiving special education services with an IEP: 12 %  
Total number of students served 25

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 with an IEP should be reflected in the table below. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

<u>0</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>0</u> Developmental Delay	<u>20</u> Specific Learning Disability
<u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance	<u>4</u> Speech or Language Impairment
<u>0</u> Hearing Impairment	<u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury
<u>0</u> Intellectual Disability	<u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness

9. Students receiving special education services with a 504: 2 %  
Total number of students served: 5

10. Number of years the principal has been in the position at this school: 6

11. 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	3
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	24
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	3
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	6
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	1

12. 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 9:1

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

Required Information	2021-2022	2020-2021	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018
Daily student attendance	96%	96%	96%	97%	96%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

14. **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 2022.

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%

15. 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.

16. In a couple of sentences, provide the school's mission or vision statement.

Foster a caring and safe environment for all to connect, learn, and grow.

17. Provide a URL link to the school's nondiscrimination policy.

<https://www.spartanpride.net/en-US/annual-notifications-02b96e62>

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

## PART III – SCHOOL OVERVIEW

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Welcome to Grundy Center Middle School (GCMS), located in the heart of a hard-working and proud community in Grundy Center, Iowa. Our school serves a diverse population of students who predominantly come from blue-collar families that value education and have high expectations for their children's success. Grundy Center is a community of approximately 2800 people and it is the county seat of Grundy County. The Grundy Center Community School Districts (GCCSD) first graduating class was in 1890 and the community is proud of our long-standing tradition and believe it is important to honor the past as we prepare our students for the future. The GCCSD and greater community has much to offer, but the real strength is the people. The relationships between students, staff, and community are second to none.

Our students are a reflection of our community, where Spartan Pride runs deep. Students and staff alike, are driven by our mission to “Foster a caring and safe environment for all to connect, learn, and grow.” Our mission is compelled by our vision, which is “preparing all to value relationships, pursue excellence, and expand potential.” Students at GCMS are dedicated to their studies and work hard to achieve their goals. Our teachers have high expectations for our students and challenge them to excel both academically and personally and our community partners with and supports it’s school.

The GCMS (secondary building) theme for the 2022-2023 school year is: “We Work.” The “We Work” theme is symbolized by a Hard Hat. The Hard Hat represents the toughness, selflessness, and hard work it takes to be a student and/or teacher here at Grundy Center. Hard Hats are most typically worn by construction workers and they symbolize the blue collar work ethic we want our students, teachers, and community members to possess. We want GCMS students and staff to come to work, punch the clock, and give a blue collar workmanlike effort every day. “We Work” speaks to our mission and vision (Connect, learn, grow) and the Hard Hat speaks to the manner in which we carry out our mission and vision. You can’t talk about “We Work” without talking about the Hard Hat and you can’t talk about the Hard Hat without talking about “We Work.”

In addition, GCMS is a Capturing Kids Hearts (CKH) school. “Through experiential training, expert coaching, a character-based curriculum for students, and personalized support, CKH equips professionals in K-12 education to implement transformational processes focused on social-emotional wellbeing, relationship-driven campus culture, and student connectedness.” CKH is mission critical (connect) at GCMS. School connectedness is protective against most health risk behaviors among students and staff. Additionally, students who feel more connected to school are more likely to have positive outcomes. The goal of CKH at GCMS is to reduce student and staff anxiety and to ultimately create self-managing groups.

GCMS is known for its strong academic programs and its strong teaching teams. A strong system of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), Early Warning Signs (EWS) data, and the continued development of our universal tier drive most of our decision making. Our teachers are committed to providing a comprehensive curriculum that prepares our students for success in high school and beyond. We offer a wide range of courses, including mathematics, science, language arts, social studies, music, art, and physical education, which challenge our students to think critically and creatively.

Grundy Center Community School District (GCCSD) operates under the umbrella of academics, athletics, fine arts, and community. Grundy Center takes great pride in our sports teams and extracurricular activities, which provide opportunities for our students to develop leadership skills and build friendships. We believe that these activities are an essential part of a well-rounded education and help our students develop into responsible and productive members of society. GCMS students have the opportunity to participate in the following athletics: cross country, football, volleyball, basketball, bowling, wrestling, track, baseball, softball. In addition, students have the opportunity to participate in the following activities: first lego league, band, choir, play/drama, robotics, and student senate.

At GCMS we value community service and civic engagement. Our students are encouraged to give back to their community through volunteering and community service projects during our annual Service Learning Day. We believe that these activities help our students develop a sense of responsibility and citizenship and



prepare them to become active participants in their communities.

GCMS is a proud and hard-working community that is committed to providing our students with a world-class education. We are proud to be a part of the Grundy Center community and look forward to continuing to provide our students with the resources they need to succeed.

## **PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

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### **1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.**

#### **1a. Reading/English language arts curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:**

The Grundy Center Middle School (GCMS) English Language Arts curriculum is My Perspectives, Pearson Education, Inc. Each unit integrates all four reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language standards into a gradual release sequence. The curriculum provides a wide range of highly engaging, complex texts with challenging vocabulary and supplementary texts and tasks. Students have the opportunity to choose, explore, collaborate and work independently to develop strong content knowledge, comprehend and critique text, and gain a strong understanding of perspectives and cultures.

Students embark on a theme-based journey addressing an open-ended essential question launching them into the richness of the content linked directly to a performance based assessment to conclude. Students begin with whole-class learning allowing the teacher to model, instruct, and support with anchor texts and as the unit progresses students move from whole-class to small-group to independent learning. The learning focuses on finding the answers in the text, not with the teacher. With each reading, discussion and activity, students are allowed to revise and fine tune their thinking. This allows the teacher to act as a facilitator and can pose questions, guide the discussion, and prompt students to contribute.

The units have a variety of formative assessments including comprehension checks, quick writes, evidence logs, and analysis questions, which allow for students to demonstrate their learning in a variety of ways. Teachers can use these formative assessment data to identify areas where students are struggling and adjust their instruction accordingly with resources provided by the curriculum. For example, if a teacher notices a group of students are struggling identifying symbols, the curriculum provides supplemental material such as an additional reading, chart and directive questions to help the group gain conceptual understanding. Timely feedback and differentiated instruction plays a key role in student progress throughout the units.

All of the formative assessments tie directly to the summative, performance based assessment requiring students to demonstrate their content knowledge, process skills, and learning habits acquired throughout the unit. The assessments combine reading, writing, speaking and listening where students may use their collective readings to write a nonfiction narrative and also present orally the main findings. The assessment is grounded in the varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline. To culminate each unit, students are also asked to reflect on unit goals, learning strategies, and texts to also help build self awareness and self management of their own personal development and learning.

#### **1b. Mathematics curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:**

Grundy Center Middle School (GCMS) offers a unique curricular approach to mathematics that aims to solve two traditional problems with mathematics education. Pacing is one of the issues, as students are often forced to move on through the mathematics curriculum/standards without true understanding of the material. The other issue is a lack of conceptual understanding, where students are taught through a series of memorized procedures that are easily forgotten.

To combat these issues, the GCMS classroom is set up with self-paced deadlines allowing students to have the necessary time needed to conceptually understand the mathematics standards for a particular grade level. Students who need more time are given that time, while others are not forced to be stagnant waiting to advance. Ample enrichment opportunities are also provided to those students further ahead of the pace.

Material is also presented in a conceptual manner. Students learn to be flexible with numbers and investigate the underpinnings of mathematics, which allows material to truly be learned as opposed to forgotten within a short amount of time because it was only memorized in the first place. A topic like finding a percent of a number is taught by utilizing a flexible relationship between a number representing 100%, where finding various percentages like 20%, 10%, and 5% to equal 35% is valued rather than an arbitrary rule of

multiplying by a decimal or cross multiplying that is easily forgotten because of its lack of conceptual meaning.

Students are encouraged to explore and collaborate together on all material, openly discussing and justifying thinking. The material is often presented in a few ways to allow for this alternate pacing. Students watch short videos aimed to get students thinking about the topic, while allowing students to develop their own understanding. Students are also presented with situational tasks with multiple entry points so students who are in different places in their individual mathematical understanding can still complete the same tasks. The teacher's responsibility is not to lecture in front of the class, but instead act as a facilitator within the classroom, listening to conversations, posing questions, and helping students move forward without giving away too much information, keeping the ownership of the learning on the student. Multiple different assignments and tasks are happening simultaneously in the classroom.

The entire class acts as a formative assessment, where multiple checks for understanding are present along the path to understanding. Students complete these checks, and the teacher provides feedback along the way. The teacher allows time for students to make revisions as part of the class, and the student doesn't move on until these revisions are made. This benefits the students because they do not move on until mastery is achieved, limiting the potential for large mathematical gaps. The teacher benefits from this process because the teacher will always know where a student is at in the process due to the vast amount of formative checks, and the communication during the revision process. Both student and teacher have a clear understanding of the progress that has been made and the progress that still needs to be made.

The only summative assessment given is the Iowa Statewide Assessment of Student Progress (ISASP). Because of the ongoing formative nature of the class, summative assessments have become obsolete, as the teacher would know ahead of time how a student would do on a summative assessment because of the formative assessments, and the conceptual nature of the class, assuring the student will not "forget" material.

Due to this unique approach, the middle school routinely places at the top of the state in growth on our state assessment, ISASP. This is an incredible feat, as this happens with the same groups of students multiple years in a row, not just having outstanding growth and flattening out the next year, but top level growth year after year throughout middle school.

### **1c. Science curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:**

The statewide standards for science had a major shift with implementation deadlines to move to Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) ending in 2014-2015. During that time, Grundy Center Community Schools (GCCS) did not have a unified science curriculum and our shift to NGSS was a major change for the science standards. NGSS emphasizes the importance of three-dimensional standards which incorporate engineering practices, content, and crosscutting concepts. The transitioning science standards guided our decision to purchase FOSS materials for grades K-8.

FOSS has been our base curriculum that we have developed and adapted at Grundy Center Middle School (GCMS) throughout the ongoing years and has allowed us to adjust our classroom setting to a more student center, hands-on, active investigation based approach. In addition to our utilization of FOSS, we have spent ample time vetting our 5-12 science standards. Through this process, we have worked to improve our vertical articulation, reduce overlaps, and increase connectedness across grade levels. Our horizontal, grade level, approaches have also significantly increased. Ultimately, our goal has been to provide our students with a multidisciplinary approach- incorporating skills utilized in our math and language arts classroom.

Our formative assessments are administered at the start of each unit, as well as each unit investigation. Formative assessment data includes performance expectations and is utilized to adjust lesson structure, monitor student groups, and prepare supplemental instruction. Summative assessments demonstrate student mastery of content, help students identify growth in their learning, guide decision making regarding tier 2 supports and future adjustments to lessons. All of our assessments help support classroom instruction, providing a critical bridge between teaching and learning.

## Example Coding Guide from FOSS Waves Unit:

Question 3- Students may have a basic exposure to wave properties, but may be limited in their ability to compare different types of waves. All waves share the defining characteristics of having a repeating pattern and transferring energy. This item asks students to acknowledge these similarities and differentiate between mechanical waves (sound and water), which require a medium for transmission, and light waves, which do not (thus light can travel through space but sound cannot).

### Impact on Instruction:

In Investigation 2, students explore the properties of mechanical waves such as water and sound waves. They learn that water and sound waves are called mechanical waves because they need a medium to travel. In Investigation 3, students explore properties of light waves, which do not need a medium to travel. Understanding students' preconceptions about different waves will inform how much you scaffold the discussion throughout the course.

### **1d. Social studies/history/civic learning curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:**

Social studies is a critical subject that plays a crucial role in the education of middle school students. The middle school social studies curriculum is designed to help students develop critical thinking skills, understand and appreciate different cultures, and understand the role of government and institutions in society.

In fifth grade social studies the focus of learning are rights and responsibilities. Students learn about how the founding documents of the United States were developed and how these documents guide decisions. Teachers focus instruction on US Geography, Iowa History, Early US History through the American Revolution, Constitution, Bill of Rights and our role in government.

In sixth grade social studies the focus of learning are world religions and cultures. Students focus on geography, history, and culture in global regions. Students will analyze regional, physical, and cultural characteristics of places. Sixth grade social studies teachers focus instruction by way of inquiry on human development and behavior, geography, economics, history and financial literacy.

In seventh grade social studies the focus of learning is contemporary global studies. Students explore global perspectives on contemporary issues and worldwide interdependence. Students examine challenges facing the world community such as hunger, population, conflict, global environmental challenges, human rights, poverty, energy scarcity, global health, education, immigration, globalization, and other political, economic, social, and ecological concerns.

In eighth grade social studies the focus of learning are U.S. history and civic ideals. Students focus on the history of the United States including the American founding and establishment of democratic principles. Students will analyze the powers and civic responsibilities of citizens and examine the origins, functions, and structure of the U.S. government.

Instruction in middle school social studies curriculum is delivered through a variety of methods, including lectures, discussions, group work, and project-based learning. Teachers use a variety of instructional strategies to engage students and make learning relevant and interesting. For example, teachers may use primary source documents, videos, and simulations to help students better understand historical events and concepts. They may also encourage students to engage in debates and discussions to develop critical thinking and communication skills.

Assessment in middle school social studies curriculum is typically done through a combination of tests, essays, project based activities, and class participation. Assessments are designed to measure student understanding of key concepts and skills, and to provide feedback on how well they are progressing. Teachers may use rubrics to evaluate student work and provide specific feedback on areas for improvement.

### **1e. For schools that serve grades 7-12:**

Career and College Readiness is an essential component of our middle school comprehensive education program developing students' academic and technical skills through a range of exploratory courses. The foundation of this begins in our daily advisory and guidance foci with strong development of self awareness, self management, responsible decision making, relationship skills, and social awareness.

Students engage in a curriculum to help identify their interests and passions regarding agriculture, business and technology, computer sciences, family and consumer sciences, health science, industrial technology, and visual arts. Not only are students involved in activities and projects to learn the key concepts of each area but are also exposed to the potential jobs in the area with guest speakers and community collaborations. This knowledge can help them make informed decisions about the courses they take in high school and beyond, leading to a more focused academic trajectory.

Secondly, GCMS CTE curriculum equips students with the technical skills they need to succeed in their chosen fields. For example, in computer science students experience a hands-on introduction to developing a machine learning model around real-world data and design a machine learning app to solve a personally relevant problem. Or in industrial technology, students understand the process of producing two- and three-dimensional sketches and designs in a basic engineering unit. Not only are these hard skills important but so are the other 21st Century skills of critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication. They are all essential in today's rapidly evolving job market, and early exposure to them sets students up for success in the long run.

Thirdly, our middle school curriculum instills in students the values of professionalism and responsibility. As students engage in hands-on projects and work collaboratively with others, they learn to communicate effectively, manage their time, and take ownership of their work, developing the 21st Century Life Skills (flexibility, leadership, initiative, productivity, and social skills). These soft skills are highly valued by employers and colleges alike and provide a solid foundation for success in any field.

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

## **2. Other Curriculum Areas:**

### **2a. Arts (visual and/or performing)**

Visual arts at Grundy Center Middle School (GCMS) is an important curriculum area that plays a critical role in fostering students' creativity, imagination, and critical thinking skills. Through the visual arts curriculum activities at GCMS students will learn about their own interests, abilities, and knowledge concerning art so that they will be able to make intelligent decisions about art in their future lives and/or careers.

Art courses at GCMS are oriented with projects developed to give students experiences in creative activities in a variety of artistic mediums, and emphasize the elements of art and principles of design. Since this is an exploratory course, the greatest expectation is that students develop an understanding of the basic concept of what art is. In terms of skill acquisition, the visual arts curriculum focuses on teaching students various technical skills related to different mediums and techniques, such as color theory, composition, and form.

The visual arts curriculum at Grundy Center Community School is typically taught across multiple grade levels, from elementary school to high school. To support students' acquisition of essential skills and knowledge, visual arts educators use a range of teaching strategies, including project-based learning, hands-on activities, and participate in appropriate field trips. Students are encouraged to experiment with different mediums and techniques, and to develop their own unique artistic style. Overall, the visual arts curriculum is

an essential component of a well-rounded education, providing students with important skills and knowledge that can be applied across various academic disciplines and in their future careers.

## **2b. Physical education/health/nutrition**

Physical education at Grundy Center Middle School (GCMS) is a critical curriculum area that focuses on developing students' physical fitness, motor skills, and understanding of healthy lifestyle choices. Physical education classes support students' acquisition of essential skills and knowledge by providing opportunities for students to engage in physical activities, learn about nutrition and health, and develop social skills.

GCMS students participate in physical education classes, which are offered on a regular basis. Fifth grade students have physical education class every 3 days and sixth - eighth grade students have it every other day.

During physical education classes, students engage in a variety of activities, such as sports, games, and fitness challenges. Physical education teachers focus instruction on motor skills and movement patterns, knowledge of concepts, principles, strategies and tactics related to movement and performance, and having students exhibit responsible personal and social behavior that respects self and others.

These activities are designed to develop students' physical fitness, endurance, and coordination. Students also learn about the importance of good nutrition and healthy lifestyle choices, including the benefits of regular exercise and physical activity.

Overall, physical education classes at GCMS are an essential component of a well-rounded education, supporting students' physical and social development. By offering regular opportunities for physical activity and education, GCMS can help students develop healthy habits that can last a lifetime.

## **2c. Foreign language(s), if offered (if not offered, leave blank)**

## **2d. Technology/library/media**

To support students' acquisition of essential skills and knowledge, the computer science curriculum at Grundy Center Middle School (GCMS) emphasizes hands-on learning, where students are given opportunities to apply their theoretical knowledge to real-world problems. Project-Based Learning (PBL) will also be used as a place to apply new technology skills and knowledge. Students will complete a PBL project at each grade level. These projects will be designed to force students to learn Google Apps for Education, Google Classroom, and Canvas. The self-paced activities introduce students to the concepts of programming, sequential and logical thinking, and basics of computer science.

GCMS students are introduced to computer science discoveries in fifth grade, problem solving and computing in sixth grade, interactive animations and games in seventh grade, and in eighth grade data and society, which emphasizes the importance of data in solving problems and highlights how computers can help in this process. Each grade level of computer science education at Grundy Center Community School (GCCS) teaches the importance of digital citizenship to address timely topics and prepare students to take ownership of their digital lives. GCCS subscribes to Common Sense Education for this instruction.

In addition to technical skills, the Computer Science curriculum at GCMS also emphasizes critical thinking, problem-solving, and teamwork. Students learn to analyze and solve problems using logical reasoning, and to work collaboratively with their peers on projects that require them to think creatively and innovatively. These practices culminate in the middle school computer science curriculum in eighth grade where students are more firmly introduced into a PBL project, Modern Robotics.

## **2e. Any other interesting or innovative curriculum programs you would like to share**

### **3. Academic Supports**

#### **3a. Students performing below grade level:**

Grundy Center Middle School (GCMS) has implemented several strategies to close the achievement gap and has taken a proactive approach towards finding solutions. We have a robust Early Warning Signs (EWS) system, use the Collective Problem Solving (CPS) process, and conduct well-monitored intervention plans.

Students that fall well below progress that do not have an IEP are immediately flagged for EWS Academics and assigned a Student Intervention Team (SIT) lead. The lead teacher collects data and works alongside the classroom teacher to determine the specific gap area whether it be a standard or skill. A CPS conversation is also held with the student to gain insight on their thinking regarding learning as well as sharing the findings pulled from the data. Collaboratively the SIT lead, classroom teacher, student, and parent devise an intervention plan.

Once the plan is devised, the SIT lead and classroom teacher work together during specified times, either guided study or Spartan Time, to implement the plan with fidelity and validity. The SIT lead helps to collect and organize the student data to analyze collaboratively. The plan is reviewed every 4 weeks to determine its effectiveness and if any revisions are needed. Frequent check-ins with all involved are held to continue monitoring the students' progress.

#### **3b. Students performing above grade level:**

Grundy Center Middle School (GCMS) serves students performing at or above grade level with two different approaches, the Talented and Gifted (TAG) program and our universal enrichment program.

The TAG program services are designed to support a learning atmosphere and experiences that provide opportunities for growth and development. Achievement Standards, developed from a blend of Universal Constructs and National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) Programming Standards, are in place to guide students through enrichment activities and a personalized plan. Self understanding, creative thinking, critical thinking, leadership, collaboration, and complex communication, when pushed to an advanced level, are powerful competencies that cross all curricular areas and elevate potential for future success. The Talented and Gifted program follows the guidance of the NAGC in aligning with recommended standards for planning and implementation: Learning and Development, Assessment, Curriculum Planning and Instruction, Learning Environments, Programming, and Professional Learning. Gifted services occur in the general classroom setting through teacher supported differentiation or Universal Tier instruction but also students have the opportunity to work on their individualized plans during Spartan Time.

Students not identified for the TAG program but are at or above grade level expectations participate in enrichment activities throughout the year during Spartan Time. Enrichment gives the student more time to study concepts with greater depth, breadth, and complexity or be introduced to subject areas and concepts beyond the essential curriculum. Each enrichment follows the Spartan Design Process: ask, imagine, plan, create, test, and improve. Students can choose a variety of cross-curricular exploration areas provided an essential question, and teachers facilitate their learning through investigation, solutions, testing, and revision with the added intent to also impact the school and community.

#### **3c. Students with disabilities:**

Grundy Center Middle School (GCMS) instructional service delivery plan for students with disabilities is designed to allow flexibility and effectiveness in terms of delivering special education services to meet the unique needs of students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Students may receive one of the following services or different services at multiple points along the continuum based on student needs as addressed in the IEP: consulting teacher services, co-teaching services, supplemental instruction in the general education setting, collaborative services and supplemental instruction in the special education setting. GCMS provides access to this continuum for all eligible individuals based on their IEP, ages 3-21.

Individual student progress on IEP goals are reviewed and discussed on a regular and ongoing basis by teacher teams including classroom teachers, special education teachers, and Student Intervention Team leads along with the AEA representative and school administrator, as appropriate. The purpose of this review is to determine if adequate progress is being made, if any adjustments in instruction are needed, or if other targeted or intensive interventions through MTSS or special education are needed. The teacher team helps to collect and organize the student data to analyze collaboratively. The plan is reviewed every 4 weeks to determine its effectiveness and if any revisions are needed. Frequent check-ins with all involved are held to continue monitoring the students progress. Teacher teams also examine IEP subgroup performance in both reading and math at least once per year. Subgroup achievement, growth, and the achievement gap will be included as items for discussion and planning.

### **3d. English Language Learners:**

Grundy Center Middle School (GCMS) recognizes that English Language Learners come from diverse backgrounds and have varying levels of English proficiency, so it is crucial to tailor instruction, interventions, and assessments to meet their individual needs. The school adopts and follows a comprehensive approach (Lau Plan) that involves various strategies and tools to support ELL students language development and academic success.

GCMS employs a range of instructional strategies to meet the needs of ELL students. These include the use of visual aids, graphic organizers, and other scaffolding tools to help students understand new concepts. Teachers also use differentiated instruction to ensure that ELL students can access the curriculum and provide opportunities for students to work in small groups or with a partner to practice language skills. Furthermore, teachers use culturally responsive teaching practices to incorporate students' cultural backgrounds and experiences into the classroom.

At GCMS teachers will be provided with updated student scores from ELPA21 testing. Teachers will also have access and training in how Wida Scales correlate to test results and how to use the rubrics to foster sequential and incremental language support strategies. Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) lesson planning will also be shared with the classroom teacher by the ELL coordinator. The school provides targeted interventions to help ELL students improve their language proficiency and academic performance. These interventions may include additional English language instruction, tutoring, or targeted support in specific subject areas. For example, students may receive pull-out instruction in English language development or a subject-area intervention, such as reading or math, to help them catch up with their peers.

Assessments, both formative and summative are critical to monitor the progress and determine the effectiveness of instruction and interventions for our ELL students. GCMS uses a variety of assessments, including formal assessments such as standardized tests and informal assessments such as observations and student work samples. Teachers use assessment data to identify areas of strength and weakness and adjust instruction and interventions accordingly. For example, if a student is struggling with vocabulary, the teacher may provide additional vocabulary instruction or adjust the materials to include more visual aids.

### **3e. Other populations, if a special program or intervention is offered:**

N/A



## **PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE**

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### **1. Engaging Students:**

Grundy Center Middle School (GCMS) is committed to providing its students with an engaging, motivating, and positive learning environment that supports their academic, social, and emotional growth, as well as their college and career readiness development.

One way that GCMS engages its students is by offering a variety of extracurricular activities that align with their interests and passions. These activities include sports, music, Talented and Gifted programs, First Lego League, and the rekindling of our Student Senate program which provides students with opportunities to learn new skills, meet new people, and develop leadership and teamwork abilities.

GCMS creates a positive environment by promoting a culture of respect, inclusion, and equity through our Capturing Kids Hearts (CKH) wellbeing initiative. The school achieves this through various strategies, such as implementing restorative justice practices, developing schoolwide social contracts for managing behavior, and providing professional development to teachers and staff on mental health first aid, trauma informed care, and initiatives that promote diversity and inclusivity. Additionally, the school prioritizes students' mental health and well-being by offering counseling services, mindfulness activities, and other Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) resources that support students' emotional growth and resilience.

Finally, GCMS supports its students' college and career readiness development by providing them with academic and career counseling, the opportunity for students to take Career and Technical Education (CTE) exploratory classes, and the development of professional skills through our CKH efforts. The school also collaborates with local businesses and community organizations to provide students with real-world exposure to different career paths and industries.

Overall, GCMS is dedicated to assessing its students' needs and interests and designing and implementing strategies that best meet those needs. By creating an engaging, motivating, and positive learning environment that supports students' academic, social, and emotional growth, and college and career readiness development, the school aims to prepare its students for success in their future endeavors.

### **2. Engaging Families and Community:**

Schools that prioritize family and community engagement can help improve student outcomes and promote school success. Educators who recognize the importance of creating a supportive and collaborative environment that values the involvement of families and community members are more likely to see positive results. There are several strategies that Grundy Center Middle School (GCMS) has employed to build effective partnerships with families and communities.

The first strategy is to create an open and welcoming school culture that fosters communication and collaboration between educators, families, and community members. GCMS achieves this by hosting parent-teacher conferences both in the fall and spring, an open house orientation event at the beginning of the school year, and has created our very own “Parent University” which embraces relevant topics for parents in the 21st century that address trending issues in parenting today and provides tools and resources for parents to see their children flourish. These events allow parents to connect with teachers, staff, and administrators in a positive, proactive manner.

Another strategy is that GCMS has formed partnerships with several community organizations to address the needs of students and families. For example, we have partnered with our local ministerial alliance to provide “seconds” at lunch for students who are still hungry after eating lunch. GCMS has partnered with the Northeast Iowa Food Bank and participates in the Backpack program which provides food and health and hygiene resources for our students in need. In addition, we have created our own Spartan Pantry, which partners with private citizens and other local organizations such as the Kiwanis, City of Grundy Center, to provide food assistance for both our students and staff in need.

One successful example of a community partnership that has addressed student and family needs in Grundy Center is the partnership between GCMS and Wildwood Hills Ranch of Iowa. Wildwood Hills Ranch of Iowa is a non-profit organization “that exists to transform lives and strengthen communities by providing healing, hope, and God’s unconditional love to children and youth at risk.” “Wildwood Hills Ranch of Iowa is a research-backed and outcomes-based leadership development organization that serves vulnerable youth and veterans and their families. Wildwood Hills Ranch makes an impact through educational programming, leadership development, job skill training, and equine therapy.” Wildwood Hills Ranch of Iowa affords some of our most at-risk students an opportunity to attend “summer camp” and year round programming that provides students various leadership opportunities, life skills training, aquatics fun, student art and self-expression, fitness, and agriculture education.

Building strong partnerships with families and communities is essential for promoting student success and school improvement. GCMS strives to achieve this by creating an open and welcoming school culture that involves families and community members in supporting student learning and forming partnerships with community organizations. The more GCMS prioritizes family and community engagement the more likely we are to see positive results and create a supportive and collaborative environment for our students and families.

### **3. Creating Professional Culture:**

Creating an environment where teachers feel valued and supported is essential for promoting their job satisfaction and retention, which ultimately leads to better outcomes for students. At Grundy Center Middle School (GCMS) we take several steps to ensure that teachers feel supported and have opportunities for professional growth.

One way we support our teachers is through our professional development approach. We offer a range of professional development opportunities, including workshops, conferences, and online courses. These opportunities are tailored to meet the individual needs of our teachers and focus on curriculum and design, classroom management, and instructional strategies. Our professional development approach is designed to be collaborative, with teachers sharing their expertise and learning from each other in Grade Level Teams (GLT) and Professional Learning Communities (PLC).

In addition to professional development, we also provide additional support to our teachers and other school staff through our Teacher Leadership and Compensation (TLC) Initiative. We have a strong TLC program which is centered around our Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) efforts. Lead Teachers work with teachers to plan, implement, and reflect with staff through student centered coaching cycles. In addition, lead teachers collaborate and consult with teachers and specifically support the implementation of professional development. Lastly, our teacher leaders support students continuously with data collected through our Early Warning Signs (EWS) and analyze and collaborate with our Building Leadership Team (BLT) on our current state and district goals.

Another way we value and support our teachers through the TLC program is through our Student Achievement Coordinator (SAC) role. Our SAC meets regularly with administrators, the BLT, and Area Education Agencies (AEA) representatives to analyze data, research current best practices, and employ district goals. Major functions of the SAC include taking a lead role in the collection, validation, analysis, and presentation of student assessment data as it pertains to the Iowa Core. In addition, this role incorporates a high level of collaboration with administrators and Lead Teachers in the planning and facilitation of professional development aligned with district data designed to facilitate instructional changes.

Lastly, our TLC program provides opportunities for teachers to take on leadership roles. Additional roles embedded within our TLC program are Wellbeing Teachers, Mentors, and PLC and GLT Lead roles. This helps to build our capacity as leaders and provides opportunities for our teachers to grow professionally.

The impact of these strategies on our teachers has been positive. Teachers report feeling supported and

valued, and they feel that they have opportunities for professional growth and leadership. This has led to increased job satisfaction and retention, which has had a positive impact on student outcomes.

#### **4. School Leadership:**

At the top of the leadership structure is the principal, who is responsible for overseeing the overall operation of the school. The principal serves as the instructional leader and works closely with other school leaders to establish goals and develop strategies to improve student achievement.

Other school leaders include assistant principals and teacher leaders from our Teacher Leader and Compensation (TLC) Initiative. These individuals are responsible for supporting the principal in achieving the school's goals and implementing policies and programs to support student learning. They also play a key role in providing feedback and support to teachers to help them improve their practice.

Stakeholders, including parents, community members, and students themselves, also play a critical role in the leadership of our school. We prioritize open communication and collaboration with these stakeholders through parent-teacher conferences, our Parent University program, School Improvement Advisory Committee (SIAC), and other community partnerships and programs.

Our leadership ensures that policies, programs, relationships, and resources focus on student achievement in several ways. First, we use data to inform most, if not all, of our decision-making. The role of Student Achievement Coordinator (SAC) ensures that resources are targeted towards areas of greatest need. For example, if we identify that our students or staff are struggling with their overall wellbeing, we may allocate additional resources towards professional development to focus on our Universal Tier of instruction regarding student wellbeing or offer a wellbeing break to our teachers through our Social Committee and offer our teachers a break, additional time, or resources.

Second, we prioritize relationships and communication to ensure that all stakeholders are aligned around our shared goals for student achievement. For example, we hold regular meetings with parents and community members (Parent University, SIAC, P/T Conferences) to provide updates on school-wide initiatives and solicit feedback on our policies and programs.

Third, we invest in professional development and support for our teachers to ensure that they have the tools and resources they need to help students succeed. For example, we provide ongoing coaching through our TLC program and outside agencies to provide support for teachers to help them improve their practice and integrate new instructional strategies. For example, if we recognize a fidelity issue with our universal tier of instruction regarding student wellbeing, we will reach out to the Flippen Group and schedule an inservice surrounding best practices of implementation and process regarding Capturing Kids Hearts (CKH) instruction.

Finally, our leadership is flexible and adaptable, recognizing that the needs of our students and teachers may shift over time. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, our administrative roles needed to shift rapidly to support remote learning and provide additional resources and support for our students and families.

In conclusion, the leadership philosophy and structure at our school is focused on creating a collaborative and student-centered environment. Our leadership ensures that policies, programs, relationships, and resources focus on student achievement by using data to inform decision-making, prioritizing relationships and communication, investing in professional development and support for our teachers, and being flexible and adaptable to changing needs. By prioritizing student achievement and collaboration, we are able to create a positive and supportive environment that benefits our entire school community.

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

To ensure equity, cultural awareness, and respect in the classroom and the school, Grundy Center Middle School (GCMS) takes various steps. For instance, we have policies in place that prohibit discrimination

based on race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or other characteristics. In addition, we have programs or initiatives aimed at promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion.

GCMS provides training and professional development opportunities for staff to increase their cultural awareness and competence. Capturing Kids Hearts (CKH), Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) and our Second Step guidance curriculum drive this learning. In addition, we leverage Spartan Time, which is our Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS) to provide students with What I Need (WIN) time or Advisory time that focuses instruction on student wellbeing utilizing CKH curriculum and best practices. This may involve learning about different Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL) competencies, different lifestyles and situations, and how they can impact student learning and development. GCMS may also provide resources and support for families and students from diverse backgrounds, such as translation services, counseling, or referrals to community resources.

GCMS also provides specialized support and accommodations for students with disabilities or other special needs by way of a student's IEP, 504, Health Plan, or an individualized learning plan. This may involve providing assistive technology, individualized instruction, or access to specialized services such as speech therapy or occupational therapy.

To ensure equity and respect in the school, GCMS has policies and procedures for addressing incidents of bias, discrimination, or harassment and asking students to “See Something, Say Something.” Student reporting of incidents funnels directly to teacher leadership and administration to address any reported issues.

In summary, GCMS takes a variety of steps to address the diverse needs and backgrounds of students, families, and staff. These include policies and programs aimed at promoting diversity and inclusion, training and professional development opportunities for staff, resources and support for families and students, and specialized support and accommodations for students with special needs. Additionally, we have policies and procedures in place for addressing incidents of bias, discrimination, or harassment.

## **PART VI - STRATEGY FOR EXCELLENCE**

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At Grundy Center Middle School (GCMS) the one practice that has been the most instrumental to our school's success has been our Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) program. MTSS is an every-education decision-making framework of evidence-based practices in instruction and assessment that addresses the needs of all students starting in general education. This critical framework supports all of our students, as it creates an optimal environment of access and equity of academic and nonacademic success for all by taking into consideration each student's current performance, analyzing their needs, and matching their needs to evidence-based instruction. At GCMS, the MTSS program has three tiers, each with its own unique set of interventions.

The first tier of MTSS at GCMS involves universal screening of all students to identify those who may be at risk of academic or behavioral (wellbeing) difficulties. Early Warning Signs (EWS) data is used to identify those who may be at risk of academic or behavioral (well being) difficulties. To help track EWS and have effective, ongoing problem solving, the Student Referral Form (SRF) is used to collect data on all students. Data concerning attendance, classroom performance, and behavioral issues are recorded as teachers observe them. Data is collected and monitored weekly with a full analysis during our Student Intervention Team (SIT) meetings. Students who are identified are then provided with targeted interventions that are designed to help them overcome their challenges. These interventions may include small group instruction, tutoring, or additional support from a teacher or counselor during What I Need (WIN) time or most commonly during guided study.

The second tier of MTSS involves more intensive interventions for students who have not made adequate progress in the first tier. Collaborative Problem Solving, Professional Learning Communities, and a Student Support Team will be utilized to better assist students with specific needs. These interventions are designed to address the specific needs of each student and may include individualized instruction, more frequent monitoring of progress, or additional support from a lead teacher, well being teacher, interventionist, administrator, or school social worker.

The third tier of our MTSS program involves the most intensive interventions for students who continue to struggle despite the interventions provided in the first two tiers. Administration, our at-risk team, counselors, and social services will be utilized to better assist students with specific needs. These students may receive one-on-one instruction, specialized counseling, or other targeted interventions that are tailored to their individual needs.

Our MTSS program at GCMS has been the most instrumental system of support in our school's success. This program provides students with targeted interventions that cater to their individual needs and allows for early intervention to prevent academic, behavioral, or student wellbeing difficulties. The program's focus on data-driven decision-making ensures that interventions are effective and that students are making progress. As a result, the MTSS program has helped GCMS achieve great success in meeting the needs of all students and ensuring their academic, social, and emotional well-being.