

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

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

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

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

School Mailing Address 14714 Willowbrook Road
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City South Beloit State IL Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 61080-9554

County Winnebago County

Telephone (815) 389-3301 Fax (815) 389-8582

Web site/URL https://www.prairiehill.org E-mail finnegank@prairiehill.org

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

Date _____

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent* Mr. Clint Czizek E-mail czizekc@prairiehill.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Prairie Hill CCSD 133 Tel. (815) 389-3301

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 Mrs. Kimberly Aulenbacher
(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 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

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
0 High schools
0 K-12 schools
- 2 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	62
K	81
1	87
2	81
3	78
4	86
5	0
6	0
7	0
8	0
9	0
10	0
11	0
12 or higher	0
Total Students	475

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

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 1.7 % Asian
 - 1.7 % Black or African American
 - 11.2 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 79.1 % White
 - 6.3 % 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: 5%

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

This rate should be calculated using the grid below. The answer to (6) is the mobility rate.

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2021 until the end of the 2021-2022 school year	19
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2021 until the end of the 2021-2022 school year	2
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	21
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2021	446
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.05
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	5

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

Serbian, Gujarati, Spanish, Telugu, Hmong, Japanese

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 14 %

Total number students who qualify: 65

8. Students receiving special education services with an IEP: 16 %
Total number of students served 75

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>13</u> Autism	<u>1</u> Multiple Disabilities
<u>0</u> Deafness	<u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment
<u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness	<u>5</u> Other Health Impaired
<u>32</u> Developmental Delay	<u>10</u> Specific Learning Disability
<u>1</u> Emotional Disturbance	<u>48</u> Speech or Language Impairment
<u>3</u> Hearing Impairment	<u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury
<u>1</u> Intellectual Disability	<u>1</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness

9. Students receiving special education services with a 504: 2 %
Total number of students served: 11

10. Number of years the principal has been in the position at this school: 12

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	1
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	23
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	11
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	17
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	2

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 21:1

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	93%	96%	96%	96%	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 X No

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award. 2014

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

Students First, Always.

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

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Orz0_uaTS_W1gihWO7vDBN948dd8s4N-/view

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

At Prairie Hill, we have a saying, ‘The Sun Always Shines Over Prairie Hill’. That’s a bit of a misnomer, as Prairie Hill School, located in South Beloit, Illinois, resides in a town where the sun makes an appearance significantly less than always - about 50% of the year. However, when you walk the halls of Prairie Hill School, you feel the sunshine in the building in the energy of the staff and students.

Prairie Hill School began as a one-room schoolhouse in 1952 serving 86 students, kindergarten through eighth grade. Through the years, we have grown, outgrown, and split into an elementary school that serves over 480 students, Pre-K through fourth grade. Despite our growth, we managed to maintain an intimate, small town, collective climate. Up until just recently, Prairie Hill School was referred to as ‘the best kept secret in Northern Illinois’. Then, in 2014, Prairie Hill was the first public school in Winnebago County to earn the title of National Blue Ribbon School. From then on, the secret to the school’s success was out.

Along with earning the National Blue Ribbon, the school has also been named a Model PLC (Professional Learning Community) School, one of just over 100 elementary schools in the world. Prairie Hill School was the Illinois Spotlight School at the state’s Raising Student Achievement Conference in 2017. Consistently, the school has been named an Exemplary School by the state, the highest distinction.

There is no Prairie Hill town. The community, instead, comes together through the school. This is done through community activities that have become incredibly well-attended, such as the Back-to-School BBQ, Jog-a-thon, the Halloween Parade, Sweets with Someone Special, Fun Fair, and numerous other events run jointly between the school and the Parent-Staff Association. Since earning the Blue Ribbon, Prairie Hill is one of the only schools in the area to see significant growth, growing by 17%. Yet throughout this growth and expansion, the school has remained true to its mission statement of ‘Students First, Always’. This was never more evident than during the 2020-2021 school year.

In the year following the closure of schools, Prairie Hill reopened its doors to in-person learning with many creative modifications. Yet even with its changes to start times, classroom configuration, and daily structure, the drive to make all students succeed never waived. During that school year, the building remained open to students and more than 95% of the population chose to learn in-person, with less than 5% learning remotely. Based on the Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR), given annually to third and fourth graders, the state recognizes schools by the percentage of the population at the 4 (meets expectations) and 5 (exceeds expectations) level. In 2020-2021, Prairie Hill had 70.6% of 3rd and 4th grade students meet or exceed expectations. That far-outpaced the state average of 36% of students who met or exceeded expectations. But even these numbers didn’t tell the true success story for Prairie Hill. For that, you had to go deeper into the numbers.

The state reports out those that are at the top end, but Prairie Hill wants to focus on every student. Most concerning are the students who are in the first level of achievement, a 1 (does not meet expectations). These are the students that need the greatest level of intervention so that they have the skills necessary as they progress through the educational system. Throughout the state in 2021, 23% of all 3rd grade students and 17% of all 4th grade students tested at a 1. This means that nearly 1 in 5 students were in the academic warning level. For Prairie Hill, we achieved something that no other school was able to achieve in 2020-2021. Out of the 160 students assessed, not a single student scored at a 1 in reading. That success includes all students: special education students, ELL students, and remote learning students. This was the greatest evidence of our commitment to the mindset that all students are the responsibility of every teacher and that all students can succeed.

This was not done with more money than other districts. Far from it. As a building, Prairie Hill spent only 62.8% of the state average expenditures per pupil. The greatest resource in the building is the staff, a group of professionals that collaborate to ensure that the district remains true to its mission.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

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

Prairie Hill School's Reading/English Language Arts curriculum is notably progressive to ensure maximum growth in an already high performing school. Each Common Core learning standard has been unpacked and aligned at all grade levels in order to avoid gaps and redundancies, as well as identify pathways to challenge students. Pre and emergent reading skills instruction begins at the preK/Kindergarten level by targeting phonics, phonological and phonemic awareness instruction. These skills are addressed through multiple curricular avenues including Heggerty, Reading Horizons, and many oral communication and phonological activities. Direct instruction of high frequency words through orthographic mapping also promotes strong foundational literacy skills. Students then continue to progress through the English Language Arts Common Core Standards while applying their foundational skills to decode and comprehend grade level text. Students are building their comprehension, vocabulary, and schema by reading and analyzing integrated texts, through the iReady curriculum and extensive decodable and leveled readers. Students have multiple avenues for rich text-based discussion daily, with a heavy focus on questioning and conversation.

Direct instruction of the Common Core Narrative, Informational, and Opinion Writing Standards is also an integral component of our 120-minute ELA block. Writing spans from drawing, dictation, phonetic spelling, and conventions at the kinder level, and progresses to adding details, facts, and dialogue by 3rd and 4th grade. Students are also challenged to respond to reading by answering comprehension questions that challenge their critical thinking and analysis abilities.

Assessment of standards is a combination of grade level, team-written Common Formative Assessments (CFAs). All assessments are utilized to identify students who are below, approaching, meeting, or exceeding grade level expectations. All data is entered and stored in the team Google document. CFA data is analyzed at Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings with all stakeholders to identify standards that need reteaching and/or extension. Timely data analysis is critical in guiding our instruction, which informs pacing adjustments. The iReady diagnostic assessment is given three times a year and is also a vital assessment piece used to drive instruction, as well as group students based on academic abilities. Another summative assessment utilized is Fountas & Pinnell text leveling, which pinpoints strengths and weaknesses in reading fluency and comprehension. IAR testing in the spring affords us a snapshot of skills acquisition in order to reteach, delve deeper into, or extend.

Every classroom balances their ELA block with readings of various fiction and nonfiction decodable and leveled texts from our extensive bookroom library. A heavy priority on our bookroom ensures a prolific, high quality selection. Word work in isolation and within writing is a powerful tool in cementing phonics and high-frequency word skills. Students are goal-setting and conferencing with teachers to achieve goals and set new ones. Working at student's "just right" levels in all literacy areas builds confidence and skills in our students who are working below grade level and maximizes growth in students who are meeting grade level expectations. Students who are exceeding grade level expectations extend their learning through writing, independent research and discovery, and technology. To visit a classroom at ELA instruction is to witness the magic of literacy and excitement that our district has worked tirelessly to construct.

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

At Prairie Hill Elementary school, our math instruction is driven by multiple moving parts which have been proven to be successful by the growth and performance of our students. Prairie Hill's math instruction is student driven and it utilizes the major, supporting, and additional Common Core State Standards. Tier 1 instruction starts with a pre assessment on an upcoming learning target. Utilizing the pre assessment data, our teachers create an instructional plan that meets each student at their current level. These plans include number talks, whole group lessons, independent practice, and guided math groups. We have found that small group instruction has maximized our students' potential because it allows the teachers to focus on the

students' specific needs. Small group instruction also allows the teachers to provide daily enrichment and reteaching when needed. As each instructional plan is carried out, teachers make informal observations and notes based on conversations at small groups and independent work stations. Our teachers use this informal data to modify instructional plans as needed to ensure that each student is prepared for the post assessment.

Prairie Hill School's pre and post assessments are rather unique because they are created by our teachers to be aligned with the curriculum and learning targets. When pre assessments are given, teachers go over the data to make their guided groups to best support their students. Post assessments show our teachers the growth students have made on the specific learning target. This data highlights students that are below, approaching, meeting, and exceeding the current target. To show mastery and exceeding expectations, teachers have developed challenge questions on post assessments that move into the following grade level's learning targets. For example, first grade students showing mastery on comparing tens and ones are given a challenge question putting groups of objects together in other arrangements and comparing those totals. Our teachers also use this post assessment data for reteaching learning targets. Students not yet mastering a target are grouped for reteaching and then reassessment of the learning target.

The Prairie Hill School teachers utilize a core curriculum that empowers their teaching by allowing for differentiation on many levels. When teachers create their instructional plan for each learning target, they draw lessons from this core curriculum as well as center differentiation activities and an online component. The core curriculum pushes our students to think and talk about their math thinking and strategies and use these strategies when working through problems. Our teachers facilitate the math conversations, but the students drive the conversations through a turn and talk routine. This routine helps students develop a deeper understanding of concepts and use mathematical vocabulary. Students can then use this understanding when they are working on independent work and at center activities. Centers and independent work build upon the core lessons, learning targets, and math fact fluency. Our students are engaged in math games to increase fact fluency with partners and small groups. Our teachers adapt weekly centers based on the needs of their students, with centers being flexible and targeted to student needs. Our core curriculum includes an online component that teachers utilize daily in instruction and independent practice. This component has teacher resources as well as student lessons. Teachers assign lessons to students based on pretest data, classroom work, and diagnostic assessment.

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

Although Science is an integral part of the ELA (English Language Arts) classrooms at Prairie Hill School, the standards are taught in a classroom called LAB. Since Illinois is a Lead State, the K-12 Science Education Framework is embraced. This includes the three dimensions of Scientific and Engineering Practices, Crosscutting Concepts, and Disciplinary Core Ideas in Physical, Life, Earth and Space, Engineering, Technology, and Applications of Sciences. LAB is a class where real-life issues are presented through concept development and engaging curiosity to promote the design of a solution or an optimization of an already existing solution. This class is project-based in which all standards connect, which is the way the world actually works. Science, social studies, engineering, and technology are merged to work interdependently with a focus on historical events and geography to determine possible future events and solutions. Students at Prairie Hill School are assessed using standards-based grading with a pre-assessment in order to obtain prior knowledge in science concepts. Once that information is compiled a STEAM-like (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics) project is designed for students to explore, investigate, and design a real working solution to the science-related issue and their effects at the community and state levels, as well as national and global interactions. Once the project is completed, students take a post-assessment in order to ensure that the students obtained the knowledge contained in the standard addressed. Students are given the opportunity to show an extension on the post-assessment with an application question that demonstrates a greater, more in-depth understanding of the science concepts using higher level thinking skills.

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

Although Social Studies is an integral part of the ELA classrooms at Prairie Hill School, the standards are taught in a classroom called LAB. In accordance with the Illinois Learning Standards, LAB applies Inquiry

Skills, Essential Questions, Supporting Questions, and Disciplinary Concepts. LAB is a class where real-life issues are presented through concept development and engaging curiosity to promote the design of a solution or an optimization of an already existing solution. This class is project-based in which all standards connect, which is the way the world actually works. Social studies, science, engineering, and technology are merged to work interdependently with a focus on historical events and geography to determine possible future events and solutions. Students at Prairie Hill School are assessed using Standards-Based grading with a pre-assessment in order to obtain prior knowledge in social studies concepts. Once that information is compiled a STEAM-like project is designed for students to explore, investigate, and design a real working solution to the social studies-related issue and their effects at the community and state levels, as well as interactions nationally and globally. Once the project is completed, students take a post-assessment in order to ensure that the students obtained or maintained the standards addressed. Students are given the opportunity to show an extension on the post-assessment with an application question that demonstrates a greater, more in-depth understanding of the social studies concepts using higher level thinking skills.

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

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

Prairie Hill School's Pre-K is an authentic blended program housing 3-4-and 5-year-olds. Each class contains neurotypical and mixed abilities students, and students with special needs blended into each class. The multi-faceted core academic curriculum of PHS's preschool is aligned to the Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS). Standards are integrated into purposeful imaginative play that strengthen oral communication skills and spark an interest for even deeper learning. Our program and educators foster the growth of each and every student and encourage them to practice their dynamic new skills in a nurturing, low-risk environment. Our main objective is to help them gain enough confidence to use their newly acquired skills in real life situations.

Though playful in nature, our pre-K classrooms waste no time getting students acclimated to reading, writing and math. Emergent reading skills target concepts of print, phonemic awareness, and phonics/letter ID and sounds. Emergent writing skills such as representing ideas with drawings, dictation, and beginning phonetic writing to extend is introduced through direct instruction and prewriting activities. Math standards such as counting and cardinality, and geometry/shapes are taught through engaging, interactive activities that often utilize rich literature as their basis. The entirety of our academic curriculum is embedded in lessons that foster gross and fine motor skills, build strong social skills, target self-regulation, and build number sense.

Authentic, timely, and ongoing formative and summative assessments are teacher created and give educators a reliable snapshot of each student's strength and needed growth areas. Action plans are made for all students with or without IEP's. To ensure alignment to Common Core Standards (CCS) and powerhouse scope and sequence of standards, PreK teachers collaborate with each other daily, and consistently with Kindergarten-4th grade teachers as part of our professional learning community.

The success of PHS's in-house preschool program has been documented by the beginning-of-year assessment data of kindergarteners through 4th grade. Kindergarten teachers' observational data regarding the basic kindergarten readiness skills is another indicator of the advantages of early intervention, particularly PHS's Pre-K program. Our success can be attributed to numerous factors: small class sizes, maintaining a 1:5 educator:student ratio, efficient professional learning community habits, a Pre-K/kindergarten transition program, and our tireless commitment to educating and nurturing the whole child. For the past decade, our preschoolers have transitioned to kindergarten with not only a love of learning, but with the confidence and skills to soar in kindergarten and beyond.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

2a. Arts (visual and/or performing)

All forms of art are vital to the development of the students in the Prairie Hill School District. Starting in Kindergarten, students are introduced to a variety of media, from clay to paints to yarn and everything in between. Incorporated into the projects that the students are working on (which are displayed throughout our building and in local museums), the students are also engaged in learning art history and theory.

The art department at Prairie Hill also helps brighten up the entry at the school with a rotation of murals that they develop. The murals, always unique and personal to the times, involve all of the students in the art department. This allows students to proudly see their contribution to the work displayed as the entry to the building.

Students at Prairie Hill have an hour of art instruction weekly and the art program is designed to build artists and their skills as they transition to the middle school. The work at the elementary school is the perfect training ground for the bigger pieces that students will tackle when they arrive at the middle school.

2b. Physical education/health/nutrition

Prairie Hill School, as part of a Professional Learning Community, allows for all Kindergarten through fourth grade students to attend physical education class four days a week. Teamwork is an essential part of the curriculum, with classes doubled up three out of their four days. Students are introduced to a number of different skills and movements throughout the year, with the cognitive aspect sparking many of our conversations. The goal, no matter what is taught, is teaching them the importance of being physically active in a confident manner from a young age. Throughout the different units, students are encouraged to do their best, while trying to get their heart rates elevated. With the hardwork and dedication students give from the start, a number of events are integrated during the year, with families joining in on the fun. The Jog-A-Thon kicks things off, with students first cheering on their favorite teachers in an assembly, followed by an hour-long run to raise money for our PSA. Parents are then invited into the gym during the Christmas season to moonlight bowl and cup stack, followed by Kids Heart Challenge to raise money for The American Heart Association. To conclude the year, parents come out to cheer their student(s) on in an all-day, 48 station Fitness Day.

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

For all the setbacks there might be for being a small district of less than 1000 students, there are far more advantages. Three years ago, the school board in Prairie Hill mentioned off-hand that it would be nice to have some foreign language opportunities at the elementary school, not just at the district's middle school. Within a month of the comment, a schedule was written up and presented to the board to provide third and fourth grade students in the 2021-2022 school year with Spanish. The program, yet unestablished, would provide both language and cultural education to the students weekly.

For two years now, the Spanish language program has continued to develop throughout the building. Students play games, engage in cultural celebrations, sing songs, and have become introduced to the foundations of the language. It's still simple, with students receiving 30 minutes of Spanish instruction weekly, but it continues to grow. The program has been a great stepping stone for the programs that begin in earnest at the middle school level.

2d. Technology/library/media

Our Prairie Hill library is open to all students within the building, Pre-kindergarten through 4th grade. The library encourages that reading is for everyone. We nurture the idea of free choice where students choose books based on their interests versus their reading level. A big part of our equation comes from their excitement of the books. There is a vast variety of books within the library that include a wide array of literature including fiction, non fiction, biographies and graphic novels. PHS is constantly adding new & diverse book options to our ever growing collection. We recently added a foreign language section which includes bilingual books for students whose first language may not be English. If a student cannot find a

book of interest they are urged to make recommendations for additions to the library's inventory.

The library stimulates student leadership and self-sufficiency through our self-check out at the 3rd and 4th grade levels. We implement research pathways for student projects where students may utilize the library space for independent exploration. For our younger students, the library is a significant space for students who may need a brain break. They can stop in for a coloring page, a quiet space for thought, or help the librarian with tasks. We participate in a variety of literacy boosting activities. These include Read Across America, Young American Poetry contest, participation in the Illinois Monarch & Bluestem Award, and host book fairs.

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

Prairie Hill School's LAB allows all K-4 students to experience in-depth exploration and hands-on project making. The use of hands-on (kinesthetic) learning helps students to bridge the gap between concrete observable phenomena, and theoretical abstract concepts. Students experience correlating connections between their classroom and LAB. In addition, hidden or unknown student talents are able to emerge. LAB combines Science, Social Studies, and Technology standards in a STEAM-like environment in which students collaborate to design, build, and test solutions or optimize a design solution. Students are given the opportunity for real-life, hands-on, inquiry-based educational experiences in a collaborative culture. LAB focuses on ideas and the combining of those ideas rather than correct or incorrect answers. This pedagogy inspires a passion for thinking and learning in a safe environment that doesn't rely on every student having the same answer. It encourages diversity of thinking and prior knowledge to learn and explore collaboratively to reach the standards. The learning is deeper and more expansive when students are engaged in a real-world issue and given the opportunity to develop possible solutions that could someday be actually utilized in the world.

3. Academic Supports

3a. Students performing below grade level:

As mentioned earlier, in 2021, Prairie Hill was the only elementary school (other than Magnet/Gifted schools) in Illinois to not have a single student (3rd and 4th grade) score as a 1 (the lowest level) in English/Language Arts on the Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR). This is the result of powerful instruction starting at Pre-K and the collaborative nature of the teachers working to make sure all students succeed. This is not to say that we are without students performing below grade level. Instead, we work to identify those students at early stages and build in intensive interventions to ensure all students are reading near, at, or above grade level by the time they get to third grade. Weekly, we have grade-level problem-solving teams where we discuss ideas and suggestions on how to assist any struggling students, be it in academics or social-emotional matters. This all-hands-on-deck approach means that students are not isolated to an individual classroom but are the responsibility of the entire team and building. We make sure to not just admire the problems but to offer solutions when discussing the struggles of students. All voices are heard and everybody at the meeting (grade-level teachers, special education teachers, social worker, psychologist, administration, and curriculum coordinator) is expected to be an active member in the solutions for students. We also take great pride in doing everything we can to make sure Prairie Hill students are served at Prairie Hill, not sent to larger districts with more resources. This has meant the creation of new programs that are specific to our population on a year-to-year basis. In the past, this has included a Life Skills program, an Early Childhood Self-Contained classroom and behavioral programs. This all falls into our mission statement of 'Students First, Always' where we are constantly driven by the responsibility to make the best decisions for all of our students.

3b. Students performing above grade level:

At Prairie Hill Elementary School, we provide vast and varied opportunities for our above-grade level learners. As a high performing district, we know it's important to keep our high level learners engaged and growing. Every student deserves an opportunity to be challenged. Both reading and math instruction is differentiated and leveled within each classroom. Teachers form reading groups based on ability and work

with those groups to read and discuss books that are appropriate for their needs. It's not uncommon for a whole group to be reading books that are of the next grade level's band. These groups are fluid and flexible, so that teachers have the ability to respond to students' needs on a consistent basis.

Similarly, math groups are formed based on ability as well. Pre-tests are utilized to identify students who have already mastered the material for the unit, and those students are presented with an alternative learning path. At guided math teacher tables, these students will receive instruction on above-grade level concepts suggested by our iReady benchmark assessment. Within centers, students also receive differentiated learning opportunities. For example, in first grade, the majority of students may be working at a station that features one-digit addition problems, while higher learners will be challenged with 2 digit addition problems or word problems.

Almost every common assessment offers students an extension opportunity that goes beyond the grade level standard. Above level learners can experience success with scenarios and prompts that challenge them. Finally, Response to Intervention, RtI, allows further opportunities for our high-level learners to engage in collaborative extension activities. For example, in one second grade classroom, you will find a group of three above level learners working together on student-selected research projects about King Cobras, World War II, or 9/11. With little guidance from teachers, this group holds each other accountable to discovery, writing, and engaging in high-level research.

3c. Students with disabilities:

The special education students at Prairie Hill Elementary are fully included within the general education classroom in all aspects, with the thought of a least restrictive environment being the top priority in order for all students to have equal opportunities and educational success. In order to meet each student's individual needs, as a team we discuss the most recent evaluation results in the domains of health, cognitive, academic, social/emotional, communication, and gross/fine motor skills. After documentation of evaluation results, and if there are results of our students assessing lower than the 10th percentile in a specific area those concerns are immediately addressed and an IEP plan is written for each area of concern. At PHS, we strive to push for independence and success no matter the level. Students are placed into classrooms with accommodations and supports within the Gen. Ed. setting. We pride ourselves on creating a schedule for our students with disabilities to receive Tier 1 instruction within the classroom, and pull out special education services to continue to build on what they are learning within the classroom, and what areas we need to continue more intense instruction. The importance of providing both Tier 1, differentiated instruction within the Gen. Ed., and special education services to re-teach, pre-teach, and have continuous checking for understanding has proved to be tremendous success with our IEP students to close gaps, meet/ approach grade level expectations, and even meet state expectations with IAR assessments. The special education cooperative that serves our district continues to provide professionals who deliver services, give accommodations, and consult with our staff for hearing, speech and language, vision, occupational therapy, and physical therapy. Educators, related service staff, and paraprofessionals collaborate continuously to ensure that we provide services in the most effective way for all of our students. These professional partnerships continue to show progress and success for our students with disabilities.

3d. English Language Learners:

The English Language Learners (ELLs) at Prairie Hill School are immersed and integrated into the regular classroom with services provided based on their determined level of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. There are many factors considered in order to determine their level of proficiency, including annual ACCESS and IAR testing results. In addition, we use a system to determine level that includes classroom performance and social abilities. Once these levels are determined, students are serviced based on needs rather than grade level or native language. Throughout this pull-out program, ELLs are assessed on a continual basis in order to adjust levels of instruction, not only within this program, but within the mainstreamed classroom as well. This hinges on constant collaboration, but allows for the most appropriate and least restrictive individualized instruction. When thinking about academic assessments, scaffolding is available and often utilized in order to allow the ELL to demonstrate their understanding of the standards without being based on possible language gaps. In the case of the Newcomer, we use an online translator in

order to allow students to continue growing academically while acquiring the English language. Families of ELL students are encouraged to continue supporting their child through their native language. These students demonstrate the diversity that exists in this country and provide rich culture and learning opportunities for the entire school.

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

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

Walking through the halls at Prairie Hill, you're likely to hear laughter and humor echoing off the walls. On Fridays, students are greeted by teachers and staff throughout the building donning their 'Free Hug Fridays' shirts and hosting dance parties in the hall to anyone who wants to join (high-fives, fist bumps and other welcoming embraces are also free of charge). In our building, we work hard and play hard.

The hallways are adorned with student work, highlighting the production of the students. You will often catch students slow down in the hall to read something written by a fellow classmate. On the announcements every morning, students are welcomed by a different fourth grade student leading them in our building pledge and giving them words of wisdom about that month's character trait.

The engagement of students happens in the lunchroom as well. During lunch, students are often engaged in trivia with the custodian and principal, be it guessing the 10 largest states or the most popular fast food restaurants. Learning is designed to be fun and energetic at Prairie Hill, but at the same time, we are measuring the progress of students and providing interventions that are designed to meet the needs of each student.

At Prairie Hill, we believe that students will live up to the expectations set for them. For that reason, we set our expectations high. Within the first month of the school year, even kindergarten students move throughout the building to their specials and to lunch independently, knowing that students and staff will be there to provide guidance and supervision if needed. Academically, we set high expectations for students with the promise that we will push them hard here at school but will not expect much of them at home, as our homework load at Prairie Hill is nearly non-existent. This feeds right into that mindset of work hard (at school) to play hard (at home...and at school sometimes) that embodies so much of our vision here at Prairie Hill.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

There is no Prairie Hill town. The community is built around the school and the school embraces that reality. Here at PHS, our faculty, staff, and Parent Staff Association (PSA) strive to ensure that our families and community members are working side by side for the success of each and every student both in and out of the classroom. We do this by partnering with our area business owners, local police and fire agencies, and other local organizations. Many of our events throughout the year not only promote families and community members coming into the building but also encourage our students to get out and become active members of the community.

The PSA has a mission far different from that of other parent associations. While they do hold fundraising events, their mission is not one of getting more money for the school. Instead, their primary objective is to help build a community. The Back-to-School Barbeque is a true party, a place families come together to catch up with friends. Even parents and families that are no longer among the K-8 students we serve return to celebrate the start of a new year. The massive outdoor party, filled with dunk tanks, bounce houses, barbecues, face painting, and laughter, runs at no profit.

The PSA and Physical Education department team up to put on our largest and most supported events at PHS, the Jog-a-thon. Students are encouraged to collect donations from family, neighbors, and to acquire local business sponsorships. Each fall numerous parents, grandparents, community members from local police and fire agencies, as well as business owners line up around our back field to cheer on the students as they participate in 60 mins of continuous movement. As our main fundraiser, donations received are allocated to be used for various school improvement projects that benefit the students and staff. Recently funds have been used for playground upgrades, outdoor seating options, classroom upgrades and school assemblies.

In addition to cheering students on (and spraying them off with their fire hose) during our annual Jog-a-Thon, police and fire departments from our local Stateline area have long supported our students by engaging with them as readers in the classroom, leading school parades, and even inviting students out to visit them and tour their departments. They have been known to stop in and stroll the hallways just to say hello to our students in an effort to continue developing positive relationships. As a result of our close ties, PHS was the lucky recipient of a grant awarded from the Harlem-Roscoe Fire Department recently. We were able to purchase new student Chromebooks with the money provided. We are truly fortunate to work with these wonderful agencies.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

The Professional Learning Community (PLC) is the beating heart of our staff development and school climate. Each grade level team consists of four core teachers. Specials have been uniquely scheduled to provide teams one hour of common preparation/collaboration time. Though teachers are required to meet 90 minutes a week, many teams choose to meet more frequently, likely due to the huge benefits they feel come from this professional space. Administrators and our curriculum coordinator may join grade-level teams at any time, but due to the intimate nature of this space, teachers feel empowered to make important decisions that affect their students immediately, whether that be an adjusted pacing, a new instructional strategy, or a new project to challenge above-level learners. Because of the time our teachers have to work cooperatively, their capacity is augmented beyond that of teachers working in relative isolation.

Every Friday, each grade level team is joined by a social worker, interventionist, school psychologist, curriculum coordinator and special education teacher to problem solve any number of issues that a teacher may be facing. These concerns run the gamut, from a student who is having trouble fitting in with peers to an academic unit that is proving to be more challenging for a group of students than anticipated. Together, a team of teachers have an opportunity to reach out beyond their classroom walls to other specialists that can offer extra support, whether it be additional instructional strategies, behavioral interventions, or a brain break with the principal.

Professional development for staff at Prairie Hill is often found within the PLC model. However, other opportunities exist as well to stretch, inspire, and grow our staff professionally. For example, our social worker provides a quarterly book study, and our curriculum coordinator offers a summer book study. We have also established three Content Teams for Math, Reading/Spelling, Writing/Grammar. A Building Committee rounds out the team opportunities, so each teacher on a team serves on one of these committees. Within these committees, vertical alignment is ensured, problems are explored and solutions are found, and teachers truly become drivers of change. For example, two years ago our Math Content Team decided that our math timed tests were antiquated. Research supported this notion. Together, the Math Content Leads decided to investigate other options and ultimately decided to pursue Math Running Records instead. Running Records are math conversations surrounding benchmark problems within each operation to pinpoint telling math strategies that are imperative to students' math fluency. This change was organic, proposed by teachers and supported by research resulting in teachers that feel empowered to create meaningful change that benefits their students. Similarly, our Writing Content Team is currently reading *The Writing Revolution*, which emphasizes sentence-level writing. Though we are in the exploration phase, this book study and team conversations may serve as a catalyst for change that is spearheaded by our teachers.

4. School Leadership:

In the Prairie Hill district and at Prairie Hill School, the leadership structure is a blend of professionalism and familial atmosphere. Administrators want teachers to feel treated as professionals, always looking to improve in their craft through collaboration or research. This is so much more than a job, it is a drive to excellence that motivates our staff to greatness. The goal and the drive is to be better than the year before and even the day before.

While we work hard, we play hard, too. The hallway is filled with laughter and smiles from staff and students. Fridays have been renamed to 'Free Hug Friday', where teachers and staff line the halls to give

students hugs, high fives, or other greetings, all while singing and dancing. The positive energy is contagious. Staff members greet the students daily with high fives, jokes, and personal interactions as well. The principal, in building relationships with every student, reads a birthday book to each student on his/her birthday, signs the book, and has them sign the Birthday Wall in the office. The pictures of the birthday walls line the principal's office, so students past and present can visit to see their name on the wall since kindergarten. At Prairie Hill, going to the Principal's Office is something students look forward to, not a sense of dread.

In 2016, our school district became only the third public school district in Illinois to pass legislation allowing the children of educators to attend the building regardless of residence. This was a way our school board chose to recognize the dedication and commitment of our educators. There's the common refrain in the restaurant business where workers don't want to eat at their restaurant because they see how the food gets cooked. At Prairie Hill, it's the opposite. The teachers see how the education process is for the students and in 2021-2022, 100% of staff with elementary-age students sent their children to Prairie Hill. This shows the greatest respect to their peers; they trust them with their own children.

In nearly every major decision from curriculum to future building planning to staffing to schedules, teachers are involved in the decision-making process. Similar to the work with students, the work on the building as a whole is met with a collaborative mindset. Every classroom teacher is a leader on one committee or another in the building, providing ownership for all in the decisions that impact students and staff.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

Culturally responsive teaching and learning has moved to the forefront in our school since the 2020-2021 school year. During that school year, the district wrote a new strategic plan which included an action plan to develop and implement learning experiences that meet the needs of whole student wellness within a diverse and inclusive environment with the specific result being to develop awareness and actively pursue the means of diversity, equity and inclusion by gaining input from stakeholders, creating and taking action on policies, and educating all. As a result of the strategic plan a new social emotional learning curriculum has been implemented since the 2021-2022 school year and includes lessons for all students grades Kindergarten through 4th grade on diversity and inclusion. Teachers are offered a variety of professional development in the forms of in person training and book studies on books such as *White Fragility*, led by the district's social work team. The social work team has expanded to allow support for families and staff so equity and inclusion can be supportive conversations and problem solving for all stakeholders involved.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR EXCELLENCE

TEAM. It takes a single word to describe what has been our most instrumental practice that we can trace our building success back to. More than a decade ago, the building consisted of nearly 20 independent contractors, working within their classroom to educate students, but without a common thread throughout the building. In 2013, when we began developing common collaborative time and working towards being a true professional learning community. This took sacrifices from every member of the staff. After we made the move towards learning from each other and collaborating on the needs of students, our student performance saw significant gains.

Our building has been recognized for its collaborative nature, being selected as a Model PLC School by Solution Tree and having been a destination for districts looking to make the change towards a more structured professional learning community environment. Currently, teams meet for 90 minutes weekly to discuss student success and struggles as well as grade-level assessments to measure the growth of students.

The team collaborative approach leads to a more proactive learning environment. Discussions about students and curricula are not about just what has already occurred but what more can be done. There are no finish lines, just checkpoints along the way in the learning process. Through our scoring and reporting process, parents are included in the on-going learning process of their children. There are no surprises in where students are in their learning trajectory.

We do not honor classroom teacher requests by parents. This extends to teachers who are parents in the building. About six years ago, a teacher hinted at wanting a request for their own child in first grade. The child didn't get the teacher she originally wanted, but about a month into the school year, that same teacher came to administration and said, "I'm not sure why I asked for a request. All the teachers in first grade are his teacher. They're all involved in his success." That's the mission we strive for at Prairie Hill. Where every teacher feels fully invested in the success of every child, not just the twenty or so that come to their homeroom daily.