

***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 Principal Kathleen Gilland  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

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

School Mailing Address 210 Maplehurst Drive  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Jeffersonville State IN Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 47130-8545

County Clark County

Telephone (812) 288-4878 Fax (812) 218-6744

Web site/URL https://ues.gccschools.com E-mail kgilland@gccschools.com

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. Mark Laughner E-mail m laughner@gccschools.com  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Greater Clark County Schools Tel. (812) 288-4802

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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

Name of School Board  
President/Chairperson Mr. John Buckwalter  
(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**

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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):
- 10 Elementary schools (includes K-8)  
4 Middle/Junior high schools  
3 High schools  
0 K-12 schools
- 17 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	25
K	81
1	85
2	97
3	89
4	88
5	87
6	0
7	0
8	0
9	0
10	0
11	0
12 or higher	0
Total Students	552

\*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 % Asian
  - 14 % Black or African American
  - 6 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 67 % White
  - 12 % 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: 8%

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.

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(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	25
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	44
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2021	548
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.08
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	8

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

Punjabi, Spanish, Kinyarwanda, Arabic, Filipino, Mongolian, Korean, Portuguese

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 2 %  
11 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 26 %

Total number students who qualify: 144

8. Students receiving special education services with an IEP: 16 %  
Total number of students served 86

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>8</u> Autism	<u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities
<u>0</u> Deafness	<u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment
<u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness	<u>5</u> Other Health Impaired
<u>18</u> Developmental Delay	<u>5</u> Specific Learning Disability
<u>5</u> Emotional Disturbance	<u>39</u> Speech or Language Impairment
<u>0</u> Hearing Impairment	<u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury
<u>6</u> Intellectual Disability	<u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness

9. Students receiving special education services with a 504: 4 %  
Total number of students served: 20

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

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.	22
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	7
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	11
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 25:1

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	95%	97%	97%	97%	97%
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.

To educate and inspire each student to strive for personal excellence through the utilization of effective strategies, application of critical thinking skills, and demonstration of self-assessment techniques.

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

<https://go.boarddocs.com/in/gccsin/Board.nsf/Public?open&id=policies#>

po2260

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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Situated on the Ohio River in Southern Indiana, Utica Elementary is part of the Greater Clark County School Corporation, located in Jeffersonville, Indiana. Once a major riverboat town located directly across from Louisville, Kentucky, our community is rich in steamboat heritage. It is experiencing unprecedented residential growth and is a thriving, suburban area consisting mostly of mixed income, single-family dwellings. This is a vast departure from our origins. Initially, the school was called First District School, constructed in 1873 in Utica Township, located one mile from our current school. The original school mascot was the Utica Bombers, a reference to the world's largest military powder ammunition plant, which was built in our historic community. We have since proudly evolved into the Utica Elementary Jets, just as the once sprawling ammunition plant has been transformed into a thriving industrial complex.

Utica Elementary serves preschool through fifth-grade general education students and includes programs for children with severe disabilities, special needs, speech and language impairments, and those who are gifted and talented or at-risk. We have a long history of excellence in education. Our school has been honored as a Four-Star School by the Indiana Department of Education in 1997, 1998, 2009, 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015. We are proud of our "A" letter grade for our performance in educating children by our own parent community and by the Indiana Department of Education for more than 12 consecutive years. Our staff has been recognized locally and at the state level. We have four teacher recipients of the Greater Clark Teacher of the Year/WHAS Excel Award. The WHAS Excel Award is given annually to a teacher in the Louisville metropolitan region. We also have a recipient of the statewide Hoosier Educator of the Year Award.

Utica Elementary provides a curriculum that goes beyond the fundamentals, emphasizing the education of the whole child with academic, social, and emotional growth of all students. We believe collaborative planning and ongoing curriculum development are essential to meeting the diverse needs of our students. Our teachers provide a flexible curriculum that scaffolds the learning of all students. We use instructional methods based on scientific research and provide a supportive foundation for our learners. The curriculum is rigorous and all staff members find ways to implement engaging activities that differentiate learning as needed. We ensure all learners' needs are met by using multiple data points to determine where each child is in the learning continuum and decide the next steps for academic growth.

Our school family is bound together by the common thread of good character, which includes mutual respect, personal dignity, and individual responsibility. Utica Elementary utilizes social and emotional learning (SEL), trauma-informed teaching, and our districtwide work ethic program called PRIDE (persistence, respectfulness, initiative, dependability, and efficiency) to support a healthy and safe learning environment. It is not uncommon to see students taking brain breaks throughout the day to help incorporate movement and refresh their thinking. This year we introduced Mika, a specially trained therapy dog that plays a unique role in supporting students who are under stress or struggling to manage big emotions. When our students feel safe and supported, they perform better. Our school has regularly scheduled lessons utilizing the "Character Strong" curriculum. It helps our children learn the value of empathy, service, and connections, so they can become the best versions of themselves. To build community, we have daily scheduled classroom meetings to develop support and empathy for others. We have a schoolwide community meeting twice a month. These meetings help build school spirit and engagement, a culture of academic achievement, and a schoolwide growth mindset. We celebrate our students' accomplishments, big and small. Our school PRIDE program is the foundation for teaching and recognizing students who demonstrate positive character traits. A focus on building relationships and embedding these practices into our daily routines has contributed to our success.

Another wonderful aspect of Utica Elementary is the extracurricular activities. Some examples include Academic Team, Technology Club, Chess Club, Rube Goldberg Club, Student Ambassadors, Dance Team, and Student Council, in addition to athletic teams. Utica Elementary consistently provides high-achieving extracurricular programs that perform well in all competitions. Our programs offer students the chance to explore their interests, learn teamwork skills, and develop time management and social skills outside of the classroom. We are especially proud of our Student Council, which has been awarded the Indiana Association of Student Council's Elementary Honor Council more than ten times. Our Student Council



embodies Utica Elementary's belief in academic excellence and a dedication to community service.

Although Utica Elementary has 552 students, we embrace a small-school environment. Teachers and staff believe in fostering personal relationships with all students, not just those assigned to their classes. We encourage children to reach their fullest potential academically, emotionally, and socially by ensuring all students feel welcome, safe, and accepted. These positive relationships contribute to the successful climate of Utica Elementary. Our community, students, and staff are proud to be a part of the Utica Jets' family.

## **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:**

Utica Elementary believes that literacy is a fundamental part of instruction for all disciplines. Indiana Academic Standards are the driving focus in our district sequence guide. Each grade-level framework addresses standards by units and state assessment priority. Teachers spiral and scaffold all literacy education guided by these documents. Our teacher collaboration process refines learning progressions, establishes criteria for success, and creates meaningful learning experiences.

The instructional approach for literacy focuses on the five pillars of reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension during a 90-minute literacy block. Within each pillar, educators incorporate the science of reading to refine instructional practices. In our primary grades, educators utilize an Orton Gillingham approach for phonics instruction and Heggerty curriculum for phonemic-awareness instruction. McGraw Hill Wonders series serves as a resource and guide to support tier 1 instruction. During a typical literacy block, students receive explicit instruction in word recognition and language comprehension. Teachers use the gradual release model to move students toward mastery. Students rotate through explicitly designed differentiated literacy activities including leveled reading groups with reading response activities, independent reading conferences, digital literacy curriculum, and a review of literacy skills. In the upper grades, the teachers embed content texts with the reading standards. Students also receive an additional 30 minutes of explicit writing instruction daily. Students are taught how to correctly respond to reading through written responses and apply the six-Traits approach to the writing process for all genres. The writing block also consists of explicit teaching, modeling, mentor texts, small-group writing, and peer/teacher conferences. Students publish their writing and take joy in their growth. Each grade level has a leader that has completed the National Writing Project training. This curriculum contributes to the outstanding growth seen in our students.

Utica Elementary's literacy committee, the literacy Data Wise team, develops an annual action plan and determines professional development needs based on multiple formative and summative assessments. Teachers employ daily formative assessments such as collaborative activities, total participation techniques, summaries, reflections, exit tickets, and quick checks. Students receive timely feedback directly from their teacher during small groups and writing conferences. Daily formative assessments are utilized to make immediate adjustments in instruction. Summative assessment data is analyzed to further guide instruction. We use the corporation-developed district mastery assessments (DMAs) at the end of each unit. Our primary grades perform quarterly checklists based on the state standards and take a universal dyslexia screener. During common planning, teachers analyze student data and refine learning groups. Additionally, our students take a nationally normed standardized test, the NWEA, three times per year. Teachers and the literacy Data Wise team use all of these data to further refine instruction. Quarterly, students complete a corporation writing benchmark for each genre. In addition, we use a mid-unit benchmark to obtain data for quality improvement. Finally, the literacy Data Wise team disaggregates data from the state tests, IREAD and ILEARN, to guide class placements and create school improvement goals. Using summative and formative assessment data helps teachers guide reteaching, instruction, and enrichment opportunities for all students' growth. When students are proficient in literacy, it creates lifelong learning and growth in all disciplines.

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

Utica Elementary's goal for mathematics is to mold our mathematicians into critical thinkers. Our curriculum is centered on the Indiana Mathematics Academic Standards. In addition, our corporation has adopted McGraw Hill's Reveal Math series. This highly engaging curriculum focuses on exploration and student conversations. Each grade level also has incorporated a 75-minute numeracy block with four major components. Students review mathematics content in daily math review, work on operation facts using math fact mastery and mental math routines, explore new content material in the core lesson, and extend their

thinking with critical thinking and problem solving tasks. These components have produced well-rounded mathematicians in our school.

Over the last few years, Utica Elementary's math committee, the math Data Wise team, has implemented an action plan to develop and focus on two main goals. The math Data Wise team has reviewed district mastery assessments (DMAs), NWEA, and ILEARN data to determine areas of improvement. This team provides professional development opportunities and resources for all of our teachers. Our first goal was set for our kindergarten and first-grade classrooms to implement Number Talks into their daily math instruction. Our second goal was for second- through fifth-grade teachers to incorporate real-life application and critical-thinking tasks in number sense, computation, as well as algebraic thinking. These goals serve two purposes. We want our students to have the basic fundamentals of mathematics and be able to use mathematical language in everyday activities. Our teachers realize this is a critical aspect of development that begins in the primary grades. As we are developing critical-thinking mathematicians, we are also implementing productive math struggle tasks into our classrooms. We have discovered students need time to process, examine the task, and think about their strategies before other students and teachers become involved. We have also found that peer conversations are essential to assist students as they develop problem solving skills.

Utica Elementary consistently utilizes data from formative and summative assessments. Our students take the NWEA assessment three times a year. We utilize the Learning Continuum to find students' strengths and weaknesses. This information, along with data from ILEARN, guides math groupings in our classrooms. Our corporation also takes district mastery assessments after each unit of instruction for students in upper elementary grades. Primary students are assessed using unit checklists that correlate standards. Teachers utilize the data received from these formative assessments to determine which students need more challenging math opportunities, as well as those that require remediation. By establishing flexible groupings across each grade level, we are able to meet the needs of all learners.

Data continuously drives our instruction. Using formative or summative assessments to ascertain our students' abilities, we can provide children with the best possible learning environment and opportunities for growth. We strive to find the best placement for our students and make sure we have provided them as much support as possible to shape the minds of our mathematicians.

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

Our goal in science is to provide an integrated curriculum in kindergarten through fifth grade that promotes critical thinking, problem solving, and curiosity. We want students to understand and interpret the natural world around them. Utica Elementary has successfully integrated science daily through literacy and mathematics instruction. Our curriculum follows the 2022 Indiana Science standards. STEM education is also promoted throughout the school. Kindergarten through fifth grade receive technology training each week. Classroom teachers provide hands-on inquiry-based instruction. Students are provided ample opportunities to solve real-world problems through highly engaging activities. Utica students also participate in after-school clubs that promote engineering, such as robotics, Rube Goldberg, and technology/coding.

Utica is always looking for ways to evolve and expand our science instruction. We have reached out to the local community to help foster STEM learning. We have teamed with Purdue University to learn about rockets. The Wilson Education Center has trained our staff to provide a portable planetarium for all grades to promote an interest in space exploration. We received a \$500 grant from the Greater Clark Educational Foundation that provided all fourth graders with Generation Genius, which is an excellent engaged-science online resource. Two of Utica teachers were selected to sit on a district-level curriculum review committee with the release of the 2022 Indiana Science Academic Standards. They worked to brainstorm how our resources may best help the integration of science within the literacy instructional time. Utica teachers are constantly looking for innovative science opportunities for our students.

After inquisitive exploration, students are assessed in a variety of ways. Teachers use well-designed rubrics to provide timely feedback for students. Utica has historically led Greater Clark County Schools and far surpassed the state average in fourth-grade ILEARN scores. This year, the administration has recognized

Utica's success and asked our teachers to help develop the science curriculum for the district. We are proud of our dedication to science instruction. We recognize the value it brings to our students and its importance in developing pragmatic, inquisitive minds.

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

The goal for social studies education is for all children to develop thinking and decision-making skills to prepare them for responsible citizenship in a democratic society. Our curriculum follows the 2022 Indiana state standards. We utilize many learning opportunities, both online and text resources, to explore and research historical time periods, places, and events. Social studies is integrated into our literacy curriculum. Our students develop critical-thinking skills while becoming better readers. Many of our writing prompts and activities force students to think about civic-based concepts. Students at all grade levels showcase their social studies learning through presentations, technology, reports and at Wax Museum Family Night. Wax Museum Family Night gives students the opportunity to portray and perform as historical characters. The use of formative assessments such as criteria-based rubrics are used in addition to summative assessments to determine student mastery. The highlight of the fourth- grade social studies curriculum is researching and presenting about famous Hoosiers. Each student portrays a famous Hoosier and performs in front of multiple grade levels. This is an amazing opportunity for the students to integrate their skills in a college and career-ready activity.

Our students participate in many unique experiences through Junior Achievement USA. Intermediate students participate in Biztown, where they create and run businesses, vote and elect officials, pay taxes, and make purchases in a mock town. Our first graders participate in Our Families, where college students teach them about needs and wants along with entrepreneurship. Additionally, we organize field trips to historic homes of colonial leaders, to local museums, where we study native groups, westward expansion, and our nation's independence, and to our local city hall, where we learn about government.

Utica Elementary also has an award-winning Student Council and School Ambassador program that focuses on civics and philanthropy. Members of these groups are leaders in our school who plan and facilitate events and promote citizenship. Utica Elementary staff understand that we are developing future leaders of our communities.

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

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

It has become evident that high-quality early childhood education programs reduce achievement gaps at kindergarten entry and have long-term academic benefits. The goal of the Utica Elementary preschool program is to prepare each child for a successful transition to kindergarten. We are doing this by optimizing kindergarten academic readiness in early literacy and math, communication, social-emotional development, fine and gross motor skills, and self-help skills. Our preschool program is a high-quality integrated program serving students with special needs and typical peers. We have two half-day preschool classes that have no more than 20 students and are instructed by a licensed teacher and two trained paraprofessionals. Preschool staff provide individual, small-group, and whole-group instruction. Students also learn through play in centers of their choice.

The Utica Elementary preschool program is a Paths to Quality (PTQ) Level 3 program. Paths to Quality is Indiana's early childhood rating system. Level 3 Programs implement a curriculum that supports children's learning and school readiness. As required by PTQ, our preschool program has a planned curriculum developed by Greater Clark County Schools. The curriculum is driven by the Indiana Early Learning Foundations, an early learning framework, created in 2002 to facilitate essential skills for children ages three to five. These foundations were written to recognize a continuum of learning from birth to kindergarten. Additionally, the foundations were written to align with the 2014 Indiana Academic Standards and to vertically align through third grade. The preschool staff uses the Indiana Early Learning Foundations to

drive instruction and to ensure that our preschool students are kindergarten ready. It is evident by looking at our kindergarten readiness scores that our preschool program has positively affected students' school readiness and success in the primary grades. Our preschool students have outperformed all others entering kindergarten on an average of three to five points in the past two years. Utica Elementary preschool program increases students' opportunities to function effectively on a daily basis at school, at home, and in the community.

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

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

All kindergarten through fifth-grade students at Utica Elementary attend art and music classes for 45 minutes weekly. Lessons are designed to follow a scaffolded approach based on national and state standards for visual arts and music.

The art program incorporates the study of a diverse group of artists and art styles from different time periods. Basic art concepts including the elements of art and principles of design are taught and embedded into each project. Students are introduced to and given opportunities to explore and experiment with a variety of 2-D and 3-D media, processes, and techniques. Students are encouraged to reflect on and refine their work with the opportunity to create art with individual expression and personal meaning. Artwork is displayed in the school and celebrated in the community.

Music lessons are designed to give students the opportunity to understand and apply music fundamentals, experience musical performances, and appreciate others' work. Students are connected electronically with performers and attend local high school performances to gain exposure to a variety of music. These lessons and experiences are continually modified to improve efficacy, meet the current climate, and address emerging topics. Students also have the expectation and opportunity to perform their productions for a live audience.

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

Utica Elementary physical education's philosophy is to equip students with the fundamentals to be healthy, competent, and confident lifetime movers. Students in kindergarten through fifth grade participate in physical education once weekly for 45-minutes. The curriculum is based on the Indiana State Standards and our district's physical education pacing guide. We include physical, health, and nutrition education that is age appropriate and continuous in development, building on the previous year's knowledge.

Primary students in kindergarten through second grade focus on building a base of fundamental movement, including locomotor, non-locomotor, manipulative, and rhythmic skills. Intermediate students in grades three through five build upon the fundamental base developed in the primary grades to develop a lifetime of activity specific skills and fitness related concepts. In addition to physical skill acquisition, students also learn applicable health and nutrition concepts that can be applied throughout life to guide healthy lifestyle decisions. Upon the completion of physical education at Utica Elementary, the ultimate goal is to equip students with the knowledge and skills necessary to confidently and competently participate in a variety of physical activities, not just for now, but to also enjoy for their lifetime.

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

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

Weekly, our students attend a library class and computer science class. During library class, the media specialist structures the period for lessons and time for students to choose books for recreational reading. Literacy lessons during library time include read-alouds with thoughtful discussions connecting personal

responses and critical thinking. A focus is also placed on improving informational literacy skills. The media specialist helps students check out appropriate books and promotes reading using the Reading Counts program, an independent reading program where students choose books, take quizzes, and set personal goals. Library time builds a culture that values reading and the belief that working toward a goal is worth the effort.

In their computer science classes, students practice keyboarding skills and learn coding and the suite of Google products. As students hone their keyboarding skills, they become more efficient with their online classwork. As they gain expertise in Google docs, slides, sheets, etc., they grow confident in producing quality work for their assignments. The coding classes teach them computational thinking and the ability to evaluate a problem and break the solution down into its individual parts. We bridge this skill to other areas of curriculum and life where they will need to analyze and solve problems.

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

The use of instructional technology has been a priority at our school for over ten years. All students in kindergarten through fifth-grade have access to individually assigned Chromebooks. Computer science standards are incorporated throughout the day, and emphasized in weekly 45-minute computer science class. Our goal is to utilize technology to complement instruction, not serve as a substitute for teaching.

Our school corporation implemented Google Classroom in all Greater Clark County schools in 2019. The early implementation and student experience helped our staff and students maintain educational continuity during the pandemic shutdown. During this period, our staff received extensive training on many innovative ways to engage students in virtual learning. We contracted with an outside agency to train our teachers on numerous tools and innovative technology. We also utilized teachers within our building to train and support staff. Teachers became proficient at Seesaw, Screencastify, Loom, Kami, and more. Technology has enhanced our ability to implement Google Meets, Google Slides, Boom Cards, Clever, Kahoot!, Symbaloo, Quizizz, Edulastic, project-based activities and student-created presentations, in addition to interactive polling, game-based learning, and administering assessments. Utica Elementary students are successfully engaging in learning through technology in order to succeed in the future workplace.

## **3. Academic Supports**

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

First and foremost, Utica Elementary ensures that every grade level provides students with solid academic core work. Tier 1 instruction is carefully planned based on a common, viable curriculum. Our teachers incorporate a variety of differentiated instructional strategies to meet students needs and ensure students can attain knowledge mastery. The first step in meeting the diverse and individual needs of our student population is scaffolding Tier 1 instruction. We use diagnostic and prescriptive tools to determine the current level of instruction for each student. Utica Elementary has a general philosophy that we should not lower the rungs of the ladder for academic success but instead build a better ladder to help students achieve mastery.

At Utica Elementary, we pride ourselves on providing students with the fundamentals needed to be successful in all curricular areas and in life. All instruction starts with the individual students' historical data. In kindergarten, first, and second grade, we utilize our dyslexia screener to identify students' reading challenges, then we address those challenges using research-based instruction. Each classroom has a 30-minute separate period for intervention in literacy and mathematics. All instruction is adapted to meet the needs of the individual student in tier 2 or tier 3 small groups during this period. Using the data, students are placed in flexible deficit-specific small groups to work towards mastery of identified areas. Specialized instructors work with students to reach mastery. Each lesson is prescriptive, diagnostic and individualized. Lessons move at the students' pace. Teachers monitor students' progress weekly, bi-weekly, and monthly to ensure growth goals are met. Teachers and interventionists make academic adjustments according to the data.

Utica Elementary's approach to student learning is a collaboration amongst all stakeholders. When students' academic or behavioral growth is behind that of their peers, a multi-tier support system (MTSS) committee meeting is convened. The classroom teachers, interventionists, special education teachers, administrators and corporation personnel come together to discuss strategies, solutions, and next steps for the student. When a plan is put into place for a student, the committee reconvenes to discuss progress and possible adjustments.

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

Utica Elementary is known in the community for setting and maintaining high expectations for our students. We believe the bar should be set high, and students will rise up to meet the challenge. Currently seven percent of our students are identified as highly-abled based on state criteria and 37 percent of our students perform above the eightieth percentile on the NWEA MAP standardized assessment. Our goal, as teachers, is to scaffold our support to assist in the discovery of new content. The instruction in mathematics and literacy is tailored to meet individual needs.

In literacy, students performing above grade level participate in book studies with peers and analyze text that corresponds to their Lexiles. A favorite activity for our higher achieving students is reading and interpreting Shakespeare's works in the Shakespeare for Kids series. It is not only about reading higher Lexile books but providing rigorous, thought provoking questions to our students. We have determined that higher-level questioning has been an essential component, fostering data-driven success in literacy.

Utica students are also performing above grade level in mathematics. Our teachers use NWEA, ILEARN, and district mastery assessments to determine our students' skill levels. Utica teachers utilize math groups, technology programs, and even peer tutoring in higher grade levels to provide additional support for students mastering grade-level content. A specific example of supporting above grade-level students occurs in fourth and fifth grades. Every two weeks, students take a DMA. The results are analyzed to determine flexible groups. Teachers divide the students based on mastery and then focus on specific skills. This process not only provides targeted support for students with skill deficits, but also explores content above grade-level standards for the highest performing group. We have found this practice to be extremely effective in meeting the needs of our students and increasing student performance. Utica Elementary strives to establish high expectations for our students by providing support for every child to reach their greatest potential.

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

Student outcomes are a focused priority at Utica Elementary. Various data sources help in determining if instructional supports are effective and if instruction needs adjustments. Monitoring preschool and kindergarten students is essential in identifying reading readiness and challenges that may impede reading progression. Because students with learning differences typically involve reading deficits, we closely monitor reading and intervene early when students do not meet reading benchmarks. We develop individual learning goals for students with disabilities that have measurable outcomes and monitor their progress regularly. Utica Elementary understands that students with disabilities must have a rich curricular experience which requires them to be readers.

We believe that our students with disabilities will perform best in the least restrictive environment that includes effective general education instruction. As a non-Title I school, we have limited resources and support staff. Therefore, our general education classroom teachers must take on both core instruction and provide the majority of interventions for all learners, including our students with disabilities. Our special education staff primarily serves over 75 percent of identified students within the general education setting. Our special education paraprofessional spends the majority of her day helping students with organization, executive-function skills, and behavior needs. Utica teachers are skilled at scaffolding and differentiating core instruction for students with disabilities and other struggling learners with similar needs. Our classroom teachers take primary responsibility for their students' learning and growth.

committee of special education teachers, interventionists, classroom teachers, and parents. The goals are also monitored weekly, bi-weekly, monthly and yearly. Student data is the driving force for modifications that need to be made to help the student reach their full potential. At Utica Elementary, our high expectations extend to all students to work towards their full potential.

Utica Elementary also has a high-quality program for students with more significant cognitive disabilities. Students' individual needs are met through data-based instruction founded in students' individual goals. Student needs are individualized and intended to build independence in academic and functional skills. Alternative curriculum that is aligned with state content connectors are used to promote student growth.

**3d. English Language Learners:**

Utica Elementary has only two percent of our population that is identified as multilingual learners, many of whom are high achieving. Students that are identified as English Language Learners (ELL) are screened initially using a standardized screener to determine their current level of language acquisition. Students are then tested annually using a suite of English language proficiency assessments called WIDA to attain their growth and proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in English. Classroom instruction is then scaffolded based on the students' scores and includes input from both the general education teacher and the reading coach. This ensures that core instructional delivery is based on the individual learning needs of each multilingual student. Utica Elementary provides an additional 30-minute Tier 3 intervention for those multilingual learners whose proficiency level is at the entering or emerging stage. Multilingual learners who are developing and may be in expanding stages in their English proficiency are supported through Tier 2 interventions. We adhere to Indiana Department of Education English Learner and Migrant Education Programs as well as WIDA guidance.

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



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

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

Utica Elementary engages, motivates, and provides students with a positive environment that supports academics, social and emotional growth, and college and career readiness development. To create a positive environment, our staff builds strong relationships with students, sets clear goals and expectations, and develops routines.

Academically, our staff makes learning relevant and connects it to the real world. Students participate in class discussions and are encouraged to share ideas and strategies. Total-participation techniques, gallery walks, and “I notice/I wonder” statements are used regularly to engage students. Our students have high expectations as well. Students set learning goals and teachers provide meaningful feedback to help students stay motivated to achieve those goals.

To foster engagement, students have a voice and choice in their educational process. We encourage teamwork, cooperation, collaboration, and project-based learning. All grade levels participate in individual and group assignments for projects, such as edible cells, Famous Hoosiers, Charlotte’s Web projects, kindness challenge, ecosystem displays, Footprints for Life program, and Community Helpers unit. Schoolwide, we engage and motivate our students in a RACE Writing Week with an Iditarod theme featuring our Alaskan husky therapy dog, Mika. We further engage our students and their families with several evening events such as the Scholastic Book Fair, Fall Family Literacy and Math Night, Oratorical Wax Museum, and Science Fair. This is in addition to the many after-school clubs and programs that we offer.

At Utica Elementary, we support our students’ social and emotional growth in many ways. Our PRIDE program is in place to teach, engage, motivate, and recognize all students for the many positive contributions made to our school climate. We have schoolwide morning meetings led by our principal to foster community and celebrate the achievements of our students. Using the Character Strong SEL program, we have monthly character words such as Respect, Cooperation, Gratitude, Empathy, Responsibility, and Courage. In our daily class schedule, we have a dedicated time to teach these SEL skills. During this time, teachers create a safe environment to hold class discussions where students are able to share feelings and discuss strategies for handling life’s obstacles. We use restorative chats to teach conflict resolution.

We have a partnership with Junior Achievement to allow students to experience real-life scenarios. Schoolwide, we feature a College Go Week. During this week, we have daily themes to engage students to consider their future choices and options. Through setting high expectations for student success in academic and social and emotional learning, we motivate them to consider their futures for college and career readiness.

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

The key to a successful family-community-school relationship is communication and a partnership of involvement. Utica Elementary creates strong connections to our families and the community by cultivating a sense of belonging and emphasizing the strengths of all stakeholders. Our relationships are first built within the classrooms by creating an open line of communication. Parents are encouraged to visit and assist in the classroom during the school day after securing appropriate security protocols. Our teachers use Class Dojo, a communication application for daily communication. Weekly newsletters from classroom teachers, the bi-weekly schoolwide Jet Gazette, weekly emails from the principal, and our school web page keep all family members informed.

Research proves that parent involvement develops a lifelong love of learning and is vital to long-term success. Therefore, we welcome volunteers and members of our community to participate in school activities as much as possible. Parents and grandparents assist in the library and collaborate on events such as our book fairs and Family Learning Nights. These events allow parents to visit our school during evening

hours and circulate through classrooms. Teachers provide hands-on materials to be taken home for families to utilize activities to further develop literacy and mathematical engagement. Classroom volunteers assist small groups of students, prepare classroom materials, and provide extra hands when needed. Our parents are eager to attend field trips. They volunteer for our field day, classroom celebrations, dances, and sporting events. Their involvement creates a positive community culture between home and school.

We are fortunate to have a dedicated, supportive Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) at Utica Elementary. Our PTO has been an integral part of the success of our school for decades. Many events hosted by our PTO such as our annual Fall Festival, Candy Parades, Trunk or Treats, and Trivia Nights encourage families to actively participate and be engaged in our school community. Utica's PTO supports our teacher with classroom contributions and needed materials.

Community professionals, along with parents, foster leadership in our students. Many of our Utica parents are leaders within our community, some are active board members of our Greater Clark Educational Foundation. Area leaders have sponsored clubs for students, such as the Rube Goldberg STEM club. Our local politicians are frequent visitors at Utica Elementary. The Jeffersonville Mayor, Indiana State Representative, and United States House Representative have made stops at our school to meet, read with, and honor our students. Several Utica parents are local first responders and have fostered a strong presence of police and fire volunteers at events in our building.

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

John Hattie states that collective teacher efficacy is the greatest, most powerful and predictive influence on student achievement. Utica Elementary has built an environment where teachers have a collective sense of agency. Our staff embodies a professional culture with their willingness to meet challenges and take risks, as they believe their role is important and makes a difference in student success. Utica teachers have an investment in leadership and a collaborative responsibility to make instructional decisions for children.

Our staff are highly trained experts in their field and continue to stay current on the latest instructional research. Eighty-three percent of our certified staff have received their master's degrees and 59 percent have earned over 30 credit hours beyond their master's degree. Sixty-six percent of our teachers have taken collegiate level specialized training or course work to expand knowledge and address students' needs.

Utica Elementary School offers many professional development opportunities throughout the year to enhance the professional learning culture of our school. Our entire staff went through Harvard Data Wise training, an eight step process to improve teaching and learning, to ensure we capitalized on our daily whole-school common planning time. We have teacher leaders at every grade level who have received the National Writing Project training. Currently 80 percent of our teachers working with primary students have participated in the specialized Orton-Gillingham multisensory technique training or Heggerty Phonological and Phonemic Awareness. Our goal is to have every primary teacher trained by the end of next school year. Our math coach is trained in Orton-Gillingham multisensory technique training for math and works with classroom teachers to expand their knowledge. Four of our teachers have completed the train-the-trainer professional development for Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). Our school is able to provide quarterly training on SEL strategies and utilization of restorative practices. SEL training paired with safe crisis management training has helped our staff with supporting students that are presenting emotional challenges that are on the rise post COVID.

Our school coordinates strategic and continuous school improvement through teams of teachers focusing on one of three areas: math, literacy, or PRIDE. Each teacher is assigned to one of the three committees, which are referred to as Data Wise teams. Each one of these teams reviews school data to look for trends, finding valuable insight for ways to improve our school. Each Data Wise team meets a minimum of twice quarterly to discuss and analyze content-specific data to measure the effectiveness of our school improvement plan and strategies that we are implementing. These teams then decide if strategies should be tweaked or modified. This shared responsibility for student learning and school culture has been critical to our school professional culture.

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

Utica Elementary is a professional learning community whose work is founded in the belief and understanding that our staff makes a difference in students' lives. We believe that in working collectively, we have become better teachers. Through this belief, we have created a system of leadership that empowers all staff to use their talents and knowledge for the collective good. This is possible through teacher leadership across the building.

Utica Elementary has one building administrator that is supported by a math coach and a literacy coach, making up the leadership team. The leadership team leads by monitoring what is important. This is outlined in the annual principal playbook, which prioritizes the work outlined in the school improvement plan. Utica Elementary leadership has created an environment of clear expectations and empowered educators, facilitating systemic change and high teacher retention rates.

We have created and refined clear systems for our school. All staff members know our priorities, and we monitor what is important for our building. We regularly review our systems and determine if they need to be refined or updated. This is done in part by our Data Wise teams. The teams meet regularly to review student performance data and goals, plan professional development, and adjust our systems. The information is shared by the Data Wise representative with grade-level teams at grade-level collaboration time. This ensures that the objectives are addressed at the classroom level. We also use this work to annually update our school-improvement plan and to determine priorities for the next school year. The Data Wise teams give every person a voice and responsibility for implementation.

We utilize our Building Leadership Team (BLT) to lead grade levels, focus Data Wise teams, and provide continued support for the vision of our school. There is one master teacher per grade level in addition to our math coach and our literacy coach on this team. The teachers on the BLT have committed to additional specialized training to further their expertise for their Data Wise team. Annually, our BLT goes on a day-long retreat before the start of the school year to dig into our student performance data and ask tough questions about how we can improve. This team of teachers has been stable for many years and has developed a level of trust that allows us to have difficult conversations. The Utica Elementary Building Leadership Team represents the best teachers leading the rest of our staff to improve student learning across the school.

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

At Utica Elementary, emphasis is placed on the whole child, as a positive contributing citizen to our school community. We strive to instill in our students a deep appreciation for strong self-identity and awareness, as well as respect for each student's individualism. Our teachers and staff know the importance of connecting children's personal life experiences to teachable moments in the classroom in order to fully engage and educate our learners. By striving to incorporate the three components of culturally relevant pedagogy, our staff provides intellectual growth using problem-solving strategies, inspires an appreciation for personal and community culture, and emphasizes critical consciousness regarding socially relevant experiences.

The social and emotional challenges facing today's youths have a strong effect on their educational experience and ability to learn. Our teachers and staff have incorporated a curriculum focusing on the mental well-being of each child and make it a point to develop meaningful relationships with students and other staff members in order to establish trust and cohesiveness. The Character Strong program emphasizes key character traits to developing positive, happy citizens. This is integrated throughout our school building. Professional development time is allocated for training on social-emotional learning and how to embed those components throughout the school day. Our previously established PRIDE behavior expectations aligned perfectly with the "Purposeful People" lessons, providing our teachers with a wealth of materials. By using media technology, videos, songs, stories, and read-alouds, our classroom teachers have expanded "Morning Meetings" as an opportunity to model and discuss real-life scenarios. This time is also used to teach strategies to address challenges students may experience at home and school. Establishing a rationale for problem-solving skills, as well as a respect and appreciation for individual differences, our focus is on fostering a positive culture throughout the entire school.

Self expression through writing is a wonderful way for students to communicate thoughts and feelings, as well as develop a meaningful voice. Realizing the need to improve and increase student writing skills, teachers incorporate daily writing journals and thought-provoking writing units focusing on relevant topics. These topics spark children's interests, intrigue, and provide opportunities to express personal narratives on paper. This daily writing experience allows students to relate and share ideas in a more confidential way while developing a love for creative writing. By incorporating and utilizing these relatable writing opportunities, our students are becoming inspired, confident writers.

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

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The most successful schools create a culture of collaboration and shared responsibilities. When asked what makes our school extraordinary, the Utica Elementary staff overwhelmingly states that our level of collaboration sets us apart from others. We are fortunate to incorporate a 30-minute schoolwide planning time and a 45-minute grade-level common planning block daily. This intentional collaboration time is being utilized to foster continuous school improvement and plan purposeful instruction. Using the pedagogical approach to collaborative teaching, our staff is constantly improving our craft.

Using collaborative data inquiry needed to drive continuous improvement, our students and staff show positive growth in all areas. We have organized our committees, or Data Wise teams, with at least one teacher from every grade level. The teams are responsible for guiding the school in strategic and continuous improvement specific to the areas of focus: math, literacy, or PRIDE. Our teams have been trained to delve into the student data to find trends and gaps. This data allows the teams to examine the effectiveness of instruction, develop an improvement plan, and implement relevant professional development. The teams assess the progress through the year to decide if strategies should be tweaked or modified. This shared responsibility continues throughout the school year. Through discussions and reflection, we establish a school culture instrumental in supporting continuous schoolwide growth.

Utica Elementary staff utilize grade-level collaboration to foster teacher clarity. Grade-level collaboration is intentional planning of instruction and focuses on improving student outcomes. Our grade-level teams analyze state standards to ensure a strong understanding of grade-level learning expectations. The teams design the learning progression, develop daily learning intentions, and determine student success criteria. Instruction and assessments are designed to align with the learning intentions. Teachers bring examples of students' work and student achievement data to the team to analyze results and determine next steps. Teacher clarity helps our grade-level teams focus on instructional practices, meet individual needs, and foster high expectations through productive struggle.

Utica teachers also refine their craft by participating in classroom visits. Teachers seek opportunities to observe teachers in their own grade level or other grade levels to examine teaching strategies and practices. These insights are discussed with grade-level teams where teachers reflect on their own practices and make necessary adjustments to support teacher development and student growth. Utica teachers also use these classroom visits to assist new teachers as they adjust to the teaching environment. Utica teachers have a strong desire to learn from each other and are interested in opinions of other colleagues concerning instruction. We strive to assist each other and build capacity with all of our teachers.

The one practice that Utica Elementary has implemented that makes our school a success is our clear schoolwide process for teacher collaboration. We foster continuous school improvement and create teacher clarity. This intentional use of collaboration increases the capacity of all teachers in our school and builds teacher efficacy. We have a growth mindset due to our continuous opportunity to grow and improve our craft.