

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

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

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

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

School Mailing Address 508 Chestnut Street
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Blue Rapids State KS Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 66411-1515

County Valley Heights

Telephone (785) 363-7693 Fax _____

Web site/URL <https://www.valleyheights.org/> E-mail tstaples@valleyheights.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.

(Principal's Signature) Date _____

Name of Superintendent* Mr. Sean Spoons E-mail sspoons@valleyheights.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name USD 498 Valley Heights Tel. (785) 363-2398

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

(Superintendent's Signature) Date _____

Name of School Board
President/Chairperson Mrs. Sharon Osborne
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

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

(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature) Date _____

The original signed cover sheet only should be converted to a PDF file and uploaded via the online portal.

**Non-public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, leave blank.*

PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION

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):
- 2 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
1 Middle/Junior high schools
1 High schools
0 K-12 schools
- 4 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	52
K	25
1	25
2	30
3	24
4	34
5	27
6	34
7	0
8	0
9	0
10	0
11	0
12 or higher	0
Total Students	251

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

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 0 % Asian
 - 0 % Black or African American
 - 5 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 94 % White
 - 1 % 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: 7%

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	8
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2021 until the end of the 2021-2022 school year	9
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	17
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2021	247
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.07
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	7

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

Spanish, Afrikaan

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 49 %

Total number students who qualify: 123

8. Students receiving special education services with an IEP: 19 %
Total number of students served 48

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional conditions. All students receiving special education services with an IEP should be reflected in the table below. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

<u>0</u> Autism	<u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities
<u>0</u> Deafness	<u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment
<u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness	<u>5</u> Other Health Impaired
<u>25</u> Developmental Delay	<u>11</u> Specific Learning Disability
<u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance	<u>2</u> Speech or Language Impairment
<u>0</u> Hearing Impairment	<u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury
<u>7</u> Intellectual Disability	<u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness

9. Students receiving special education services with a 504: 0 %
Total number of students served: 1

10. Number of years the principal has been in the position at this school: 1

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	2
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	18
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	2
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%	99%	96%	95%	0%
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. 2018

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

The Valley Heights community will prepare students to become lifelong learners and productive citizens. As a Professional Learning Community, we envision a school in which staff: Unites with parents and community to achieve specific goals with a common purpose; Works together in collaborative teams; Monitors each student's individual progress to guide instruction; Improves student achievement on a continuing basis by implementing effective, research-based strategies; Demonstrates a personal commitment to the academic growth and general well-being of all students; Nurtures a caring, positive, child-centered learning environment; Values everyone within the school community.

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

<https://www.valleyheights.org/page/usda-nondiscrimination>

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

The Valley Heights district, USD 498, includes the two towns of Blue Rapids and Waterville in Northeast Kansas. In 2021, the population of Blue Rapids was 921 and Waterville was 656. Local employment opportunities consist of agriculture, manufacturing, and mining. The district is comprised of three campuses: Waterville Elementary, the Preschool through second grades, Blue Rapids Elementary, the third through sixth grades, and the Junior Senior High School located between the two towns. Our population is 131 students for Waterville Elementary and 120 students attend Blue Rapids Elementary who are served by approximately 22 certified staff, as well as Special Education services provided through the Marshall County Special Education Cooperative. With a poverty level that continually hovers at approximately 50% and relatively low property valuation, the district continues to be highly dependent upon state aid to operate effectively and efficiently.

Until consolidation in 1966, each town had its own K-12 school. Once Blue Rapids and Waterville joined together, each community kept their own elementary building and unified Junior High and High School students in 1972. In 2022-2023 the Free/Reduced percentage for the elementary buildings is 47%. Students With Disabilities is 23% at Blue Rapids. We are made up of a majority of Caucasian students with no English Language Learners (ELL) students. The Valley Heights District has a Schoolwide Title I status.

A catalyst for our current elementary success was being put On Watch in 2014. For three years prior, our State Assessment scores dropped due to our school decision of switching to Common Core Standards early on. The elementary buildings hired a reading specialist to help us make significant improvements in reading. We also decided to join the Technical Assistance Systems Network (TASN) to help us implement Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) as well as choosing a new English Language Arts (ELA) program. At this time we also transitioned from a targeted-assisted Title I program to a schoolwide Title I program. Our MTSS program consists of a Walk-To Intervention approach where our children are divided into fluid groups that work on targeted skills in reading. All of these alterations to our curriculums and new mind-set have played a huge role in the success we have experienced.

Not unlike other districts throughout our state and our country, numerous factors have impacted the social emotional well-being of both our students and our staff. We believe it is one thing to know that our students, parents and community struggle with poverty, addiction and various upheavals within the home environment, but it is truly another to acknowledge it and proactively address it. USD 498 has taken tremendous strides to face these challenges head-on with a family advocate, a mobile resource center and added personnel for social and emotional support. Understanding the hierarchy of learning and ensuring our students' basic needs are being met in a caring and safe environment has been a priority that we have set and continue to work on.

While the publicity and overall perception from COVID is negative, we have found a way to be resilient, and come out ahead of the other side. Addressing the hierarchy of needs and building resiliency has helped us focus on the whole child. During COVID, staff went above and beyond to connect with our students via home visits on front porches, class meetings via Google Meet, and numerous attempts to meet the needs of students and families. Between our district family advocate and our elementary counselor, over 400 home visits were made between March and August of 2020. Daily lunches were passed out by various staff members to guarantee children were receiving nutritious meals with an added bonus of necessary human interaction. During this uncertain time, the highlight for our elementary schools and our families was our “We Miss You” Parade! The teachers and staff decorated our cars and paraded by students’ homes in both communities, honking and waving! Everyone was so excited to see each other and made life seem a little bit more normal. Protocols were implemented to make sure that our district’s academic and social emotional standards remained rigorous. Our district returned to full schedule in the Fall of 2020 with optional online learning following all Marshall County health regulations and suggestions.

With the new administration in our Superintendent’s position in 2020, a renewed focus on the whole child was brought to the forefront for our district. Our professional development centered on trauma informed decisions and practices. This, in conjunction with a growth mindset philosophy altered our approach to

teaching our children resilience. An elementary counselor was hired for the 2019-2020 school year. This had a huge impact on the mental health of our students and staff! Daily classroom meetings and Zones of Regulations were implemented in 2021. Both of these helped to gain data and personal information on our children as well as helped to set goals for the following year.

Since receiving the Blue Ribbon Award in 2018, there has been a renewed focus on continuing student success and well-being. Our staff consistently reviews and searches for new and better strategies to implement in our MTSS program. Since our MTSS instruction begins in the classroom core, we use the data to differentiate for each group to guarantee a smooth transition and fluidity from core time to supplemental instruction for Math and Reading.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

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

The Valley Height Elementaries utilize curriculum protocols that maintain consistency and fidelity throughout our buildings. Standards and lesson plans are regularly being checked for alignment between all grade levels in our core areas.

We use a handful of resources to implement the Kansas standards. For ELA, we utilize Journeys as our main curriculum resource. Journey's provides explicit instruction to create a system for teaching informational texts and literature, receiving foundational skills, and for mastering speaking, listening, and writing skills. Journey's addresses the five main areas of literacy; phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Our preschool through second grade teachers implement Heggerty phonemic awareness as a supplemental resource. Another supplemental resource we use for informational text is Scholastic News and Studies Weekly. All grade levels enhance our grammar and writing with outside programs that help to support our state standards. Reading strategies and expectations are used cross-curricular throughout the buildings in all subjects including Music and PE.

An elementary-wide comprehension strategy has been implemented for several years, to create a universal strategy for all students to utilize. We tie in our school mascot, COLTS, to walk the students through the step by step process. This process has the children scan the passage, read carefully through the questions and passage, look for textual evidence to support their answer choices, and then choose the best answer. Reading comprehension is one of our Kansas Education Systems Accreditation (KESA) goals, and this building wide comprehension strategy is one of our action steps to attaining this goal. The data that was collected were weekly reading passages provided through our Journeys series. Staff were precise on which questions were answered correctly/incorrectly. This data was helpful to differentiate learning for both our core and MTSS times. First through sixth grade use the program Accelerated Reader to help monitor comprehension of library books the children choose.

The Kansas State Department of Education rolled out a state-wide dyslexia initiative that our team became heavily invested in. This was the first step in teacher buy-in towards the science of reading. This has led to all PreK-third grade certified teachers and administration to take Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) training offered by the

State of Kansas during the 2022-2023 school year.

At the beginning of the 2022-2023 school year, the curriculum adoption committee explored and looked at evidence based programs and attended curriculum fairs. After much research using Ed Reports and What Works Clearinghouse, the decision was made to continue using Journeys 2014 ELA curriculum due to building level success as supported with our State Assessment scores.

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

In 2018, the Valley Heights math curriculum adoption committee met to research numerous programs to replace Envision, our prior math series. After much comparison and discussion, Eureka was adopted as the elementary Math program. Some of the deciding factors in favor of Eureka were the increased rigor encompassing number sense, fluency, conceptualizing, and more inline with our standards. "Eureka Math set a new standard for rigor, coherence, and focus in the classroom so students gain a deeper understanding of the why behind the numbers, all while making math more enjoyable to learn and teach." (Great Minds, n.d). Manipulatives were purchased for Kindergarten through sixth grade classrooms for hands-on instruction to better assist with concrete level learning. This program has been very successful and staff has seen a rise in math understanding and comprehension.

To ensure best teaching practices, the district sent our Math curriculum team to an initial training over three days in Denver, Colorado. They then came back and organized a Professional Development day for staff. The following summer, additional training was offered to staff in Kansas City. In conjunction with training from Eureka, the district hired an outside consultant from Kansas State University for two consecutive years to help teachers bridge the Kansas standards with the new curriculum. Professional Development was led for all elementary staff together to delve into the Kansas Math Standards. He also visited our district once a month to work one-on-one with grade level teams to help with implementation of lesson goals and tying the entire curriculum together.

On top of the fact fluency practice through Eureka, grades Kindergarten through third have consistently implemented daily fact practice over the past few years. The gains from this practice are seen at the upper levels. After seeing these results, the upper grade levels have now also put fact fluency into weekly practice in their classrooms.

Technology is utilized to enhance and support instruction. When time allows, students love playing Prodigy, Zearn, and Freckle, online math programs that create a “game” like atmosphere while solving math problems.

We use different forms of assessments to monitor our student learning. Exit Tickets are a useful and efficient tool for our daily formative assessments. Staff give various summative assessments offered through Eureka such as Topic, Mid-Module, and End of Module tests. The online program Edulastic is an effective format to give these tests to the students.

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

Mystery Science is our online science curriculum for grades first through fifth. This program engages students with videos from Doug, a former elementary and middle school science teacher, and hands-on activities. When starting a new lesson, Doug introduces the concept and encourages discussion over the topic. Then a hands-on activity is facilitated by teachers. Resources for individual lessons have been purchased for each classroom to assist students in hands-on learning. The scores from our fifth grade state assessments are consistently above the state’s. These scores lead us to believe that Mystery Science is meeting the needs of our students along with matching our Kansas Science standards. Teachers use the Mystery Science assessments following each individual mystery along with teacher observations to check for understanding.

Since this curriculum only goes up to the fifth grade level, our sixth grade implements Kesler Science curriculum which is based on the 5E (Engagement, Exploration, Explanation, Elaboration, and Evaluation) learning method. Each topic spans for a two week period with a final assessment to check for understanding. The alignment between sixth grade and Junior High has been mapped out to assure no standards are left uncovered. With creative time management, our teachers implement science topics and material into our ELA and math lessons when applicable.

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

Preschool through fifth grade classes have adopted grade level materials that meet the Kansas History, Government, and Social Studies (NGSS) standards. Sixth grade students navigate through their Studies Weekly magazines in order to meet their social studies standards. There have been many discussions between sixth and seventh grade teachers in order to tie standards and curriculums together.

Students have an opportunity to learn more about our great state of Kansas in January. Kindergarten through second grade have a big birthday celebration on January 29th in which students learn about the different aspects of our state. A park ranger from the Homestead National Historical Park visits to teach our children about the buffalo and how the Native Americans used every part in their lives. Students also have the opportunity to make homemade bread and butter, play old time games, sing songs from the prairie, and make Kansas crafts. The third through sixth grade teachers set up stations for students to rotate through to learn more about various facts about Kansas. Third grade students also participate in an online scavenger

hunt in which they discover Kansas historic events and people.

The sixth grade class watches CNN-10 YouTube videos once a week to gain knowledge of current events in the world. Throughout the video, the children write three specific details and facts they learned and email these to their teacher. This helps our children who may never travel outside of our county to see there is a world out there to explore.

Scholastic News Magazine is also used as a supplemental curriculum in grades Pre-Kindergarten through fourth grades to learn more about their grade level topics in a more enjoyable, engaging format.

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

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

Valley Heights operates an early childhood preschool program for students ages three and four. Classes are held four days per week. Our sessions run from 8:05 am to 11:15 am, and 12:15 pm to 3:30 pm. Having a morning and afternoon session allows for flexibility among families and their schedules. Skills taught during preschool include social and emotional, gross and fine motor, pre-reading and readiness, language, and music, art, and technology skills. Fees are minimal, at only \$40 per month or \$20 per month for families qualifying for free or reduced rates. Morning and afternoon transportation is provided to assist families. Preschool students are able to receive breakfast, and each session provides a healthy snack for students.

Our preschool program balances structured play and academics. We use Wonders as our ELA curriculum and Eureka for math. A small group approach allows for individualized instruction.

In compliance with the Kansas State Department of Education, we ask parents to administer the Ages and Stages Questionnaires at the beginning of each school year.

Each spring, we offer an early childhood open house for families to come see our facilities, ask questions, and receive our handbooks and policies. At this time parents can also request either the morning or afternoon session. We strive to let parents know which session their child will attend in the spring to allow time for child care arrangements.

Our Marshall County Special Education Cooperative provides early childhood screenings to help identify students who are struggling with walking, talking, and learning ages three through five.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

2a. Arts (visual and/or performing)

Valley Heights Elementary students, grades kindergarten through second grade have Music class daily for 25 minutes. Grades three and four have music three days a week for 25 minutes where grades five and six are four days a week for 25 minutes. The Kansas standards for Music are covered in a wide variety of manners and activities. The Music instructor provides multiple opportunities for the students to showcase their skills in programs put on for the community such as both a winter and spring concert. Our fifth and sixth grade students are extended the chance to participate in a Band class with the Junior High/High School band teacher. This class is four times a week for 25 minutes each day. The bands do get to perform at different concerts throughout the year.

A local group of volunteers present artwork to our students monthly to promote visual arts in our buildings.

2b. Physical education/health/nutrition

Valley Heights Elementary students receive physical education daily for 25 minutes. As a staff, we recognize the importance of physical activity and promoting a healthy lifestyle. We utilize the Kansas standards and the Spark Training Curriculum to ensure students are receiving strategic physical education lessons. Some units that are covered are mindfulness/yoga, football, basketball, volleyball, gymnastics, and baseball. We also participate in the American Heart Association's Hoop for Hearts Program. This program educates our students on heart healthy habits and raises money for the American Heart Association. The highlight of our year is the annual PreK-6th grade Charles Steele Play Day. Students compete in track and field events and parents/community members fill the stands to observe their children.

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

2d. Technology/library/media

Valley Heights Elementary shares a librarian who travels to each building library daily. Students in grades kindergarten through fourth grade have library time twice a week while fifth and sixth grades once a week. Our librarian introduces authors monthly to entice readers to try something new. We established the 30 Book Club in grades one through four which the librarian facilitates.

Our music teacher is also our keyboarding instructor. Twice a week students in third and fourth grades work on an online keyboarding program to teach them correct hand and key position. Fourth and fifth graders continue this program once a week and use keyboards often in the classroom with daily assignments.

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

Through Valley Heights Community Education, we provide an afterschool program funded by a 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) grant. Our program addresses social emotional learning, physical fitness, arts, reading, homework help and tutoring, a healthy snack, and positive interactions between students and staff. Our afterschool program is offered to all students ages preschool-sixth grade, runs four days per week from 3:30 to 5:30, and is free of charge. This has proven to be a true benefit for our students and their families.

Also offered is a summer Camp Exploration and academic summer school that lasts three weeks in June and three weeks in July. This program is also funded through the 21st CCLC and we have secured funding for the past eleven out of twelve years. This opportunity for our elementary students is offered free of charge and runs four days per week. Transportation is provided between our two communities and rural routes are provided for summer school students. A free breakfast and lunch are provided. A variety of activities are integrated throughout the six weeks including remediation in reading and math, STEAM activities, and character education. Many engaging and cross curricular units are created and often encompass local and community resources.

3. Academic Supports

3a. Students performing below grade level:

Our dedicated staff members provide numerous accommodations and support to ensure the needs of all students are met. We administer a universal screener three times per year, FastBridge, to identify students at risk. Once students at risk are identified, we administer diagnostic assessments to determine individual need levels. Via our walk-to-intervention Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) model, each student receives thirty minutes of reading intervention or enhancement daily. Groups are kept small in size with a goal of six students or less per staff member to allow for intense, strategic instruction. We use evidence based resources to provide fast paced, engaging lessons during our intervention times. Students are monitored weekly or every other week and groups are adjusted according to student needs. Celebrations are held when students show growth.

Differentiated instruction and scaffolding are implemented in each classroom. Accommodations include preferential seating, modified assignments, one on one support, repeated directions, visuals, and sensory seating/objects.

Students below grade level are also supported by paraprofessionals in the classrooms. Our paraprofessionals are highly-qualified and receive professional learning on how to engage with struggling students.

Through our after school program, Colts RoundUp, students are able to attend homework room for further academic support. Our after school program also includes a rotation of reading to promote literacy skills in students.

Our Student Intervention Team meets every two weeks to discuss student concerns and provide support and recommendations for how to best meet student needs.

3b. Students performing above grade level:

Valley Heights Elementary staff work tirelessly to challenge and encourage our students who perform above their grade level. The main arena is in our MTSS classes where our Tier 1 students are able to collaborate on various projects and topics. Teachers focus on Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) activities to challenge each child to their greatest learning potential. The Tier 1 groups are determined by using benchmark data from FastBridge three times a year along with classroom data. These two formats allow our groups to be fluid and have students striving to join the Tier 1 activities. Teachers within their own classrooms also implement differentiated lessons for students to meet their individual needs. One format is by using online math apps that can be set up by the teacher to allow children to continue working above and beyond their lessons in class. This format exposes students to higher level problem solving. In reading, our school librarian works with the Junior/Senior High librarian to have more access to higher level books for our students. This option takes away any building limit to reading books children are interested in.

3c. Students with disabilities:

Approximately 19% of the students at Valley Heights Elementary have Individualized Education Program (IEPs). These needs are met through the Marshall County Special Education Cooperative, through whom the district shares services with Marysville USD 364. The Special Education Cooperative's motto is Grow Big Dreams. Individualized instruction and accommodations/modifications are in place to ensure a free and appropriate education for all students. Although our special education employees are employed through USD 364, they attend professional learning from both that district and ours. Despite frequent turnover of Special Education staff, our students' needs have continued to be met and held to a high standard.

To identify students with disabilities, we have a Student Intervention Team (SIT) that goes through the formal process of identifying interventions, accommodations, and strategies, and determines the effectiveness of those interventions. When general education interventions are not successful, our staff communicates with the Special Education staff to request further evaluation. Parents are actively involved in this process, and we meet with them to discuss ways we can work together as a team to help their child be successful.

3d. English Language Learners:

Valley Heights has one teacher who is certified to teach English Language Learners and is a full-time classroom teacher. This teacher oversees the implementation of KSDE's ESOL Program Guidance. Valley Heights has students complete Home Language Surveys, screens students using the KELPA (Kansas English Language Proficiency Assessment) screener, writes ILPs (individualized learning plans), assesses students in the spring on the KELPA and communicates this information to parents. Two percent of our student body are English Language Learners. Since Valley Heights doesn't have multiple staff to work with ELLs, the ILPs are written with strategies that general education classroom teachers and paraprofessionals can use to support the student during the day. These strategies often include visuals, more time and more

individualized practice on skills. The MTSS program at Valley Heights supports the students in developing ELA skills.

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

Through Valley Heights Community Education, we provide an afterschool program funded by a 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) grant. Our program addresses social emotional learning, physical fitness, arts, reading, homework help and tutoring, a healthy snack, and positive interactions between students and staff. Our afterschool program is offered to all students ages preschool-sixth grade, runs four days per week from 3:30 to 5:30, and is free of charge. This has proven to be a true benefit for our students and their families.

Also offered is a summer Camp Exploration and academic summer school that lasts three weeks in June and three weeks in July. This program is also funded through the 21st CCLC and we have secured funding for this the past eleven out of twelve years. This opportunity for our elementary students is offered free of charge and runs four days per week. Transportation is provided between our two communities and rural routes are provided for summer school students. A free breakfast and lunch are provided. A variety of activities are integrated throughout the six weeks including remediation in reading and math, STEAM activities, and character education. Many engaging and cross curricular units are created and often encompass local and community resources.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

Academically, we engage our students through multiple avenues of lesson presentation. This includes hands-on learning, small group activities, centers, brain-breaks, technology, student voice and choice, and Jump Start. Jump Start was implemented five years ago in both elementary buildings and has gotten our students excited to come to school in the mornings. It quickly had teacher buy-in and has become one of the most important parts of our day. Students go straight to the designated location (gym or lunchroom) and interact with other students. At the beginning of the school day, the entire student body participates in a regular routine which includes flag salute, announcements, birthday celebrations, introducing guest teachers, daily affirmations, and team unity cheers. This process helps to get all the students and staff on the same page to start the day.

Once students are heading to their classrooms, there are multiple high-fives and greetings up and down the hallway. It is common to see students of varying grade levels checking in with all staff members. This has led to an environment of children feeling comfortable talking to and going to different adults with any concerns or issues.

Class meetings and Zones of Regulations have given teachers great insight into our students' emotional concerns. Our class meetings are held daily and follow a routine of greetings, share time, and an activity. This is a great way to set the tone for the day while teaching speaking and listening standards. In 2017, we adopted the Second Step as our social emotional curriculum. Students are taught coping skills, de-escalation and self-regulation strategies, anti-bullying expectations, etc. Universal building expectations are taught at the beginning of each school year and are consistently reviewed.

Understanding that career interests start as early as elementary students, the utilization of Career Cruising has helped students identify potential interests and future career opportunities. Guest speakers have been brought in monthly to showcase their career path.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Our Community Education program offers adult education classes led by certified instructors. These classes include hunter's safety, CPR & First Aid, cooking classes, Silver Sneakers classes, spin class, high intensity fitness class, and Zumba dance class.

A unique program that our Community Education offers is our Santa's Gift Shop. Students' grades kindergarten through sixth grade are able to purchase gifts for members of their household for one dollar per item. Scholarships are available for those in need. Approximately 1000 gifts are purchased each year.

Our Family Advocate drives a mobile resource center to provide resources for any student, family, or community member, based on need, not income. She has served over 250 unique individuals within our district. Examples of items provided include clothing, school supplies, hygiene and household products, baby items, as well as connecting families with other supportive resources. She is also in attendance at school events such as parent/teacher conferences, enrollment and family engagement nights as well as community wide events such as parades, fairs, festivals, etc.

We host family engagement nights two times per year to engage families as well as provide resources for how parents can help their children at home. Our district provides free meals and resources to encourage all families to attend.

Our Parents as Teachers program serves numerous families which includes children newborn through age five. Play groups are held monthly to connect families with children of similar ages.

The Valley Heights Elementary Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) is actively involved in raising funds to

support our elementary students. Playground equipment, field trip expenses, treats, meals and the book fair, are a few examples of how the PTO supports our district.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

The staff at Valley Heights Elementary has created a culture that is reflective of the high standards and expectations they have of not only themselves, but the students as well. The Valley Heights Elementary School has created a family-like atmosphere in which all staff support each other.

Professional learning opportunities are always encouraged and supported by district administration. Staff are encouraged to seek out professional learning that interests them or is a goal area they would like to work towards. District wide professional development is provided for all, including support staff. Our District and Building Leadership Teams develop and plan these professional development opportunities. Professional development was also adapted to ensure adequate time was available for staff. Seven days are scheduled throughout the year for grade level, content area, as well as building and district level collaboration.

Once a year the districts in our county bring in motivational speakers. This allows time for us to collaborate with other schools in our area. These have included subjects such as trauma-informed practices, how to increase student engagement, and strategies for boosting teacher creativity. All of our professional development has the whole student in mind when planning and implementing.

Our district helps to compensate teachers to encourage degree advancement. The board will reimburse up to \$250 per college hour earned. Many staff members have taken advantage of this opportunity by obtaining their Master's degree. This enables many of our teachers to achieve a highly qualified status within their area of concentration.

Several of our staff members are trained in the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) framework. With new training in the PLC+ framework, we are working towards enhancing our PLC process to provide more collaboration amongst staff.

A district Wellness Committee was implemented after seeing physical and mental stress in our staff. They constructed an incentive program in which staff complete activities to earn a \$300 medical reimbursement card. Some of these activities are: exercising, annual wellness check ups, reading motivational or leadership books, volunteering, and donating items. Many staff members participate in this program.

4. School Leadership:

The leadership structure of USD 498 consists of a seven member school board, one superintendent, and a building level administrator in the Pre-K-2 building, the 3-6 grades building and the 7-12 building. The philosophy of leadership at USD 498 is to make student centered decisions that focus on the social emotional well being of the students first and academics second.

The role of the superintendent is to oversee and support the building level administrators and to give them the resources necessary to effectively run their building. The superintendent also works alongside the school board to make fiscally responsible decisions and to support and create district policy.

The role of the building level principals is to oversee the everyday functions of their respective building to include supervising teachers, handling discipline concerns and being an instructional leader. There are various ways that school leadership ensures that policies, programs, relationships and resources focus on student achievement. Leadership ensures that the programs that are in place receive financial as well as professional development support for all programs and policies that are in place. Previously, with the presence of only one administrator in both elementary buildings, lead teachers were hired to help with student decisions when the principal was not present. In 2019, the district hired an assistant principal to assist the principal with discipline and other leadership decisions and to be opposite of him in the elementary building that he was not in. In the spring of 2022, it was decided that a building principal was needed in both buildings. Feedback from staff has been extremely positive and they appreciate having immediate feedback

and support with any issues that may arise.

The principals communicate with the Board of Education at each monthly meeting and report the events and successes of their respective buildings. As an administrative team, the principals and superintendent meet frequently to ensure that transparency of programs, policies and procedures are aligned throughout the district, and communicated effectively at the building level.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

We have been more aware of the importance of promoting diversity, equity, and access for all. Even though Valley Heights does not have a wide variety of cultural diversity, we do have a large range of socio-economic diversity. Our best resource for this gap is our family advocate. Her job is to reach out and be available to help support our families as noted earlier in Engaging Family and Community. Each building in our district has essential supplies for students including, but not limited to, hygiene products, clothing and even formal wear and dress clothes for concerts, dances and other school sponsored activities.

We started implementing Trauma Informed Practices in the Fall of 2020. We continue to deepen our knowledge and skillset to best meet the needs of our students who have experienced childhood trauma. This began with district wide professional development that provided a foundation of knowledge regarding adverse childhood experiences. A big portion of this education was on ACES scores and their impacts on both our staff and our students. We utilized community patrons and resources to provide a Poverty Simulation Exercise for all district staff. This was extremely impactful and an eye-opening experience for staff on the impact of poverty on our students and families. Through the course of the day, we acquired an extensive knowledge of available resources for families in need within our communities.

To provide equitable learning opportunities we differentiate instruction, provide intervention, and write legally binding documents such as IEPs and 504 Plans. We share a special education cooperative with Marysville USD 364 School District where resources are tailored to meet the needs of all students with disabilities.

In Fall of 2020, the district completed their initiative to be fully 1:1 with iPads providing equitable access for homework completion. During COVID, the school district partnered with Blue Valley Telecommunications to ensure low socioeconomic students had equitable access to internet services while schooling from home.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR EXCELLENCE

The most instrumental practice that we have implemented at Valley Heights is student centered decision making. Every decision at Valley Heights is made through the lens of what is best for our children. We know that teaching the whole child begins with addressing their hierarchy of needs. In order to achieve active and engaged learners we must first ensure that the most basic needs of our students are met, and that they feel safe, protected, loved, and confident in their ability to succeed. It is this paradigm that unites us and has created an environment that is centered around the needs of each student, both socially, emotionally and academically.

The foundation of the whole building is a family centered environment. Living in a small, rural community, we have increased awareness of the specific stressors and experiences of our students and their families. While we cannot control what happens at home, we can control the care and concern we give to our students in light of those struggles. Examples of a loving classroom encompass feeding children breakfast or snacks throughout the day when they are hungry; allowing students to take a break when they are needed; utilizing the Colts Clothes Closet when clothing, shoes, or coats are needed; reaching out to the Family Care Advocate when a child doesn't have functioning glasses; and listening when children need to talk. Our staff understands and believes children's basic needs must be met before academic growth can happen.

Knowing that our status quo wasn't working, we implemented MTSS districtwide to meet the academic needs of each child. This allows us to focus on the individual needs of each student and create interventions specific to skill deficits. Data points for each child are reviewed weekly and instruction is adjusted accordingly. We are creating a safety net to guarantee that each child feels safe, loved, and empowered.

Along with academics, we also regularly screen our student's social emotional wellbeing. Interventions include one-on-one or small group counseling, check-in/check-out, positive reinforcements, visuals/goal charts, and de-escalation and self regulation strategies. Each classroom implements Zones of Regulations to help children acknowledge their emotions as well as allowing the teachers to check in with students they are concerned about.

In conclusion, Valley Heights Elementary is a unique and loving environment where students thrive under the guidance of dedicated, loving professionals who are committed to excellence.