

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

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Mr. Matthew Hoffman

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

Official School Name Smithsburg Middle School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 68 North Main Street

(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Smithsburg State MD Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 21783-9606

County Washington

Telephone (301) 766-8353

Fax (301) 766-8352

Web site/URL

https://sites.google.com/wcps.k12.md.us/sms

E-mail hoffmmat@wcps.k12.md.us

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* Dr. David Sovine E-mail SovinDav@wcps.k12.md.us

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Washington County Public Schools Tel. (301) 766-2800

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 Ms. Melissa Williams

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

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

Date _____

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

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

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

PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION

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

1. All nominated public schools must meet the state's performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
2. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2023 in order to meet all eligibility requirements. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
3. The school configuration must include one or more of grades K-12. Schools located on the same campus (physical location and mailing address) must apply as an entire school (i.e. K-8; 6-12; K-12 school). Two (or more) schools located on separate campuses, must apply individually even if they have the same principal. A single school located on multiple campuses with one principal must apply as an entire school.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2018 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for at least the three years prior to September 2022.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 or 2022.
6. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. If irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state, the U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's application and/or rescind a school's award.
7. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as "persistently dangerous" within the last two years.
8. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
9. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
10. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district, as a whole, has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution's equal protection clause.
11. The nominated school has, or is subject to, a nondiscrimination policy (provide either a link to the policy or submit a text of the policy), is committed to equal opportunity for all students and all staff consistent with applicable law and does not have any outstanding findings of unlawful discrimination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's nomination and/or rescind a school's award if unlawful discrimination is later discovered.

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

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

PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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

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

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

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools. **Only include demographic data for the nominated school, not for the district.**)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located. If unsure, refer to NCES database for correct category: <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/> (Find your school and check “Locale”)

- ☐ Urban (city or town)
☒ Suburban
☐ Rural

3. Number of students in the school as of October 1, 2022 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent at the school. Include all students enrolled, in-person, participating in a hybrid model, or online only. If online schooling or other COVID-19 school issues make this difficult to obtain, provide the most accurate and up-to-date information available:

Grade	# of Students
PreK	0
K	0
1	0
2	0
3	0
4	0
5	0
6	184
7	162
8	188
9	0
10	0
11	0
12 or higher	0
Total Students	534

*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):
- 1 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 2 % Asian
 - 15 % Black or African American
 - 10 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 1 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 64 % White
 - 7 % 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: 12%

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	40
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2021 until the end of the 2021-2022 school year	26
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	66
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2021	534
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.12
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	12

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

Spanish

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 45 %

Total number students who qualify: 238

8. Students receiving special education services with an IEP: 10 %
Total number of students served 56

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>7</u> Autism	<u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities
<u>0</u> Deafness	<u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment
<u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness	<u>14</u> Other Health Impaired
<u>0</u> Developmental Delay	<u>16</u> Specific Learning Disability
<u>6</u> Emotional Disturbance	<u>8</u> Speech or Language Impairment
<u>0</u> Hearing Impairment	<u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury
<u>5</u> Intellectual Disability	<u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness

9. Students receiving special education services with a 504: 7 %
Total number of students served: 35

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

11. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to the nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below. If your current staffing structure has shifted due to COVID-19 impacts and you are uncertain or unable to determine FTEs, provide an estimate.

	Number of Staff
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	30
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	10
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	4
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	3

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 18:1

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	92%	93%	95%	94%	95%
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.

The Smithsburg Middle School community develops life-long, self-directed learners who take responsibility for their academic achievements as they become productive citizens in a global society.

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

[https://go.boarddocs.com/mabe/wcps/Board.nsf/files/CHDLB755B52E/\\$file/AC%20\(final\)%208.16.22.pdf](https://go.boarddocs.com/mabe/wcps/Board.nsf/files/CHDLB755B52E/$file/AC%20(final)%208.16.22.pdf)

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

Located in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, Smithsburg Middle School (SMS) has a diverse student body, serving both urban and rural communities in the area. While our students and their families are very different from one another, all stakeholders are linked together as proud Smithsburg Leopards. The pride in the school can be seen in the community with Leopards spiritwear being worn everywhere from the grocery store, to the Steam and Craft Show, to Pride Days, to athletic events. The Smithsburg Middle School Parent-Teacher-Student Association (PTSA) proudly supports staff and students with activities and resources to encourage and celebrate Leopard excellence.

Our commitment to the importance of literacy and our belief in the power of reading drives the curriculum throughout Smithsburg Middle School. First and foremost, the students at Smithsburg Middle School see themselves as readers. Staff guides students to carefully select independent reading books that will both interest and challenge students to grow. Our administrative team performs random, light-hearted “reading checks” as students pass through the hallways, asking students what they are reading and how they feel about it. Students welcome the opportunity to share their choice books and their thoughts about them.

The curriculum in all of the core content classes is literacy-based, requiring students to read a variety of materials to learn and gather information. Staff members teach students a variety of before-, during-, and after-reading strategies, which are employed across content areas. Students then use the information gleaned from their readings to further grow their skills as problem-solvers, collaborators, speakers, writers, and artists. Students demonstrate this learning through the creation of presentations and writing pieces and participation in Socratic Seminars, debates, and mock trials. All students are equipped with Chromebooks, which allow learning to happen anywhere and anytime.

Students' individual needs and interests are honored at Smithsburg Middle School. Intervention and supplemental instruction classes are offered to support students who need additional, differentiated support in mathematics and English Language Arts (ELA). Our Student Support Team meets weekly to focus on student attendance and to support families in various ways. In addition to the core content classes, students can enjoy band, chorus, orchestra, art, technology, and physical education classes as electives. After-school programs include tutoring, archery, yearbook, jazz band, Leopards for Christ (LFC), and art exploration. The Smithsburg staff volunteers to coach area sports, facilitate student clubs, and supervise student leadership organizations.

Knowing that the importance of mental health is a growing concern and something that must be supported before anyone can be expected to learn and grow, Smithsburg Middle School equips staff and students with the skills and strategies necessary to foster wellness. Throughout the school year, staff members are trained by mental health professionals and our in-house equity coach. These trainings include trauma-informed best practices for teaching, yoga in the classroom for mindfulness, relationship-building, and other mindfulness practices. Teachers employ the strategies and skills learned in these trainings in their classrooms, with many teachers starting each class period with a mindful minute and time to share good news. Both of these practices allow students to have a quiet time to regroup and destress before class begins and allow teachers and students to build relationships that go beyond the academic. Additionally, students meet twice a week with an advisor, and during this time there are lessons addressing how to get students to recognize strengths and challenges impacting their own mental health and wellness, stress management, empathy, and conflict resolution. Our two school-based counselors are also available to students throughout the day for one-on-one support, mediation, and lunch groups. Furthermore, the counselors provide timely and relevant classroom-based lessons to all students in all three grade levels.

Smithsburg Middle School gives back to our remarkably supportive community in a variety of ways. Smithsburg participates in the Micah's Backpack program, which provides “direct food assistance for students who are experiencing food insecurity.” Students in the National Junior Honor Society (NJHS) volunteer in the community and raise money for local organizations; this year NJHS students volunteered their time after school to assist in the clean up of classrooms and shared areas. Our physical education staff hosts an annual three-on-three basketball tournament to raise money for the Washington County Humane

Society. The Student Government Association (SGA) raises money for diabetes research and education. Each year, the band, chorus, and orchestra classes host concerts for the community, including a band concert on Veterans Day to show our appreciation to our local veterans, and the band also participates in many local parades. Throughout the school year, staff and various organizations host activity nights for students, providing students with a place to socially interact with one another after school hours.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

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

The Smithsburg Middle School English Language Arts Department uses the Washington County Public Schools Essential Curriculum, which was developed using the Maryland Career and College Readiness Standards for ELA. Smithsburg Middle School has also adopted the Washington County Public Schools Literacy Philosophy, which states that “All ... students have the right to be successful and confident readers and writers. Instruction, grounded in systematic, explicit foundational skills and complex texts, promotes thinking and builds knowledge so students communicate their ideas in the classroom and beyond.” Using this curriculum and a solid, student-centered literacy philosophy, Smithsburg Middle School teachers employ a variety of strategies to prepare students as competent readers, writers, speakers, and collaborators.

ELA teachers guide students through four units of study: argumentative writing, literary analysis, narrative writing, and research. Students read, analyze, and discuss a variety of fiction and nonfiction texts in each unit to analyze and evaluate the extent to which language is used for different effects, in different contexts, and for different purposes. Students utilize this knowledge along with our Writing Non-Negotiables to improve as writers as they learn to use language effectively for writing tasks correlated to each unit. The curriculum is cyclical in nature, with the texts and tasks becoming increasingly complex in each subsequent grade level.

A variety of strategies are employed to foster students’ continued development in ELA at Smithsburg Middle School, and with a focus on disciplinary literacy throughout the building, these strategies are employed in ELA classes as well as other content-area classes. Students are taught Greek and Latin prefixes, roots, and suffixes to expand their vocabulary. For writing instruction, teachers provide students with models and standard-specific rubrics to guide students to create their own writings, and a focus is put on employing the claim-evidence-reasoning model used in science and social studies classes for academic writings. Students are taught to use the Notice and Note Signposts, Talking to the Text, and annotations to fully engage in their readings, reflect on their understandings, and evaluate authors’ perspectives and intentions. Discussion protocols, such as Socratic Seminars and Accountable Talk, are utilized to improve students’ oral communication and collaboration skills. Technology is used to enhance these learning experiences, as teachers employ a myriad of programs, such as Google Suite, Kahoot, Blooket, Quizlet, and Pear Deck, which help to keep students organized and engaged.

Smithsburg Middle School students are assessed throughout the school year to guide instruction. At the beginning of the year, students take the Electronic Reading Inventory to determine their reading levels, which teachers use to plan for tier-one and tier-two instruction. At the end of each unit, students complete a performance task that embodies all of the skills learned in the unit. Smithsburg Middle School ELA students take county benchmarks that are modeled after the Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAP) to assess their progress and needs. Teachers use the benchmark results to collaboratively plan appropriate and differentiated learning experiences for students. Finally, at the end of each year, students take the MCAP assessment for their grade level as a final assessment of their yearly progress in ELA.

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

The Washington County Public Schools mathematics curriculum follows the Maryland College and Career-Ready Standards. The standards concentrate on a clear set of math skills and concepts that students need to be prepared for mathematics in college, career, and life.

Students have an opportunity of two different math paths in middle school. Utilizing elementary data–gathered from math inventory, district-developed interims, and state-standardized test scores–helps determine the initial mathematical placement in sixth grade. Throughout the middle school years, student progress is monitored to assure proper placement, adjusting as appropriate to develop a solid foundation and

confidence while challenging students to meet their highest potential. Students either follow an advanced-level mathematical path that ends with completing and earning a high school credit for algebra in eighth grade or a grade-level path.

Teachers follow the district developed modules, incorporating effective routines and engaging activities to enhance understanding. Daily lesson plans are developed that make a conscious effort to incorporate the eight mathematical practices. Students gain skills during their math courses that allow them to demonstrate their understanding of mathematics by modeling and solving real-world problems, making sense of quantities and their relationships, and reasoning mathematically.

During the summer of 2022, our math department was looking for new forms of engagement to help offset the gaps caused by the recent pandemic. All math teachers engaged in a book study (*Building Thinking in the Classroom*). As a result, the structure of our classes shifted to rotations, small group instruction focusing on the needs of individual students, and vertical white boards that help to make student thinking visible. Digital resources are frequently used to allow teachers to monitor real-time work and provide immediate feedback correcting misconceptions and building concept knowledge.

A strength of the math department is the collaborative planning that occurs daily. During this planning, many aspects of daily teaching are addressed. A book study provided a deep dive into the state standards, while also providing various ways to teach, solve, and avoid or correct student misconceptions. Time is also spent analyzing recent assessments, both classroom and district interims, for weaknesses in student understanding so as to help develop the small-group rotations and tier-two support for students. This also allows for enrichment opportunities for those mastering the standards being taught and for students who are absent to have access to the daily instruction through posting in Google Classroom. Ongoing student placement is also monitored, and adjustments are made to either interventions or math levels.

Daily routines allow students to jumpstart thinking, engaging them in reasoning while developing and reinforcing their number sense. Anchor charts developed with students provide another visual resource that records student and teacher thoughts, ideas, and processes. Exhibiting how mathematical concepts build upon one another and are not isolated skills, they make connections between past, current, and future learning.

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

The vision of the science department at Smithsburg Middle School is to provide all students with access to excellent science instruction through authentic learning experiences that allow students to transfer their knowledge to be informed members of the community. Lessons are developed that implement the Next Generation Science Standards in the classroom through the use of a digital resource, Amplify Science. Following the district pacing guide, teachers are able to blend hands-on investigations using digital tools to help our students think, read, and write like scientists. Students select and evaluate reliable sources of information to address real-world issues. They use critical thinking, inquiry, and modeling to analyze ideas and phenomena to solve problems. They also are given opportunities to design and conduct an authentic scientific investigation in order to collect and analyze data. Through writing, students communicate the results of an investigation using claim, evidence, and reasoning.

All units of science—life, physical, earth, and space—are integrated. Each unit starts with an anchor phenomenon which is studied in each lesson through an overall unit question. Finally, students show what they have learned by applying their newfound knowledge to a new context, defending their argument through written and/or spoken reasoning.

Teachers use data from pre-assessments to develop differentiated lesson plans that will meet the needs of each student. Throughout a unit, formative assessments, such as critical junctions and internships, are given to make sure students are on track with the learning goals and objectives. Lessons are adjusted to assure that all students are learning the intended standards.

Frequent reading and writing strategies are implemented to continue a school-wide focus on literacy.

Students are encouraged to annotate the text and then respond to frequent writing activities that require students to develop a claim, state their evidence, and explain their reasoning. Students are required to use the school's Writing Non-Negotiables to develop their written responses.

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

The Washington County Social Studies curriculum has been developed following the state standards and frameworks in social studies. Our teachers follow the county pacing guide to provide opportunities for our students to develop opinions, effectively communicate, and defend those opinions as informed citizens throughout the social studies daily instruction. By the end of eighth grade, students have had three years of evaluating and using reliable and credible sources to formulate investigations to address a question, form an opinion, or to solve a problem. Instructional units provide clear guidance by prioritizing the most critical grade-level content and processes as the academic priority for instruction.

Purposefully crafted units serve as an excellent tool to help teachers make strategic instructional decisions for reaching grade-level expectations. Sixth grade explores Ancient World History. Seventh grade focuses on World Geography including economics. Eighth grade expands their knowledge of US History. Standards are similar in all grades, but the units of study vary to give students an opportunity for a more global perspective. Students apply the relevance of historical lessons to a given situation, problem, or challenge. Frequent opportunities to study and respond to authentic historical texts are incorporated through evidence-based argument sets.

Teachers incorporate literacy throughout daily instruction, including the use of daily writing, reading, speaking, and listening strategies to help students become more analytical thinkers. Teacher- and student-developed success criteria are evident throughout the various instructional activities holding students to a higher standard that they helped to establish. Their learned knowledge of political and social structures allow them to actively participate as informed global citizens through activities such as mock trials and Shark Tank proposals. These activities expand students' thinking and involvement with their own learning to make the social studies curriculum more relevant to today's challenges. All students are encouraged to become involved in our school's SGA to further their experiences.

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

Preparing students for a college or career where they can thrive is the keystone of our work in every classroom. Our curricular offerings support students' talents, interests, and goals by providing opportunities for seventh and eighth graders to enroll in credit-bearing courses, participate in a variety of student leadership options, and engage with diverse course choices. Eighth grade students have the potential to leave for high school with four high school credits— one each from Spanish I, Foundations of Technology, Foundations of Computer Science, and Algebra I. Doing so enables learners to have more freedom in high school to select courses that support their progress within a college or career pathway.

Students are encouraged to cultivate their inner-leader through our National Junior Honor Society chapter, Student Government Association, or Where Everybody Belongs program. These three groups initiate and run activities year long across campus. Other organizations such as Future Farmers of America, Art Club, LFC, Archery, and Best Buddies provide avenues for students to be exposed to different topics and establish new passions. Additionally, school counselors offer college campus field trips to neighboring four-year universities as well as community colleges to inspire and educate eighth grade students as they start to plan their future.

A renewed emphasis on Career and Technical Education (CTE) curricula has brought in emerging technologies that allow students to gain the technical skills necessary for in-demand jobs. These include a Glowforge 3D Laser Printer, three 3D printers, drones, and an array of robotics. CTE courses grant learners opportunities to investigate real-world problems in design and construction. Coupled with a curriculum that covers engineering basics and computational thinking, our students are poised to go into various hands-on CTE programs in high school, particularly at our county Technical High School.

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

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

2a. Arts (visual and/or performing)

The Fine Arts curriculum addresses creating, presenting/performing, responding, and connecting within the framework of developing twenty-first century skills. Using strategic scheduling, students learn art-specific techniques, present and perform their work, and make personal, cultural, and historical connections that promote lifelong learning through the arts. Students are given choice and voice throughout the art, band, chorus, orchestra, general music, and digital photography courses, empowering learners to expand interests and hone talents. All students are enrolled in a fine art class each year of middle school.

A recent focus within the visual art classroom has been on how to create works through the lens of kindness, with hundreds of pieces of student self-portraits being delivered to students in Nigeria as part of a school motivation initiative. Additionally, our students have been honored to place in the Disability Awareness Art Contest for the past several years, with one student having her artwork made into a billboard sponsored by Civitan International.

Our music program extends beyond the classroom and holds a vivid presence in the community. Our band is a fixture at local events such as autumn's Steam and Craft Fair, Mummer's Parade, and the local park's Veterans Day memorial ceremony. SMS ensembles have earned superior ratings in adjudications year after year.

2b. Physical education/health/nutrition

Promoting responsible, safe behaviors within an active lifestyle is the foundational belief at the core of our physical education and health courses. All students enroll in physical education and health at least one marking period each school year, with over ninety-eight percent enrolling all year.

The middle school physical education program emphasizes skill development, fitness, team sport participation and social and emotional growth. Teachers introduce a variety of activities such as individual, dual, and lifetime sports. Games are used to improve student fitness, skill, application of safety measures, knowledge, and attitudes. Instruction and expectations increase as students progress through the middle school grades.

All students also partake in health class, which occurs once every other week throughout the school year. It is during this class where skills including decision making, communication, accessing information, goal setting, advocacy, self-management, and the ability to analyze influences on health are developed on students' journeys to be health literate. Our physical education teachers have coordinated our popular three-on-three charity basketball tournament each February for over twenty years with proceeds donated to our local Humane Society.

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

The fundamental purpose of world language instruction is to enable students to communicate in a new language in a culturally appropriate way. The linguistic and cultural insights that come from the curriculum are essential for twenty-first century college and career readiness in the global community and marketplace.

Instruction is delivered via the immersion method in which ninety percent of instruction is expressed in the target language. Focus is centered on common phrases and clauses frequently used in conversational Spanish so that students become comfortable with translating some of what they might hear in a real-world

discussion. True and false cognates are also discussed in order to help students understand what they see or hear in another language and avoid some common misconceptions.

All sixth grade students take a semester of World Language with a focus on Spanish. Spanish I is offered as an elective for seventh and eighth graders. Students who successfully complete Spanish in both seventh and eighth grade earn one high school credit.

2d. Technology/library/media

Technology courses offered to students range from Desktop Publishing and Communication to Foundations of Computer Science and Foundations of Technology. It is within these classes that students stretch their abilities to design and implement creative solutions through group and individual activities. Essential skills gained throughout the curriculum include computational thinking practices, demonstrating technology literacy, digital citizenship essentials, applying the engineering design process, and synthesizing major ideas through an understanding of the core concepts of technology. Students are enrolled in technology class for a minimum of one year in our building, continually engaged with hands-on projects in our Fab Lab, culminating in our hugely popular Rocket Day.

Our Library Media Program is built to provide all students and staff with equitable and timely access to ideas and information. Through the school library media curriculum, students are empowered to be enthusiastic readers, lifelong learners, and responsible citizens in the information age. Students are regularly invited to get creative and learn new skills in our dynamic makerspace. Some makerspace offerings include Keva Planks, crafts, STEM challenges, 3D modeling, coding, and use of a variety of emerging technologies like 3D printers and robotics. School-wide reading promotions and collaborative lessons with teachers across contents occur regularly.

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

Our School Counseling Program is committed to promoting academic success, career guidance, and skills for personal/social growth that enable all students to reach their full potential. Monthly lessons are administered in the classroom and seek to advance learners' self-confidence in their ability, attitude toward learning, social/emotional well-being, and sense of acceptance, respect, and inclusion for self and others. This data-driven program determines which American School Counselor Association Mindset and Behavior indicators are implemented within a large or small group setting.

Beyond classroom lessons, our school counselors enhance their curriculum by offering leadership opportunities to students through their Student Ambassador program, collaborating with the health department for drug awareness promotions, coordinating guest speakers, supporting social skills via "Legos at Lunch," and hosting Mending Minds, a student-led mental health awareness group.

Our counselors also develop monthly advisory lessons which focus on empathy and wellness. They have also collaborated with the elementary school to create a Buddy Readers program to support our literacy initiative and develop leadership skills.

3. Academic Supports

3a. Students performing below grade level:

Below-grade-level students, including our achievement gaps—economically disadvantaged, students who identify as two or more races, and students with disabilities—receive additional academic support both in and out of the classroom. Small-group, tier-two supplemental instruction is provided two days each week for an additional seventy minutes, outside of regular instructional time. During instructional time in all content areas, students receive small-group supplemental instruction to help lessen gaps, correct misconceptions, and provide alternate ways of learning. One-to-one conferencing within a classroom provides direct feedback and personalized academic focus, allowing students an opportunity of targeted learning specific to their needs. Strategic grouping within the classroom provides below-grade-level students an opportunity to

learn from their peers. Tier-three interventions are data driven and strategically grouped.

After-school academic support, Leopard Learning, is also offered twice a week. This offers students an opportunity to receive homework support with a lower teacher-to-student ratio. Advanced-level high school students tutor during this time, as well. Many teachers offer one-on-one tutoring either before or after school. In addition, teachers are available before school, during lunch, and after school for additional support and instruction.

During the summer months, our school offers literacy-focused Summer Camps. These are geared toward helping students develop skills in both reading and writing, through fun, engaging themes such as Outdoor Adventures, Board Games, Kitchen Science, Sports Mania, Fun in the Fab Lab, and other engaging topics. Though all students are invited to attend, some specific students are invited based on various assessment data, including their Lexile reading level, MCAP results, teacher recommendation, and parent request. Students may attend as many week-long camps during the summer as they wish.

3b. Students performing above grade level:

Above-grade-level students are provided opportunities to enroll in merit, advanced-level classes. Students enrolled in merit-level courses throughout middle school receive more rigorous instruction and assignments. When possible, the learning of these students is through non-traditional methods, such as projects, presentations, research, labs, and within the community. In addition, several high school credit classes are offered for advanced students to fulfill graduation requirements early, opening up a more advanced pathway for their future studies at the high school. Algebra, Foundations of Technology, Spanish, and Foundations of Computer Science are high school credit-bearing classes offered at Smithsburg Middle School.

Makerspace provides an opportunity for tinkering, engineering design process, creative opportunities, and further Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math exposure. It is a self-directed learning environment aimed at teaching a growth mindset attitude by having students construct knowledge for themselves. Innovation is encouraged and occurs naturally through hands-on inquiry.

Annually, students earning 3.5 and above grade-point average are given an opportunity to apply to the National Junior Honor Society. Students inducted into the Honor Society meet twice a week for a total of seventy minutes to analyze current school and community needs. Students then plan and implement school and community projects, such as tutoring, food bank collections, and community monetary needs, among others.

3c. Students with disabilities:

All student Individualized Education Plans (IEP) are created by a collaborative team of students, parents/guardians, teachers, administrators, and the special education case manager. IEPs are updated yearly, using feedback and progress monitoring.

Students with identified math and/or reading deficits receive explicit instruction from special education content (SEC) teachers. The math SEC teacher uses i-Ready assessment data to monitor student progress towards IEP goals. The reading SEC teacher uses a variety of diagnostic tools and data to address deficits that interfere with comprehension, like phonemic awareness, decoding, fluency, and vocabulary. The reading programs used include Wilson, Read Naturally, and PowerUp. This small group instruction is in addition to instruction in the general education classrooms.

Smithsburg Middle School is home to a district Connections Program (CP). Students in this program receive instruction with alternative achievement standards as outlined by the Content Core Connectors for English Language Arts and Mathematics and the Essential Elements for Science. Life skills are incorporated into instruction. The goal of CP is to develop students as individuals and provide them with the experiences necessary to become contributing, successful members of the community.

Community connections are vital to growing our students. Our CP students develop relationships with non-

disabled peers through the Best Buddies Program, working together on projects, crafts, and games. They participate in general education classes, such as physical education, music, art, and technology. Students are able to check out books when they take walking trips to the local library and when the book mobile comes monthly. Students visit the local diner to practice ordering off the menu and paying for their food. Students are pen pals with students in other CP classrooms at other schools. For staff members, the CP students have also created a school-wide coffee cart to practice skills, such as taking orders, planning for supplies, and making deliveries.

3d. English Language Learners:

Smithsburg Middle School recognizes and supports our English Learner (EL) students in various ways. We share our EL teacher with the campus high school. Our EL teacher goes above and beyond in reaching our EL students' families throughout the year to help with everything from completion of paperwork to obtaining necessary school supplies to assisting with parent-school meetings.

For seventy minutes per week, our EL students also receive small group, specialized instruction in academic skills classes with an EL mentor. We recognize and understand oral presentations are difficult; therefore, we provide opportunities for our EL students to present in front of small groups consisting of administrators and fellow EL students. The EL teacher pushes into English and math classrooms throughout the day and at times pulls small groups for specialized support. Our EL teacher also emphasizes our literacy focus by incorporating specific books and magazines geared for her students.

Guided by World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA), English Language Development Standards, and Maryland College and Career Ready Standards, the EL program adjusts instruction to students' strengths and needs in order for ELs to communicate effectively in English with cultural proficiency, to achieve in academic subjects, and to fully acquire English. ACCESS (Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State) is taken annually by English learners in kindergarten through grade 12 in WIDA Consortium member states to determine student levels of proficiency in speaking, listening, reading and writing in English. Based on the assessment results, students are scheduled into either beginner, intermediate, or advanced EL courses.

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

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

Engaging students and building relationships between and among staff and students at Smithsburg Middle School is a top priority. This begins the week before school when all incoming new students are invited to the school for orientation. During this student-led event, our newest students are assigned eighth grade mentors and are introduced to other new students. Additionally, they are able to meet administrators, counselors, and support staff, as well as get a tour of the building, learn their schedules, and overall build their comfortability. Staff members continue to build meaningful relationships with students through daily personal interactions and engaging lessons.

Smithsburg Middle School is a Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS) school. We use the acronym STAR for the Smithsburg PBIS program, which stands for “Stay Safe, Take Responsibility, Act Respectfully, and Ready to Learn.” Expectations for student behaviors are posted throughout the school, delineating the behavioral expectations for STAR students in all areas. A focus is placed on teaching students these behaviors and offering positive reinforcements for the demonstration of those behaviors. Over ninety-five percent of Smithsburg students are eligible each month to participate in engaging and exciting PBIS reward events. Students also look forward to end-of-the-year grade-level trips to Antietam Recreation (sixth), Adventure Park USA (seventh), and Hersheypark (eighth).

Smithsburg Middle School offers students many academic and leadership opportunities. Students with high academic standing may join the National Junior Honor Society, which is involved in many philanthropic opportunities. Students may also join the Student Government Association as officers or representatives. In grade eight, over forty-five student leaders join the Where Everybody Belongs leadership program, in which they mentor grade six students, host social events, and plan lessons that focus on social, academic, and emotional wellness.

Smithsburg Middle School offers a variety of staff member-facilitated extracurricular activities after school. On Tuesday and Thursdays, students can seek academic support from highly qualified teachers and high school tutors during the Leopard Learning Program. Smithsburg also offers students archery club, math counts, art club, jazz band, Future Farmers of America, LFC, book clubs, and more.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Family and community engagement is paramount to the success of our students. To forge relationships with families before students attend our school, we host a fifth grade transition night. This not only showcases our school and our pride, but also explains to both parents and students what to expect from our staff and the education they will receive. The excitement the students and families feel after this event is a first step toward the relationship we cultivate throughout their time at Smithsburg Middle. Meet-the-Teacher Night provides parents the opportunity to meet teachers, see classrooms, and learn about the experiences their child will have that school year. Communication and transparency help the families and community feel more connected with our school. Monthly newsletters, postcards mailed home with personal messages about a student, and home visits are key building components.

Less formal interactions between Smithsburg Middle, families, and the community are through book fairs and PTSA meetings. Monthly activity nights are held so students can interact with friends after school hours in a safe environment. Members of the community and families help chaperone these fun-filled evenings consisting of open gym time, karaoke, rec time, and corn hole, to name a few.

Highlighting student achievement and excellence through our STARs recognition program occurs every marking period, earning STARs recipients a certificate and t-shirt. Often, these shirts are worn on our Friday Pride Days. Many parents and other community members attend these recognitions. Students who earn Honor Roll or Distinguished Honor Roll are published in our local newspaper and receive letters of recognition. At the end of eighth grade, students are recognized for their middle school achievements at an

awards assembly. If a student maintains Honor Roll and Distinguished Honor Roll throughout their time at Smithsburg Middle, they earn the Faculty Honors Award.

We also recognize students through our Night of Excellence which showcases outstanding work in all content areas. The community spends an evening viewing the showcase throughout our school while interacting with staff and each other. This was disrupted due to Covid, but we are rebuilding and expanding the event.

Sometimes students need additional support beyond the school. Mental health and economic disadvantage can be a struggle for several students and families. We have several community organizations who work with us to provide supports for these affected families. The Micah's Backpack program is provided for students in need by a local church and foodbank. Staff and community members donate money, food, and gifts for struggling families during holidays, helping to make the time special. A local mental health facility, Brook Lane, provides services for students with mental health issues.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

All professional development implemented in our school is driven by our School Improvement Plan (SIP) which is developed prior to the school year and reflects the current needs of the school. This year, our goals were improving literacy, providing timely feedback, creating a culture of mindfulness, and improving attendance. Job-embedded professional development occurs weekly through grade-level teams for a minimum of forty-five minutes. Also, departments meet monthly to continue exploring curriculum and resources needed to stay current with school and county trends.

Daily collaboration within teams, both content-specific as well as cross-curricular, ensures deeper, more thorough, and complex lessons, instruction, and questioning. Educators work together to devise rigorous, engaging lessons that will benefit student learning. During Classroom-Focused Improvement Process (CFIP) meetings, various data is analyzed and needs are identified. A plan and lesson are then implemented to address the identified gap. Further assessment then occurs to see how and if any improvement is being made through the ongoing responsive instruction.

The administration and teaching staff participate in two yearly book studies driven by our SIT goals and the principal's vision. This year, teachers discussed the concepts and implications for classroom instruction and student-teacher relationships.

The math department also participated in two additional book studies that led to new instructional practices and a deeper understanding of the grade-level standards. The benefit of such studies allowed the department to have a cohesive instructional plan and develop common practices across classrooms and grade levels. For example, as a result of one of the book studies, vertical whiteboards were installed in all classrooms along with the creation and use of anchor charts to help make student thinking more visible and feedback more timely. Discourse was also a focus, making mathematical think-alouds more common.

The administration at Smithsburg Middle School ensures that teachers feel valued. Every morning, the administrators greet each staff member before the start of their day. Our administration values and respects our time by keeping the agreed-upon meeting schedule. Our administration models timely feedback through observations, walkthroughs, awards, and recognitions. Teachers are not hesitant to call administration when behavior support is needed. Conflict resolution is practiced where administration covers a class so that the teacher and student have an opportunity to resolve an issue occurring in the classroom. Administration practices an open-door policy and is always available to provide professional and personal support when called upon.

4. School Leadership:

Smithsburg Middle School has one building principal and one assistant principal. With a combined thirty-one years of administrative experience, both realize that the most critical component of school success is the relationships that are built between the administration and the staff and students that they serve.

Among the administrative team's top priorities are being visible and available throughout the school day. Administrators begin the day with one very important practice: walking the building as students and teachers arrive. They make a point to say "Good morning!" and check in with every teacher (and many students) every morning, communicating to teachers and students that they are seen and valued, and allowing both to voice any needs or concerns before the day starts. This daily practice ensures that the leadership team is truly connected to the stakeholders and has a grasp on the pulse of the school each day. Administrators invite feedback from all stakeholders to improve their leadership, so they may better serve the Smithsburg community.

Smithsburg Middle School is fortunate to have several teacher leaders in the building that help the administration to ensure successful school operations. The lead teacher helps to provide weekly professional development opportunities, as well as mentoring and support for teachers in all content areas. Team leaders for each grade level ensure organization of the team and help to communicate ideas and needs between and among administration and grade-level teachers. Department leaders for ELA, social studies, math, and science hold monthly department meetings to communicate county-wide and school-wide content expectations and needs. All of the aforementioned teacher leaders and teacher volunteers work collaboratively (beginning in the spring, continuing into and through the summer, and monthly throughout the school year) to create, reflect, and revise a data-driven, formal School Improvement Plan. This plan outlines the skills students need and the strategies that will be employed to ensure continued improvements in all content areas, attendance, and behaviors.

With a belief that all leaders must be life-long learners, the administrative team and all school leaders both participate in and offer to others school- and county-wide professional development opportunities. This year, teachers have participated in monthly equity training via an in-house equity coach. Teacher leaders used book studies to explore trauma and mental health and their impacts on student learning. Teachers are able to grow as leaders as they expand their knowledge in these areas and are equipped to coach others.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

Smithsburg Middle School recognizes the importance of cultural awareness and equity within the classroom and school. Our school's equity coach provides professional development once a month to staff, encouraging courageous discussions and ensuring our school's diverse population is understood and celebrated. A comprehensive staff library representing a multi-faceted sampling of current equity topics and reading titles is available to further expand staff's responsiveness to meet the ever-growing needs of our population.

The nucleus of our school, the media center, highlights and celebrates the various heritage months by showcasing books, movies, influential figures, and often running reading challenges to encourage our students to explore a variety of literature. The visual displays not only bring awareness but also compel students to consider topics they might not otherwise choose.

There is a series of strategically placed televisions around the school that broadcast and repeatedly loop awareness slides promoting school diversity and student recognition. These are located in each grade-level area as well as common areas, such as cafeteria, media center, and front lobby, to provide better exposure and viewing for students and staff. In addition, our morning announcements, run by students, showcase the monthly theme and achievements.

Each year, we give a school-wide student interest survey to gain information about students and how they learn best. The daily schedule at Smithsburg Middle rotates every day allowing students to experience their learning in various subjects at different times throughout the day; therefore, students do not have all of their classes at a set time each day, supporting various learning preferences.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR EXCELLENCE

Committed to growing a culture of skilled readers, Smithsburg Middle School emphasizes the importance and power of literacy. We believe that literacy is key to improving student focus, empathy, social-emotional well-being, communication, and academic achievement. Each day, students are reminded on morning announcements that they are expected to have their independent reading books with them at all times. Any time students finish work early, they can be seen reading their choice reading books.

Students at Smithsburg Middle School engage in at least twenty minutes of dedicated, daily independent reading of self-selected books in their ELA classes. To support this, teachers have built libraries with diverse titles, authors, genres, and topics to pique student interest, speak to the diverse backgrounds and needs of our students, and increase engagement. Teachers have also “genre-fied” their classroom libraries, adding colorful labels to the spines of books that correspond with the literature genres, making it easier for students to locate their favorite types of books. Furthermore, teachers have equipped students with active reading strategies, including setting a purpose for reading, that apply to all genres to facilitate active, engaged reading. These encourage students to stop during reading to reflect on and evaluate what they are reading and its relevance. After each independent reading session, students are given time to reflect on their reading through writing, movement activities, one-to-one conferences, and/or discussions. Students transfer the use of these strategies to their ELA assignments as well as assignments in all of their classes.

Similarly, the media specialist has reimagined the media center, drastically improving its functionality for students and staff. A variety of seating areas allows students to have comfortable places to engage in text-based conversations and independent reading. An audit was completed to remove books no longer being circulated and to make way for new books. New titles are added to the shelves weekly and book displays are updated regularly. The addition of electronic reading resources offers students even more choices in titles and authors. The electronic self-checkout system and the ability to order books from other district schools or our county libraries have also enhanced student interest in reading. As a result of these transformations, book circulation in the media center has increased by 400% in the past year. The media specialist also teaches timely lessons to support student literacy in all content areas. Providing students with the resources necessary to grow as readers has greatly contributed to their successes.