

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

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

School Mailing Address 7150 Ashville Fairfield Road  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Ashville State OH Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 43103-9406

County Pickaway County

Telephone (740) 983-5000 Fax (740) 983-5049

Web site/URL https://www.tvsd.us/o/walnut E-mail gkovack@tvsd.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.

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

Name of Superintendent\* Mr. Kyle Wolfe E-mail kwolfe@tvsd.us  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Teays Valley Local Tel. (740) 983-5000

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

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

Name of School Board  
President/Chairperson Mr. William McGowan  
(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):
- 4 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 2 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 1 High schools
  - 1 K-12 schools
- 8 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	32
K	86
1	78
2	71
3	92
4	91
5	76
6	0
7	0
8	0
9	0
10	0
11	0
12 or higher	0
Total Students	526

\*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):
- 0.2 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 0.4 % Asian
  - 1 % Black or African American
  - 0.8 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0.2 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 95 % White
  - 2.4 % Two or more races
  - 100 % Total**

(Only these seven standard categories should be used to report the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.)

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2021 - 2022 school year: 4%

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

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

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2021 until the end of the 2021-2022 school year	19
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2021 until the end of the 2021-2022 school year	1
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	20
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2021	507
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.04
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	4

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

Spanish

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

1 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 32 %

Total number students who qualify: 166

8. Students receiving special education services with an IEP: 25 %  
Total number of students served 133

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>6</u> Autism	<u>1</u> Multiple Disabilities
<u>0</u> Deafness	<u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment
<u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness	<u>26</u> Other Health Impaired
<u>1</u> Developmental Delay	<u>62</u> Specific Learning Disability
<u>2</u> Emotional Disturbance	<u>32</u> Speech or Language Impairment
<u>0</u> Hearing Impairment	<u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury
<u>3</u> Intellectual Disability	<u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness

9. Students receiving special education services with a 504: 2 %  
Total number of students served: 10

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

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

	Number of Staff
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	24
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	6
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	14
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	4

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 22:1

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	91%	96%	96%	97%	96%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

14. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**

Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2022.

Post-Secondary Status	
Graduating class size	0
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	0%
Enrolled in a community college	0%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	0%
Joined the military or other public service	0%
Other	0%

15. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.

Yes ☐ No ☒

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

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

To ensure that students enjoy coming to school every day, where staff prioritizes students' social-emotional well-being in order to create a welcoming, positive culture that is conducive to academic growth.

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

<http://go.boarddocs.com/oh/tvsvd/Board.nsf/goto?open&id=CD9N5R5E4BB5>

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

---

Walnut Elementary School is a K-5 public school located in a rural community surrounded by agricultural fields in Ashville, Ohio. Community involvement is embedded in the heart of Walnut. Roots run deep with generations raising their families in a close-knit, hardworking country community. Many have stayed to cultivate their lives in and around Walnut, and many more have joined the area in recent years. Walnut began as a K-12 building when it was built in 1922. The original building was raised in 2003 and a new K-5 building constructed. Families and community partners play an active role within the school community. The unwavering support of these volunteers provides several programs that enrich the core curriculum and make Walnut a true National Blue Ribbon School.

The best way to describe the culture at Walnut Elementary is, “family.” Students are encouraged to include one another so that all feel safe and welcome. Teachers model the importance of celebrating everyone’s achievements, and providing support during times of difficulty. Students and teachers alike strive to ensure that no individual is “left out.”

The student community participates in daily meetings that are key to feeling valued, supported, and safe. Students participate in building-wide surveys and interventions in order for their needs to be heard and addressed. Social-emotional skills are the foundation to overall student success, academic and otherwise. Walnut is well-versed in providing students an education in social-emotional skills, specifically the self-regulation of thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.

Treating students’ social-emotional needs as seriously as one might address students’ academic needs is what makes Walnut unique. Learning is a social experience, and students’ development of these skills is fostered through interactions and relationships with one another. Walnut began the implementation of social-emotional learning programs seven years ago, and has since become the leader in the district in terms of prioritizing social-emotional learning and interventions as the basis for improvement in academics. Walnut creates a culture that places students’ social-emotional needs first, which in turn has improved the academics and the well-being of the student population overall.

From the time that Walnut was rebuilt and reopened as a larger K-5 elementary school, its capacity to serve students also grew. Walnut currently hosts over 500 students, many of whom are disadvantaged and with diverse learning needs, both academic and social-emotional. Students are not simply taught the academic skills needed to be successful, but also the social-emotional skills necessary as they grow into their independence beyond 5th grade. What makes Walnut stand out is the focus and importance placed on the physical and social-emotional needs of students and families, and the understanding that it is crucial to meet these needs first in order for students’ to achieve academic success.

In order to assist families and students, Walnut conducts a variety of service projects, including an Open House where complimentary meals are served and resources provided. Kindergarten registration events are held at local mobile home communities to benefit families with transportation needs. Community partnerships have been secured to provide weekend food bags to disadvantaged students, a mental health specialist who provides counseling services to students and families, and drives to support the local food pantry and county dog shelter.

To better support students within the building, teachers incorporate daily morning meetings; time set aside to directly teach age-appropriate social and emotional skills. Walnut incorporates The Zones of Regulation curriculum as well to help students better understand and manage their emotions, set and achieve goals, develop empathy skills, and establish and maintain positive relationships. Surveys and other activities provide important information regarding student social emotional health. Centervention is a tool where students play a “game” where decisions are made based on various life simulations. Data is collected that rates each student in the areas of communication, cooperation, empathy, emotional regulation and impulse control. The Panorama survey is administered to 3rd through 5th grade students and provides real-time social and emotional data. Information from both platforms are utilized when planning morning meeting



activities and counseling sessions. Walnut recognizes that students' social-emotional needs must be met first in order to adequately address their academic needs.

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

---

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

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

English Language Arts (ELA) is embraced through a variety of explicit and systematic instructional practices of critical literacy and writing skills for all students K-5. Students are routinely assessed in the areas of phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, oral language, and reading comprehension in order to determine their ever-changing strengths and weaknesses. Reading assessments include: Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), Phonological Awareness Screening Test (PAST), The Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Reading Assessment, the Teays Valley District Decoding Diagnostic, and the NWEA Measures of Academic Progress (MAP). From this assessment data, student instruction is tailored to the individual academic needs of the child.

At Walnut, all grades K-5 utilize Lucy Calkins Reading and Writing Units of Study to address grade level standards in ELA. Students are taught through a workshop approach to reading and writing. Writing workshop is an instructional framework where students proceed through the writing process and use a variety of writing forms. Through mini--lessons, modeling, conferences, and time for composing and sharing, students develop writing strategies and skills, learn about the writer's craft, and use writing as a tool for learning and communication. Writing for sustained periods, they explore different genres and formats for a range of purposes and for a variety of audiences. All grade levels have a common writing rubric for all three modes of writing outlined in Writing Pathways by Lucy Calkins. Rubrics can be used to: teach the modes of writing; teach key qualities of writing; model expectations for writing; assess student writing; guide teacher/student conferences; plan instruction; support conferencing. If used as a focus of TBT meetings, the rubrics serve as the foundation for horizontal and vertical curriculum alignment.

Reading Workshop is structured the same as writing workshop: mini-lessons, modeling, conferencing, and sharing. Walnut Elementary supports a Balanced Literacy Approach in K-5: This means that we ensure that students receive instruction in phonics (and other foundational skills) while providing access to meaning-making opportunities in authentic text (texts that are not explicitly written for teaching some aspect of language, as would be the case in decodable texts or vocabulary-controlled text). Students are taught the foundational skills of oral language, phonemic awareness, and phonics and fluency while also engaging in meaning making in texts as they develop vocabulary knowledge and comprehension skills.

Collaborative learning in reading and writing is also implemented at Walnut. Collaboration in reading instruction takes place in the form of book clubs in the upper grades, and guided reading groups in the primary grades. In both, students participate in peer conversations and reflections that lead to a deeper understanding of the text. In the area of writing, students collaborate through peer editing and the giving of constructive feedback. In order to build a solid foundation in collaborative writing partnerships, instruction and practice begins in kindergarten and continues through grade 5.

At Walnut, the ultimate goal of language arts instruction is to provide students with the tools needed to be successful readers and writers at all levels, to instill a desire in students to continue their learning outside of the classroom, and to secure a solid foundation in literacy that will last a lifetime.

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

Math curriculum and instruction at Walnut Elementary is rigorous and develops important math concepts along coherent learning progressions and connections among areas of mathematical study. Instruction is aligned to sequencing of core mathematical ideas that are well articulated and that heed to Ohio's learning standards across grades K-5.

Instructional strategies based on research findings are incorporated into daily instruction. Teachers facilitate learning by using whole group instruction, cooperative learning groups, active and engaged discussion and

math tools. Math games are also employed to help students practice and improve skills. Students are encouraged to share solutions and strategies, ask questions and reflect upon new findings.

Formative assessments are implemented during whole-group instruction as well as small groups to determine the needs of individual students, differentiate instruction and provide appropriate intervention and enrichment in small-group settings. Each grade-level teaching team follows the curriculum from The Bridges in Mathematics Curriculum. Teachers also implement supplemental math resources such as DreamBox Math and Ohio Readiness Assessments, which include benchmark and checkpoint evaluations, that drive instruction.

Building solid foundational skills in math computation and nurturing growth in problem-solving strategies are instrumental to math instruction. Number sense, mathematical reasoning and fact fluency is developed at all grade levels through the use of investigations, games, repetitive practice, computer-based learning and hands-on projects. Conceptual knowledge of basic operations is emphasized through the use of manipulatives and math discussions and is guided by students' intrinsic inquiry in the subject area. Problem solving is also a key component of instruction; teachers coach and promote 21st-century thinking skills. Reading skills and vocabulary are an integral part of the strategies students use to build problem-solving skills. Students are encouraged to model and explain various strategies orally and in writing. Collaboration is promoted through open discussion in whole and small groups. The goal for all students is to have creative, flexible thinking using their conceptual understanding of mathematics.

Supporting the growth of each student and meeting individual needs are a priority. Enrichment and interventions are provided to students by the classroom teacher or a trained paraprofessional. Every math teacher has received their certification to serve gifted students. Both formative and summative assessments allow teachers to make data-driven decisions on appropriate instruction. Unit tests and the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) are given to assess students' progress and provide important data for benchmarking. Flexible groups meet for scaffolded lessons in order to achieve grade-level expectations during intervention time. In the last five years, the number of Walnut students scoring at the proficient level or above in grades 3-5 on the Ohio State Test in Mathematics has maintained an average of 78 percent or higher and continues to trend higher.

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

Teachers are committed to engaging every student in a high-quality, hands-on education based on the Ohio Learning Standards. Teachers prioritize building a solid foundation of science knowledge that can be applied to the real world and foster a sense of wonder and appreciation of the scientific world. Classrooms promote critical thinking, collaboration and problem solving skills that can be used in the classroom and beyond. Teachers use evidence from formative, summative and performance based assessments to reflect and monitor progress, adjusting instruction to meet the needs of individual students.

Throughout each grade level, students have hands-on opportunities to question, test, explore, discover and evaluate. All grade levels utilize Non-Fiction Texts in Science Education (NFTI) Science. This approach provides an ideal opportunity for teachers to explore the links between Ohio's New Learning Standards for Science and English Language Arts. Learning is supported through the effective integration of nonfiction texts into the science curriculum. Instruction is reinforced through virtual and interactive lab simulations through the use of Gizmos Science. Examples include testing items to discover their buoyancy, exploring characteristics in order to classify items, experimenting with force in motion, and discovering and describing states of matter.

Hands-on activities include growing a classroom garden from seed to fruit, experiencing and constructing renewable energy models to test which are most effective, and the building of erosion tables to discover the best way to preserve soil. Students also participate in exploring the moon and Mars with the use of giant maps received from the Buzz Aldrin Foundation that were secured through grants written by the science department.

Teachers have also tapped into community resources in order to facilitate our students' science experiences.

The Pickaway County Soil and Water District visits classrooms throughout the year and performs classroom lessons that directly link learning concepts to local environmental concerns. They also host Agricultural Day every September where students learn about livestock, crops, careers in agriculture, soil conservation, pollinators, and farm machinery. Fourth and 5th grade students have the opportunity to participate in the after school STEM Club program where they engage in advanced learning projects ranging from building catapults and circuits to beekeeping.

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

At Walnut, the social studies curriculum is guided by the Ohio Learning Standards, and is centered on the development of the following goals: improving students' critical thinking skills, facilitating the ability for students to make connections between topics, providing multiple pathways for students to present their learning, creating opportunities for students to engage in cooperative learning, being engaging enough to build student passion and understanding, encouraging active, informed, and responsible citizenship among students, and teaching students to identify and utilize reliable sources.

Every grade level at Walnut focuses on government, history, geography, and economics. As students advance to the next grade level, the learning goals become more complex. Social studies instruction strives to educate students on what it means to be a "good citizen" through involvement in community service. Walnut reaches out to local organizations, such as Pickaway County Soil and Water, as resources for teaching students about their agricultural community. Walnut works with Slate Run State Park and Historical Farm to help students learn about local Ohio history. From the learning experiences provided through these organizations, students are able to compose collaborative projects and presentations that show growth and understanding of content. At the end of the school year, students participate in "Business Day" to further teach the content area of economics. Upper grades develop and operate businesses that encompass the laws of supply and demand, while primary grades and staff are encouraged to participate in the consumer role.

Instructional practices in social studies involve independent and collaborative learning. Students are given a multitude of resources and a wide variety of literature to support their learning. Learners engage in discussions and compose evidence-based arguments. Assessment types in the area of social studies are completed through participation in learning, rubrics, informative assessments and project presentations.

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

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

Preschool is offered to all students identified with special needs ages 3-5 and a select group of typical students who are chosen through a lottery. Including typical students within the preschool classroom provides students with identified disabilities, peer models to learn from. Creative Curriculum for Preschool is utilized, which is a comprehensive, research-based curriculum. Creative Curriculum features exploration and discovery as a way of learning, enabling children to develop confidence, creativity, and lifelong critical-thinking skills. This curriculum aligns with the Ohio Early Learning and Development Standards in the areas of social emotional, language and literacy, mathematics, science, social studies, physical well being and cognitive development.

Classes are child-centered and devoted to meeting each child's unique needs. Teachers and support staff strive to provide a safe and nurturing environment in which to foster each child's cognitive, social, emotional and motor development.

It is Walnut's philosophy that children learn best through meaningful play. Learning is encouraged through selected play activities appropriate for each child's age and development level. Skills are integrated across activities. Teachers serve as facilitators to guide children in interactions with the various learning opportunities. Activities are primarily child-oriented and child-directed.

Preparing students for success in kindergarten and beyond is our goal. Many students come to our program at 3 years old, with significant needs in communication and emotional regulation. The majority of these students enter kindergarten in their least restrictive environment. Academic and behavioral data consistently indicates that many of these students have not only experienced success throughout the primary grades, but in many cases have outpaced typical students who did not attend the preschool program. There have been several cases in which students who entered the program with an IEP have outpaced many typical students throughout the primary grades and no longer need an IEP.

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

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

Kindergarten through fifth grade students attend music class twice each week for 30 minutes. Skills and knowledge studied in various genres of music build and expand upon content from the previous year. Students in all six grade levels explore music literacy skills; reading and writing music symbols appropriate for their grade level content standards. Students are presented with tasks that allow them to apply their music literacy skills by creating their own compositions. Iconic representations are the focus in early grades, then progressing to music symbols in later grades. Vocal and instrumental methods are explored and practiced in each grade level. Improvisational skills are explored, practiced and encouraged as well. Kindergarten students begin learning about classroom instruments and how they are grouped in families of woods, metals and skins. Older students progress to learning about orchestral instruments, how they produce sound and are grouped into woodwinds, strings, brass and percussion families. Students examine composers from various time periods investigating and analyzing their music and the time period in which the composer lived. Lessons making connections between music content and other curriculum areas are planned and presented by the music specialist and the classroom teacher, allowing students the opportunity to make broader connections within several content areas.

In addition, students visit the Ohio Theater each December to watch the Nutcracker Ballet and teachers across all grade levels plan classroom cultural activities related to national holidays/celebrations. The PTO also funds a visit every spring from the Columbus Children's Theater which performs plays based on popular children's stories. Further, an author visit planned by our librarian takes place annually. Classroom teachers plan activities and students complete projects that not only are used to welcome the author, but also enrich their content area curriculum.

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

Students in grades K-5 participate in physical education twice each week for 30 minutes. Walnut's phys. ed. teacher has created an environment where students feel safe, included, and develop confidence, regardless of their physical, emotional, or intellectual abilities. Skills taught in Walnut's physical education classes address motor skills, tactics related to physical movement and performance, the maintenance of a healthy lifestyle, the ability to make good choices, and, overall to recognize the value of physical activity. Activities are based on the Ohio Learning Standards and emphasize physical fitness, health and wellness, working as a team, as well as sportsmanship. Student health and nutrition is addressed both in and outside of this classroom. Personal hygiene lessons and presentations are delivered by Walnut's school nurse and healthy dental hygiene is presented by a local dental agency in the community. An annual "Fun Run" takes place every September where students compete by navigating an obstacle course. In addition to physical education class, Walnut offers girls the opportunity to participate in Girls On the Run, a non-profit organization that is designed to empower school-age girls through physical fitness and sportsmanship. Walnut recognizes the importance of physical education and the direct relationship between physical and mental health.

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

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

Walnut's library is designed to provide a welcoming atmosphere to students and staff, and provide resources for both entertainment and education. All classes from kindergarten to grade 5 attend the library weekly, curriculum varies by grade level. Kindergarten students focus on respecting library materials and enjoying story time. In first grade, that basic foundation is built upon, learning differences between fiction and nonfiction and alphabetical order. Second grade learns about the Dewey Decimal System and how to choose "just right" books. Third and fourth graders concentrate on using the library catalog to search for books they want, and along with fifth graders, learn about using the internet in a responsible manner. Third through fifth grades also have lessons in research, using multiple resources.

In an effort to support students' acquisition of essential skills and knowledge, our building has a Chromebook for every child to use. One-to-one student devices became one of our building improvement goals a few years ago. With the help of our PTO and Teays Valley Education Foundation, we have accomplished that goal.

Our students learn the basics of technology as it is the foundation to build upon in middle and high school. Students use a variety of digital programs throughout their school day. In class, students learn to create Google documents, slides, and drawings that connect to classroom learning. Smartboards and projectors in every classroom provide a platform to create engaging presentations.

Children in grades 1st through 4th participate in a class called Typing Club in our media room, instructed by our librarian. Children learn how to type and use the keyboard appropriately. This is a lifelong skill that helps students type passages for class projects, and is highly transferable in the general education classroom.

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

To meet the children where they are, and to improve social skills and emotional regulation, Walnut has incorporated the evidence-based program, Centervention. This curriculum provides social-emotional learning activities in the form of personalized, interactive stories in which students can hone their skills in a safe, controlled environment. Students can "graduate" from Centervention once they have accomplished the social-emotional decision-making skills necessary to do so.

Walnut utilizes three main resources from Centervention to address the varying social-emotional needs of different grade bands. Zoo Academy is geared toward primary students, Zoo U aims to address the social-emotional needs of students grades 2-4, and Walnut's 5th graders use the SS Grin program. Each program within Centervention offers an individually created report for students. The report monitors student progress and gains insights about strengths and weaknesses in the areas of communication, cooperation, emotion regulation, empathy, impulse control, and social initiation skills. Classroom teachers, intervention specialists, and the school counselor use this information to track progress and identify specific needs for students at Tier I and Tier II intervention levels.

## **3. Academic Supports**

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

To address the needs of students performing below grade level, Walnut relies on the Multi-Tier System of Support (MTSS) team. As part of the district's MTSS Tier I process, students are universally screened three times per school year to quickly determine whether they are at-risk for future academic failure. In reading instruction, all students are assessed using the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), NWEA Measure of Academic Progress (MAP), and the Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment. Data from these assessments is used to determine what further diagnostic assessments are needed to pinpoint a student's specific areas of weakness.

For students with identified reading difficulties, they are given the Heggerty Phonemic Awareness Assessment, Phonological Awareness Screening Test (PAST), District Decoding Diagnostic, District

Letter/Sound Identification Assessment, and District Sight Word Assessment. Students identified with math difficulties are further assessed using the Bridges Intervention Placement Assessment. Once students have been administered their additional diagnostic assessments, they are assigned interventions with Walnut's reading specialists, Title I teachers, or paraprofessionals.

Walnut's Tier II interventions include: David Kilpatrick One-Minute Drills (for phonological awareness intervention), Foundations & Just Words (for reading decoding & fluency intervention), Leveled Literacy Intervention (for reading comprehension intervention), and Bridges Intervention (for math). Students who aren't responding to core curriculum receive these Tier II interventions to supplement Tier I instruction. Progress is monitored weekly to help make data-based decisions. Students work with trained staff members who provide the interventions and collaborate with the classroom teacher to ensure fidelity of the interventions.

Students who participate in Tier II interventions are also monitored by Walnut's MTSS team. The team is made of different building professionals who share interventions and expertise for struggling students. Students who do not respond to interventions at Tiers I or II are recommended to the school psychologist by the MTSS team to begin the evaluation process for determining whether the student has a disability and may require special education services.

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

At Walnut, all students grades 2-5 are eligible to qualify as gifted by means of the NWEA MAP test, and in grades 2 and 4 the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT). To qualify as gifted, a student must score a 95% or higher on the NWEA MAP test, or score a 128 or above on the (CogAT).

Walnut understands that a differentiated curriculum is the best way to meet the day-to-day needs of the gifted child. Differentiated instruction provides developmentally appropriate material for gifted children, giving them optimum opportunity to grow. Elements of our gifted programming include flexible grouping, progress monitoring, intellectual peer interaction, and support provided by a gifted intervention specialist. All 2-5 teachers of reading or math are certified to teach gifted students, and they utilize a variety of teaching strategies to meet the needs of high achieving learners in the classroom. These teachers are provided with opportunities for high quality gifted professional development annually.

Students identified as having a specific academic ability in math and/or reading are deliberately placed in one or more classrooms (cluster grouping) with service provided by the classroom teacher through a differentiated curriculum and pacing. Walnut currently serves 41 students that are identified as gifted. In addition, students that are identified as having superior cognitive ability, and have a gifted identification in either math and/or reading, are serviced in a resource room setting by a gifted intervention specialist once a week. The gifted intervention specialist provides a pull-out service that uses a variety of instructional approaches to reach the cognitively gifted student. Inquiry, problem solving, research and performance based tasks provide an enriched learning experience. The gifted intervention specialist also embeds technology and other 21st century skills into integrated units.

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

Approximately 12% of the student population at Teays Valley Local School District is identified as having a disability. At Walnut Elementary, 26.5% of the student population is identified as having one of the following disabilities: autism, intellectual disability, specific learning disability, other health impairment, developmental delay, emotional disturbance, multiple disabilities, traumatic brain injury, and speech/language disability. Walnut also houses related services for our students with disabilities, including occupational therapy, physical therapy, music therapy, and speech/language therapy, as well as a specialized behavior unit for students with emotional disturbances.

Walnut promotes a full inclusion policy where students' social-emotional and academic needs are met in the general education classroom with support from an intervention specialist. Students receive additional academic interventions and related services outside of the general education classroom depending on their

individual needs. Reading and writing intervention is addressed using The Orton-Gillingham Approach, and Bridges Intervention is used for intervention in mathematics. Intervention specialists are trained not only in intensive, research-based academic interventions, but also in behavioral interventions (such as The Zones of Regulation) designed to de-escalate students with emotional needs and prevent crisis situations. Specialized instruction and intervention is selected to meet the needs of Walnut's students with disabilities.

Academic assessments are consistently conducted by intervention specialists and related service providers to determine how best to close norm-referenced gaps and address the specific needs of each student on their caseload. Academic assessments include: the Heggerty Phonemic Awareness Assessment, Phonological Awareness Screening Test (PAST), District Decoding Diagnostic, District Letter/Sound Identification Assessment, and District Sight Word Assessment, Bridges Intervention Placement Assessment. Additionally, intervention specialists collect work samples, running records, observational records, and other short-cycle assessments to track Individualized Education Program (IEP) goal progress for each of their students. Intervention specialists use data-driven evidence in their students' achievement to not only guide the interventions they are providing, but also to annually update students' IEPs appropriately and in a manner that best serves the student.

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

In order to identify the mastery of their English language skills, students who are English Language Learners (ELLs) are administered the Ohio English Language Proficiency Screener (OELPS). Student results (either "emerging," "progressing," or "proficient" in their English language skills) help educators determine individual service needs. Students with advanced English skills are provided services 2-3 times per week or on a consultation basis. Students with intermediate skills are given more frequent services at 3-5 times per week, and students with beginning-level skills receive services every school day (5 times per week).

Specialized instructional for ELLs is addressed both in the classroom and through pull-out interventions with a Teacher English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Small group or individual pull-out services focus on learning new vocabulary through reading, speaking, listening, and writing. In the classroom, literal and figurative meanings of words, particularly idioms, are consistently taught and reviewed, as the nuances of the English language are the most difficult for ELLs. Students are encouraged to engage in conversation and practice their words orally, with conversations structured around books where academic vocabulary is prominent, lending itself to deeper level questions and responses. Classroom teachers also teach critical vocabulary prior to the lesson, so students can transfer it within the context of a particular text. To aid in the development of comprehension, graphic organizers such as story maps, and other visuals allow ELLs to better understand the material presented.

While Walnut currently only has one English Language Learner, the ELL population is growing more every year. Walnut takes the time to research and learn the culture of ELL students by inviting families in for a welcome night aimed to show them that they are valued, respected, and welcomed.

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

Walnut Elementary also houses the behavioral unit for the district. All students who need specialized services for behavioral or emotional challenges are serviced through Walnut Elementary. These students are in the regular classroom most of the day with support of morning meetings, behavior charts, and incentives through the unit within our building.

Every morning students receive 30 minutes of behavior support using self monitoring strategies and tips to regulate their emotions. We use the Zones of Regulation to teach self-regulation by categorizing emotions. All students are taught to identify and independently control their emotions, impulses, manage their specific needs, and improve their ability to problem solve conflicts. All students and staff have been explicitly taught this program and is used building wide.

There are a variety of professionals who assist with intervention for the behavior unit: a certified teacher,



several aides with specialized training, a registered behavior technician and a trained behavioral intervention specialist available through the county educational service center. Students are offered additional programming such as music and movement therapy, sensory paths and safe places in the classrooms. A coffee cart, “The Walnut Wagon”, also provides these students with daily life and social skills.

Walnut is special in many ways, but one aspect that truly stands out is the student culture. Teachers at Walnut teach and model how to support students with behavioral and emotional needs and realize the importance of supporting the whole student. Sometimes challenging behaviors occur in the classroom. Students are supportive of the interventions and are friends to students who exhibit some of these behaviors. Emotional and behavioral challenges can be a huge barrier to learning. The staff realizes that for a student to be successful, difficulties need to be dealt with promptly in a way that provides a safe and accepting environment for all students.

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

---

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

Walnut engages, motivates, and provides students with a positive environment that supports their academic, social, and emotional growth. Every school year begins with a motivational speaker sponsored by the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) and Walnut’s Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) team. The assembly engages and inspires students to create a school environment that is positive and welcoming. Walnut also reinforces positive behaviors and emotional regulation skills through schoolwide, daily morning meetings in the classroom.

Walnut strives to ensure that students can independently select practical strategies for coping with difficult emotions. By the time Walnut students reach the end of 5th grade, they are well-versed in functional tools, strategies, and resources to use when they find themselves in overwhelming emotional situations. In addition, Walnut’s school counselor meets with every class monthly to cover an age-appropriate lesson about Walnut’s monthly emotional focus. For example, the focus for the month of March was “Worry Warriors” with a lesson about specific ways to combat worry and anxiety. To support students who have experienced a recent loss of a loved one, a grief counselor comes to the building once a week to meet with those students.

Walnut students who show exemplary behavior and who go above and beyond in academics are publicly acknowledged with a Walnut postcard outlining their achievements. Postcards are read aloud in the cafeteria during student lunches, and the student in question is directed to “come on down” to spin a wheel in front of their peers for a mystery prize. Students thoroughly enjoy “spin the wheel” Fridays and are motivated to improve their performance to earn a postcard. Postcards are then mailed home to the student’s family at the end of the day each Friday to engage families in their child’s accomplishments.

Further, students can accumulate “points” in the classroom (either on ClassDojo in lower grades or ClassEquity in upper grades) for demonstrating the “Walnut HERO Way” (Hardworking, Encouraging, Respectful, and Optimistic). Students can redeem accumulated points for free time on Fridays, classroom prizes, and other rewards determined by classroom teachers. To promote togetherness, upper grade levels (3-5) are paired up with primary grade levels (K-2) to form student “buddy” relationships. “Buddies” meet quarterly to share and celebrate each others’ reading and writing skills, do crafts, and participate in friendship-building activities. Overall, students are happy to be at Walnut where all of their needs are met: academically, emotionally, and socially.

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

Walnut hosts a wide variety of programs and activities meant to engage our families and communities. Activities are designed to be inclusive of all ages and socioeconomic backgrounds. All 4th and 5th grade classrooms host a Career Day called “Celebrity Readers.” Members of the community are encouraged to come to the building to read aloud books to students and discuss their career requirements and specifications. This gives our students a chance to explore career opportunities and engage with community members.

As a community service project, Walnut runs a “Doggy Drive” in which students, staff, and community members come together to donate needed items to the local Pickaway County Dog Shelter. The shelter in turn comes for a demonstration meant to educate students about dog care, dog adoption, and how the dog shelter runs and works. Each month thereafter, the shelter chooses a “dog of the month” to feature with Walnut’s Student of the Month on social media. We are thrilled to mention that all of the dogs that are pictured with our students have been adopted. Helping find homes for dogs and giving to the shelter is a way our students feel a sense of pride and purpose.

Another way we try to bridge school and community partnerships is our holiday candy sale. Walnut 4th graders run a “Candy Cane Drive” every December to give back to the community. Students are able to buy

“candy cane-grams” to send to their peers, staff, and family members. The money raised from the Candy Cane Drive goes to our local Asheville Food Pantry.

Of all the elementary schools in the district, Walnut Elementary has the largest population of families living in socio-economically disadvantaged conditions. Walnut is connected with local churches to help families with food scarcity, and who do not have transportation to the food pantries. The church groups create bags of non-perishable food for some of our neediest children. Bags are discreetly distributed to children who have permission from home. The Weekend Food Bag Program helps families feed their children on the weekends when school meals aren’t an option.

Families are also connected to Pickaway County’s Family and Children First Council for wrap-around services. Some families need mental health therapy, parenting and kinship support, housing if they become homeless, transportation to appointments or to an alternative school, and more. This partnership helps families not just survive, but thrive.

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

The environment at Walnut Elementary is one where teachers and staff are not only valued, but revered as true professionals. Through various professional development opportunities, teachers are able to raise the level of their teaching and further develop their craft.

Walnut’s literacy coach supports teachers in developing and applying new content knowledge and strategies. The literacy coach meets with educators, models lessons, and observes to supply needed feedback and next-step support. The literacy coach also leads monthly meetings allowing teachers to gain knowledge and strategies while also providing time to collaborate across grade levels. She collaborates with teachers and paraprofessionals and analyzes assessment data to help them plan instruction. Her effective coaching and expertise of literacy makes her an essential resource for professional development, which is a direct reflection of student achievement.

Book studies led by literacy coaches, the principal, and counselors have also been an important part of teachers’ professional growth. Texts are chosen by staff members and reflectively studied to provide insight on trending issues and concerns in the building. Topics such as diversity and inclusion, best practices, addressing the needs of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and social-emotional learning have given staff new knowledge and skill sets tailored to positively impact relationships with students.

Staff members are also provided with an annual professional development training called “Viking Academy” to kick-off each school year. Viking Academy consists of a variety of classes that are selected based on teacher recommendations and needs.

To further support teachers, Walnut has a fantastic support staff. Para-professionals play a crucial role in developing the whole child at Walnut Elementary. Paraprofessionals run reading groups, specifically working with students who are performing below grade level. They become an extra set of hands in the classroom to meet with small groups, or to give modified instruction to students who might not fully understand the material.

Finally, teachers at Walnut are seen and heard. The Viking Pride award acknowledges teachers and staff for the outstanding things they do both in and out of the classroom. This award includes a picture and write up on the school and districts social media platforms, and is given for various reasons including: being a leader in their craft, going above and beyond for a student with varying circumstances, or for putting kids first.

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

The leadership philosophy at Walnut ensures that the principal acts as a facilitator who encourages each staff member to assume a leadership role as a part of one of five teams which meet monthly. Each team is composed of a representative from each grade level, an intervention specialist, a unified arts/specials teacher, a paraprofessional, and any other specialist with expertise relevant to the team. The Housekeeping

Team is responsible for creating the school calendar and planning events. They support our students by ensuring each day is well organized.

The Multi-tiered System of Support Team (MTSS) focuses on student achievement and data. This team reviews student data from various academic and behavioral sources and then assigns relevant Interventions. The team reviews student progress, makes changes to intervention plans as needed, and makes referrals to the school psychologist when necessary. This team directly supports our students by monitoring updated student progress and providing help or enrichment as needed.

The Positive Behavior Interventions and Support Team creates and monitors our school-wide behavioral program. Planning begins each spring to identify goals for the following year. School-wide and individual student behavioral data is monitored, and goals are set based on that information. This team has made it a priority to address the social and emotional needs of our students and these efforts have improved student behavior throughout the building. With less distractions, more instruction takes place, which has a direct impact on student achievement.

The School Safety Team creates, monitors and enhances our school safety plan. The team identifies potential risks throughout the building and works with the staff and local township officials to develop solutions. Maintaining a safe school environment is essential in order for staff and students to operate at their full potential.

Walnut's Vertical teams work across grade levels to ensure all content areas are in alignment. English-Language Arts teams are led by our literacy specialist, math teams are led by the principal and science and social studies teams are led by a teacher leader in those subject areas. These teams develop yearly goals based on student assessment data, new curriculum and challenges identified in meeting discussions. Vertical teams support student achievement by ensuring that pacing and curriculum are aligned, preschool through fifth grade, making certain there are no gaps in our instruction.

This leadership structure was created so that all teachers have a voice in school decisions. Representatives from each team bring ideas, recommendations, data and questions from their grade level teacher based team meetings (TBTs) to these teams, where collaborative decisions are made. Those representatives then return to their TBTs to share. By creating a team leadership structure at Walnut that includes all stakeholders, the principal is able to gather as much information as possible in order to make the best decisions for students.

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

While Walnut may not contain as culturally diverse a population as many schools found in urban or suburban areas, its socioeconomic population is highly diverse. Students who attend Walnut reside in mobile home communities, rural, country homes, or family-run farms. Socioeconomic challenges many students in the community face include but are not limited to: lack of running water, food, suitable shelter, drug and alcohol abuse in the home, and lack of academic exposure outside of school.

Language deficiencies, behavioral needs, and academic difficulties are also common for Walnut students who come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Thirty-two percent of the student population at Walnut is economically disadvantaged. Teachers and staff understand that students do not always have outside support and services, and are thus willing to go above and beyond to bridge the needs gap between students in the Walnut population.

To address academic and language deficits among Walnut's diverse group of learners, a Multi-System Tiers of Support (MTSS) program has been put in place as a preventative measure for closing the knowledge gap between students with different levels of academic exposure. The MTSS team at Walnut undertakes the screening of all students in order to determine whether they need Tier II interventions to avoid falling further behind their peers. The MTSS program is meant to ensure that Walnut students from all socioeconomic backgrounds receive an education tailored to their specific, diverse needs.

responds to these needs by connecting students and their families to community outreach programs that provide food, clothing, transportation, housing, and mental health services to those in need. Walnut also works with Pickaway County Recovery Services (PARS) and local sheriffs trained in Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E) to join in educating all students about drug and alcohol abuse. These programs allow for constructive dialogue with peers about situations that, sadly, many Walnut students have faced at home, and offer strategies students can implement in difficult situations.

Finally, staff at Walnut cares about what students have to say. Students are given a survey called Panorama at the beginning and ending of each school year. The survey seeks to collect student opinions about their lives both in and out of school, and provides teachers and administrators an overview of the social-emotional needs and well-being of Walnut's diverse student population. The results are used to identify areas where staff can provide better social-emotional support, and allows for teachers and staff to goal-set in order to improve the well-being of the student population overall.

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

---

The practice that is the most fundamentally influential to Walnut's success is the importance that is placed on students' well-being; not just their "academic well-being," but the well-being of the child as a whole. This "whole child" approach encompasses students' social-emotional, physical, and safety needs. Walnut has gained a positive reputation throughout the community for consistently providing much-needed resources to students and families that go above and beyond academic needs.

Walnut addresses students' physical needs in many ways. For instance, staff are aware that many Walnut students come to school hungry, tired, and/or without adequate clothing. Staff members secure funding through grants and community outreach to provide food bags, warm clothing, and even have supplied and built beds for students in need. Walnut has held fundraisers for families who have been displaced from their homes due to unforeseen circumstances.

Walnut is a place where students feel comfortable coming to adults—be it a teacher, administrator, counselor, or paraprofessional—with their needs and concerns, because they trust that these needs will be met.

A major aspect of Walnut's building culture is the support provided for students' social-emotional needs, which directly impacts their ability to learn. With a large percentage of the student population being disadvantaged, it quickly became evident to stakeholders that students' needs extended beyond that of the classroom. These social-emotional needs negatively affected students' academic growth. Therefore, the decision was made to increase staff knowledge and awareness as it pertained to students' social and emotional health. Staff became trauma-informed, understanding the impact that students' personal experiences have on their education. Additionally, staff participated in book studies and educated themselves about best practices in social-emotional learning. Walnut employed programs such as The Zones of Regulation to teach students how to identify and handle difficult emotions, morning meetings to set the tone for the day, Centervention to further develop students' skills in regulating their emotions, and Panorama to assess and identify weaknesses in the culture and climate in the building.

Once students' social-emotional needs were identified and addressed by staff members, students felt valued and safe resulting in increased student academic achievement and growth.

Today, students consistently report that they look forward to coming to Walnut, a safe learning environment in which positive relationships thrive.

It is the belief at Walnut that the focus on the whole child is the single greatest factor to our students' academic success.