

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

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

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

Official School Name Northwest Middle School  
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 8614 Erie Avenue NW  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Canal Fulton State OH Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 44614-8852

County Stark

Telephone (330) 854-3303 Fax (330) 854-5883

Web site/URL <https://nms.northwest.sparcc.org/> E-mail braman.s@northwest.sparcc.org

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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

Name of Superintendent\* Dr. Shawn Braman E-mail braman.s@northwest.sparcc.org  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Northwest Local Tel. (330) 854-2291

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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

## **PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION**

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

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

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

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

## PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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

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

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 2 Elementary schools (includes K-8)  
1 Middle/Junior high schools  
1 High schools  
0 K-12 schools
- 4 TOTAL

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

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

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

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

Grade	# of Students
PreK	0
K	0
1	0
2	0
3	0
4	0
5	0
6	122
7	117
8	140
9	0
10	0
11	0
12 or higher	0
Total Students	379

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

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 1.6 % Asian
  - 2.1 % Black or African American
  - 0.3 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 96 % White
  - 0 % 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.

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	4
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2021 until the end of the 2021-2022 school year	12
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	16
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2021	420
(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: 1 %  
2 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 19 %

Total number students who qualify: 71

8. Students receiving special education services with an IEP: 10 %  
Total number of students served 39

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>1</u> Autism	<u>1</u> Multiple Disabilities
<u>0</u> Deafness	<u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment
<u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness	<u>10</u> Other Health Impaired
<u>0</u> Developmental Delay	<u>24</u> Specific Learning Disability
<u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance	<u>1</u> Speech or Language Impairment
<u>0</u> Hearing Impairment	<u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury
<u>2</u> Intellectual Disability	<u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness

9. Students receiving special education services with a 504: 6 %  
Total number of students served: 23

10. Number of years the principal has been in the position at this school: 7

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

	Number of Staff
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	18
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	13
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	3
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	2

12. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 12:1

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	94%	99%	97%	96%	96%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

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

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

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

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

Yes ☐ 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.

Our teaching and support staff aim to positively impact every student, every day. This includes a dedication to considering the emotional, physical, an academic wellness of our students.

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

<https://www.northwest.sparcc.org/about-us/annual-notice>

18. **For public schools only**, if the school is a magnet, charter, or choice school, explain how students are chosen to attend.

## **PART III – SCHOOL OVERVIEW**

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Northwest Middle School serves students in grades six through eight, and is part of the Northwest Local School District. Northwest local serves the communities in and around the city of Canal Fulton, Lawrence Township, and the village of Clinton. The school campus is located in the northwest corner of Stark County, in northeast Ohio, but the district itself spans parts of three different counties. The village of Clinton is located in southern Summit County, small parts of the extreme western portion of the school district are found in Wayne County, and the remaining majority of the district is in Stark County. Canal Fulton is a historical town, founded along the banks of the Ohio and Erie Canal in 1814. The school campus is geographically located twelve miles northeast of Canton, Ohio, and fifteen miles from Akron. This location makes our school community an ideal place for people who work in those larger communities to live in a quiet, suburban area.

Northwest Local was unified in the 1950's via a consolidation between the Canal Fulton and West Franklin School Districts. Northwest Middle School is now housed in a renovated building, which was originally the first High School for the consolidated district. In 2007, following nearly a decade of financial difficulties, Northwest Local took advantage of a statewide school improvement initiative, the Ohio School Facilities Commission, to help in constructing a new high school building on the same campus as its then middle and high school. In the years that followed, Northwest would renovate the old high school building to become the new middle school, and the previous intermediate and middle school building to become Stinson Elementary. A previously used elementary building was demolished and a new primary school was built on site, making Northwest a one campus school district. The new middle school's renovation was notable in that it led to the building being designated a "green" building. This included all aspects of the state's qualifying factors, ranging from the inclusion of natural light, motion detected light switches, eco-friendly wall paints, rubber tile hallway flooring, geothermal heating systems, high efficiency HVAC units, and on campus water runoff methods, just to name a few.

Students in the Northwest Local school district could most accurately be described as primarily representing middle, and lower middle-class working families. The families who send their children to Northwest are largely second and third generation residents. This indicates not only a bond to the geographic area, but also to the schools themselves. The district has benefited from a tradition of community support and parent engagement in both academic learning and extracurricular opportunities. While voters have chosen to support the schools financially by passing a tax on earned income, the support is most readily visible in the mindset our families overwhelmingly take toward learning, and the trust they place in our school's teachers to do what's best for their children.

With support from the community in place, hiring capable, compassionate, and dedicated staff members became the most important part of making Northwest Middle school a successful learning community. District administration has focused on the critical and highly impactful decisions that hiring cycles bring to the forefront. In short, Northwest Middle School has succeeded, thanks to its hard-working, professional staff. This includes a healthy blend of new, energetic staff members working alongside veteran staff members who have shown the professional willingness to self-analyze and make necessary changes for the benefit of their students. Time and again this willingness to do what is best for their young learners, has marked the ability of teaching staff members to connect with their students and win the support of parents and families. It also has helped to have been able to provide veteran members of the teaching staff, opportunities to share their hard-earned expertise with newer staff members. These opportunities have come in the form of stipend funded positions such as department lead teachers, as well as participation on the school's Building Leadership Team, and District Leadership Team. Over the course of the last five years alone the teaching staff at Northwest middle school have taken on tasks such as formatting expectations for effective department and grade-level meetings, unifying a collective approach to data analysis, and also to create a building-wide model for positive behavior interventions. The team of teachers actively seek new and more effective teaching practices and tools, and are consistent in their willingness to share their findings with colleagues. The work of these professionals is exemplary, and is the greatest reason for the school's success.



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

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

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

Ohio content standards are based in the common core, consisting of varying elements of reading, writing, speaking, listening and language. This includes, but is not limited to skill acquisition targets such as analyzing literary and informational text, vocabulary acquisition, comparing and contrasting works of writing, drafting complex writing pieces, and analyzing forms of information to construct five paragraph written responses.

Teachers at Northwest Middle School can best be described as dedicated and proficient in the application of these standards. An important feature of the state standards for language arts is the linear, building block approach that stacks content standards by grade band, so that they flow neatly from sixth, to seventh, to eighth grade in order. Using the state's model, middle school teaching staff has worked together to create a shared vision of how the team's instructional approach will reflect these prescribed standards. This has ranged in practice from common team terminology, to common assessment activities in the form of practice-based analysis. A key element in allowing these activities to take place is the common planning time language arts teacher share with each other. Co-planning and analysis take place frequently during these times.

Language arts classes for all grades are double blocked. This means that these classes are twice as long as the typical forty-seven-minute class period. Because of this, a large percentage of the school's teaching staff are engaged with language arts instruction. At each grade level, two teachers, and one intervention specialist are assigned anywhere from one to three double-blocked class periods of language arts instruction. Some of these classes are taught by one teacher. Others are co-taught by a general education teacher, and an intervention specialist. For these classes, students who are identified as qualifying for IEP services are included with typical peers. Depending upon the documented needs of identified students, grade level specific resource classrooms can be offered. Currently, there is one grade level resource language arts class each, for sixth, seventh and eighth grade.

Teaching staff at Northwest has become highly reliant on the results of periodic diagnostic testing through the Measure of Academic Progress, more commonly known as MAP testing. This testing provides our teachers with a regular view of student progress related specifically to reading and writing skills. These skills are most commonly observed to be reflected in the teaching practices of language arts staff in the form of quick formative assessments, which allowed teachers to continually monitor student acquisition of these skills. Entrance and exit slips, mid lesson quizzes, quick checks, and even flipped classroom elements, have become regular practice for language arts teachers at Northwest. Teachers then work in teams to analyze and breakdown the results of these formative assessments in order to determine the types of activities they will assign to their students going forward.

It is also important here to note the team approach to teaching writing. Teachers in this building use a system known as TARACEES. This writing acronym allows students a quick and easy way to remember a writing format that includes the most pertinent components of a well-constructed written response. The steps include; Title and Author; Restate the question; Answer the question; Cite textual evidence; Explain textual evidence; Extend; Stop and close. The use of this format has no doubt played an important role in allowing our students to perform well when tested for written response proficiency.

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

Mathematics content in Ohio is also based on common core standards. Math standards are divided by grade level into overarching strands that include, ratios and proportions, the number system, expressions and equations, geometry, statistics and probability, and functions.

Math teachers at Northwest Middle primarily work within one grade level, but this includes an intervention specialist who works exclusively as a part of the math team, and also a small group general education math teacher, who teaches both seventh and eighth grade math classes. This particular approach has been helpful in allowing students who have been identified in the past as needing extra support to complete assignments, or who may benefit from being placed in a smaller class with a teacher who can focus more on helping them to succeed in matching our building-wide focus of work completion.

The members of the math department have worked hard over the last several years to connect evidence of learning from diagnostic MAP testing to the practices they work through on a regular basis in their classroom. The specific results from this testing, give math teachers frequent data by which they are able to connect skills and needed interventions for typical learners. Most importantly, this includes a dedication to regular spiraling of math content. Teachers use both online and paper-based methods of continually exposing students to varied math concepts. Paired with available tools embedded in the state testing reporting system, teachers are able to identify specific needs for groups of students. This data-driven knowledge leads to impactful teaching.

Perhaps most importantly, and nowhere better evidenced than in the math department, Northwest Middle School operates under an approach which emphasizes teacher autonomy as a driving focus. Though common planning is prioritized in the creation of the master schedule, it is considered highly important that planning time be largely unobstructed by building administration. This is to say that planning time will only be taken by building administrators when absolutely necessary. Teachers know that this approach is only possible because they are expected to work together to make decisions that are based on data, and the gathered results of student learning. It is our team belief that this should whenever possible, not be driven or directed from the principal's office, rather math team members are given the freedom to make decisions that indicate they are the experts when it comes to math instruction. At Northwest middle school, we strive to allow teachers a leadership role in determining what may be best for our student learners. This ranges from instructional approach for different content standards, to assessment needs for individual students and groups of students. The approach, which is clearly not entirely common, has led to success and teacher ownership of results.

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

The middle school science department is staffed with one teacher at each grade level. Content is divided into specific grade bands in accordance with the state standards for science in Ohio. Each grade level addresses specific content pieces from three major categories; earth science; life sciences; and physical sciences. Students are then assessed for proficiency in eighth grade as a part of the Ohio state testing system.

Teachers use a combination of hands-on lab style activities, interactive online activities, and a blend of reading and writing which aims at providing students a focused approach to literacy within the discipline of science. Science team members have worked hard in the last several years to make reading a focus, in an effort to hone in on the skills that will allow students to be scientific thinkers. Some of these focal points have included inquiry style questioning, fostering a common approach to diagnosing meaning from charts tables and graphs, and also designing and understanding the parts of the scientific process.

The vast majority of science lessons at Northwest middle school would be observed to be a combination of direct instruction and interactive student exploration. Most regularly students will be set to work on a paired or group task, that teachers support via one-on-one, or small group question and answer sessions. Teachers use a text series, experiment kits, and a myriad of online resources to provide students access to examples that enrich and support their content.

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

It is our team belief that social studies has long been a misapplied content area for many schools. Often, social studies teachers focus on the acquisition of facts alone as a measure of student understanding. It is rather our approach at Northwest Middle School to use the facts as the basis for understanding overarching concepts within history, and hopefully discovering ways to measure student growth within these skill areas.

This can best be described as a work in progress. Encouragingly, Ohio's standards assist this thinking by providing social studies teachers, with long range themes they call strands. Strands are overarching concepts present in each of the individual grade bands of content, and include history, geography, government and economics.

The social studies team has recently made gains in using formative assessments, most often appearing in the form of electronic quizzes, to measure student understanding of content that falls inside of the provided strand categories. These teachers have also addressed strand mastery learning by prioritizing reading within their content area or discipline, and have made it a focus to challenge and immerse their students in the many opportunities for reading within social studies. To support this team buy-in, our school has purchased access to an online textbook, additional reading materials in the form of paper and electronic periodicals, and a license to use an online reading tool that can be accessed by teachers in different content areas, for various newspaper articles that match their desired topic.

This teacher team has also focused on the inclusion of more frequent discussion, presentation, and group task assignment, to complement the sometimes necessary load of direct instruction associated with social studies.

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

The most obvious connection from the work done by teaching staff at our middle school is that of college preparation in the form of rigorous academic expectations. In this area, our students are prepared for high-level learning due in large part to the staff wide focus on reading comprehension and effective writing skills. However, our teachers have emphasized the skills of speaking and listening as part of their regular instructional practices as well. Many of these skills appear in the form of engaging lessons, but have become most often present in frequently used activities, such as collaborative group work, presentations of project-based learning, and one-on-one assessments.

Career readiness can best be described as an area for desired improvement at Northwest Middle School. Though many of Ohio's high schools have taken huge steps forward over the course of the last thirty years in being able to prepare students for careers immediately beyond graduation, it is safe to say that Ohio's middle schools have not yet gained similar footing. One of the strategies employed at Northwest include an annual visit to the shared career and technical high school available to students in our district as well as several neighboring schools. In late winter of each school year, eighth grade students take a half day field trip to tour the various programs that the career and technical center offer. When students enter their junior year of high school, they have the option to take part in any of these career-based programs. This trip serves only as a way to expose students, make them aware of what is available to them, and give them a visual idea of what that programming could potentially mean for them.

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

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

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

Students at Northwest are given the opportunity to engage in both visual and performing arts programs. This is highlighted by an outstanding, and highly rated vocal music program. The number of students involved in choir at the middle school makeup roughly thirty-three percent of the student body in total. This large number of students represents not only a successful program, but that many more students who have built in a connection to the larger school community. Choir shows regularly sell out and are a highlight of the school calendar.

In addition, the instrumental music program has undergone change in leadership at the high school level several times over the course of the last decade. Recently, this frequent turnover has come to an end, and the numbers of students participating in band have begun to grow. Instrumental music students are given the opportunity to participate in local and state competitions throughout the school year. Our middle school band regularly performs at the highest rated levels in these adjudicated competitions.

Visual art is offered to students in grades, six and seven at Northwest Middle School. Content for these classes includes various mediums and applications. Students are not required to take this class, but the numbers of those requesting to do so remain significant. This class has also played a key role in helping the visual aspect of the school climate to remain high. The instructor uses a planning period, as well as before and after school hours, to fill many of the school's hallway bulletin boards with the artwork of students from these classes. This provides the opportunity for students to see their work recognized as being meaningful, as it is featured and posted for all to view.

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

Physical education is offered as an elective course to students in seventh and eighth grade during the first semester, and to sixth grade students in the second half of the school year. Students in these classes can regularly be observed working in stations related to physical fitness. Charting of progress from the beginning to the end of the semester has proved to be highly beneficial in motivating students to persist in the progress toward their personal wellness goals. The teaching of team sports and the skills related to performing them well, helps students to gain understanding of what it takes to not only be a good teammate, but also to become a better athlete. Students are given the opportunity to first learn the game being taught, but then to perform in highly popular class wide tournaments. Periodically students will be given the opportunity to play their grade level "championship" during the school's intervention period.

Eighth grade students take high school credit health in the form of a hybrid class which includes both an online and traditional component. The high school credit is awarded through the successful completion of the online modules. This typically takes students anywhere from four to six weeks to complete. The remainder of the semester class is spent working through traditional activities, collaboration, and exposure to outside programs and guest speakers. Students in this class tackle, sometimes difficult to discuss topics, such as substance abuse and human sexuality. They also work to complement the learning that is done in physical education by focusing on the study of nutrition, and creating healthy habits when it comes to what they put in their bodies.

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

Eighth graders who have qualified for enriched language arts class are given the opportunity to elect to take Intro to Spanish. The instructor is shared with the high school and teaches only one section of this course. Popularity of Spanish as a middle school course has fluctuated over the years, with many students electing to wait until high school to take it. Part of the reason for this decision is the full nature of course offerings at the middle school while students are in eighth grade. Still, each year anywhere from twelve to twenty students have taken Spanish as eighth graders. Students who take this class will have the opportunity to complete an additional year of Spanish in high school, or if they choose to take it for college credit before they graduate.

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

In the fall of each year, incoming sixth grade students are assigned to take Tech Resources. In this re-envisioned model of a traditional computer class, students are introduced to the most important technology skills they will be expected to use in their core classes. Among these, students are exposed to the use of the online learning management system our school uses, as well as functional exposure to the use of spreadsheets, slideshows, email, typing, and submitting documents electronically to teachers. This is particularly important for students in sixth grade to be instructed, as it is the first year students in our district are given a laptop they are expected to care for after the school day has ended. For that reason, as well as for the functional skills students will apply in their classes, this course plays a crucial role in the success of

our district's one-to-one districtwide device plan.

Seventh grade students also take a bolstered version of this course during spring semester. The purpose of the second course is to dive deeper into the previously learned skills, as well as to explore the many important lessons of digital citizenship and internet safety.

Though a library course does not formally exist at Northwest Middle School, language arts classes are inherently tied to the library via class-based assignments that ask students to read and reflect on a literary work of their choosing. The school library is supported financially beyond the funding that exists in the district general fund, by a yearly book fair which helps to add to the choices available for students in our library collection.

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

Our school is nearing the end of its fifth year offering students an Automation and Robotics class. This course is offered to students in eighth grade, and one section is also available to seventh grade students who have been identified as being gifted. The course, which is purchased from the Project Lead the Way platform, gives students a view of the makings of the design process, and a basis for the principles of engineering and automation. As they move through the early stages of the course, students are assigned tasks which require them to learn the basics of coding and assigning. By the end, this learning is applied to more sophisticated builds, which ask teams of students to create a device such as a car or stationary robot, and also to program a mini computer in order to make that device complete a task. Students are often successful in designing a fully automated car that can complete a floor maze. This course has proven to be both challenging and fun for students in eighth grade.

## **3. Academic Supports**

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

Students who perform below grade level at Northwest Middle School have traditionally been the students who have failed to complete assignments and those who have had poor school attendance. This is often the case at most schools, but this school's staff has targeted work completion as the primary driver by which struggling students could be helped to improve.

As a Title I district, this middle school is fortunate to employ two tutors from this fund, which is not at all a given for most middle schools. These tutors, primarily pull-out students to provide reading support, but also push in to language arts classes for the opportunity to give a more hands-on version of academic help. This has been particularly helpful in uniting the efforts of our language arts team to individually impact the learning of at-risk students.

Ten years ago, the seeds of that plan were put in place via a unique after school study table program, which involved keeping students after the day ended to work on missing assignments and tasks needing to be completed following absences. Monitored by the school's library aide, who had a work day that began and ended an hour later than the rest of the building, teachers would sign up students who needed to stay in the library after school to complete work. A limited number of spaces would be available each day, and other staff members could often be seen stopping in to help get students started on their missing tasks. One of the key factors in making this program successful was the inclusion of a communication system which would allow students to stay after school with parent permission, and be bussed home following the extra work time, thereby eliminating the potential hurdle of parents not being able to pick up their child. This meant that students in grades six through eight, who needed to stay after school, could be added to a later bus run which typically included only elementary students.

With the addition of one-to-one technology around the time of the pandemic, the use of this model has been less frequent, but the overall mindset of staff members to focus on accountability in work completion had been set. It is not uncommon to find Northwest Middle School's teachers eating lunch with their students, or pulling them from study halls during their planning time to catch up on work that needs to be completed,

or redone more satisfactorily. It is this staff-driven dedication to student accountability, and the belief that all students can master learning content, that have led to the success of Northwest Middle School in assisting students who have been identified as performing below grade level.

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

Enrichment tracking begins at the district level when the Director of Instruction implements gifted testing at the state prescribed grade levels. Once students are identified, they can be placed on an accelerated track that exists at the middle school inside of math and language arts courses. Acceleration tracking does not exist for other content areas in our school building. In addition to gifted testing, students may be identified as qualifying for acceleration based on their MAP diagnostic test scores. Our district team has worked diligently to find an appropriate range of scores and identifiers that indicate a student may benefit from an enriched placement.

In language arts, students who qualify can take enriched courses in sixth and seventh grade that follow the same grade level standards, but are taught from more challenging resources. Once in eighth grade enriched language arts students take freshman English for high school credit. This offers a path of acceleration, which will likely result in students being able to take college level courses while still in high school. This acceleration model is also in place for math, but due to the similarity in prescribed standards for sixth and seventh grade, course offerings are slightly different. Enriched sixth grade students, are enrolled in a class of the next higher grade level. Both groups of students take the grade level test associated with that course during state testing season. Lastly, eighth grade students who have qualified for enriched math take algebra as eighth graders for high school credit.

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

The identified student population will likely experience a few varied models of instruction related to their IEP goals over the course of the three years they spend at Northwest Middle School. Models for inclusion and pull out exist, and are implemented as part of the master schedule in response to the needs of students. For example, in relation to language arts instruction, a co-taught model exists for students whom this is deemed appropriate. These students would learn and be included with their typical peers in the general setting, while being instructed via a team-teaching model.

For those with more intensive needs, resource style classrooms are sometimes used. These classes are not always part of the building's master schedule, but are created when needed, based on the number of students who are determined to require a less inclusive learning environment. It is notable that Northwest Middle School uses a somewhat unique approach to providing support for these students outside of typical content instruction. Students with IEPs are also scheduled to a support period, which serves both as a guided study hall, and an opportunity to gain data related to IEP goals. These class periods are assigned to licensed intervention specialists who have the appropriate training to assist students with these needed interventions. During this time, students may receive extra help with assignments, have the opportunity to test in a smaller setting, or be given more direct assistance alongside a staff member when completing difficult tasks.

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

Our district has not typically had large numbers of enrolled students who could accurately be described as English language learners. Though occasionally, students who fit this description have been a part of the student body. Currently, there are two students enrolled at Northwest Middle School, who fit this categorization. The State of Ohio requires that the students be tested for English language acquisition as part of the state's testing system. It is possible for students to progress to the point that they test out of these requirements and no longer are required to participate in them.

At the building level, there are no special programs or designated interventions in place, but efforts are made in conjunction with the district's Director of Instruction and the high school Spanish department head to arrange for several basic interventions. This includes fourth year Spanish students serving as volunteer tutors

for the entirety of the school year, providing students with an iPad that has a built-in translator, supplying Spanish versions of classroom textbooks, a hard copy of a Spanish to English dictionary, and opportunities for these children to regularly engage with a Spanish-speaking staff member, particularly at the beginning of the school year when there are many questions that need to be asked and responded to.

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

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

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

The adoption of a formal Positive Behavior Intervention Support system over the course of the last several years has been integral to enhancing our school's climate, thereby enhancing overall engagement. Members of the school's Building Leadership Team attended a professional development offering through our county's Educational Service Center that coached our staff on Ohio's approach to implementing a PBIS model. Once the training was completed, the team set to work creating a matrix of desired behaviors that could explicitly be outlined in a format that students could follow. This matrix targeted positive behaviors that students could be expected to exhibit in the four key locations within the school building. These included classrooms, hallways, cafeteria, and restrooms. For each desired character trait, expected behaviors for each of those locations were listed in bullet point format. Large posters were purchased and placed in each classroom so students could be reminded of the positive behaviors on this matrix.

The school year began with all teachers taking time on a designated date to instruct students about the behaviors listed on these posters. Team members created a lesson for all staff to use in the form of a slideshow. This electronic presentation included inspirational quotes, links to videos which demonstrated the described character traits, and imagery and reading selections to support the overall message. The team's plan was to then deliver a midpoint booster session to remind students of one of the characteristics on the matrix. In a brief collaborative activity, all students in the school would review the importance of demonstrating that behavior. Teaching staff was asked to keep an eye out for the focus behavior, and to submit the names of students who were "caught" demonstrating them. In a typical week, the names of anywhere from 10 to 20 students would be submitted by staff. Weekly on Friday mornings, those students' names would randomly be drawn, and four students would be given the opportunity select from a prize bin which included snacks and school supplies.

Finally, on the last day of each nine-week grading period, a school wide assembly or rally, would be held to celebrate the students that teachers selected as having demonstrated the qualities focused on for that grading period. In addition, students who had been recognized for positive behavior throughout the nine-weeks would be included in competitions between grade level teams, and others would be selected to compete against the teachers in a fun game of skill or luck.

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

Over the last several years, school districts in our county have worked together to implement building and district wide teams tasked with identifying and providing interventions for families in need. These teams include administrators, counselors, teachers, mental health professionals, school psychologists, nurses, and most importantly family support specialists. These teams meet monthly to discuss students who may be at risk, and work to brainstorm not only potential assisting interventions, but also to connect them to available resources. The family support specialist position exists in some form, in each of our county school districts. This position is funded in part through the local United Way. Those who attain these positions receive training in working with those in need, gathering resources, and providing contacts for individuals and agencies who aim to assist at-risk students and their families.

At Northwest Middle School, the work of the family support specialist has resulted in several key components that have benefited families. The first of these is a community closet which is housed at the middle school. Community donations have resulted in not only clothing, but also toiletries and other supplies that can be given to students who have a need for them. All items are donated by community members, and the closet is organized and showcased by still other volunteers. Partnerships have also been established with community food banks via district wide food drives which help to fill the shelves of these important donation centers. Also, the family support specialist leads the charge in gathering donations from local organizations to assist students in need of school supplies, costs for school related trips, as well as occasional disaster relief needs, such as the assistance provided to families displaced from their home due to fire.



Lastly, the school guidance counselor regularly organizes spirit week events, and connects them to themes that are important for middle school students to learn. An example of this would be events organized for kindness week. During kindness week, students can choose to participate in theme dress up days that require them to donate to a worthy cause. Students who would like to participate on these days would bring in supplies that would be collected for a local charity. The response from families has been excellent, and donations have been plentiful.

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

In the last two years, Northwest Local committed to the addition of instructional coach positions at each building to assist our teachers in their implementation of best practice strategies within their instructional planning and lesson delivery. This team of coaches, led by the district's Director of Instruction, works to research, study, and implement best practice strategies alongside the teaching staff. Prior to the creation of this team, professional development had been delivered as it is in most districts, which is to say on designated days throughout the school calendar. The failure of that model is that professional development is viewed by teachers as something that must be done on certain days, and not a continuing conversation that develops throughout the school year.

The realization that this model was not working for our teachers led the instructional coach team to implement a professional development model that is spread out over the course of the year, and asks teachers to engage in shorter, more frequent sessions of professional development. Using a popular book as a guide, teachers met with the instructional coach team bi-monthly for a half hour either before or after the work day. The sessions focused on one or two best practice engagement strategies. Teachers were then asked to use strategies in their classroom and reported out to colleagues at the second monthly session. This type of professional development has allowed our district to have continued discussions centered around high-impact strategies, that have proven over time to be useful in fostering student learning and long-term mastery.

Other more common practices, take place in the district as well, including a new teacher mentoring system. Mentor teachers work side-by-side with those entry-level teachers who have joined our district team to foster discussions about best practice and also time management. This process has proven to be helpful in retaining new employees. It is the belief of our district administrative team that teachers must be given opportunities to lead others in order for them to feel connected to the district vision. For that reason, and whenever possible, teacher input is sought in regard to new building initiatives, professional learning, and even hiring.

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

Administration at our middle school historically consisted of only the school principal. At the start of last school year, the district added a second administrator to the team when it created the position of Dean of Students. At Northwest Middle, the Dean technically serves as an additional administrator who is assigned typical administrative tasks, such as teacher evaluation, extracurricular planning and logistical management. However, the main focus for this position has been student wellness and positive behavior management. This represents a significant commitment on the part of the Board of Education and school district leadership, to the well-being of middle school students. With all that's been added to the list of responsibilities for schools in this day and age, having a lead student communicator and advocator has been crucial in allowing students the opportunities to work through difficulties, manage emotions, and keep the focus on performing well in the classroom.

Apart from changes that have taken place recently, large amounts of time and energy have gone into determining whether available programming and scheduling offer the best opportunity for students to learn in an appropriate manner, and that our model reflects the needs of a changing world. Most often this can be found in a changing and adaptive master schedule. Rarely does Northwest Middle School offer the exact same courses to the same categories of students, year after year. Rather work begins in the spring of one school year, to analyze offerings and classes, in preparation for the coming school year, and for the next

wave of individual students. For example, the chosen special education model for a given year, may look very different, depending upon the needs of the identified population of students. One year there may be mostly inclusion, while the next may provide more options for resource classrooms. It is the belief of our collective administrative team that the program offerings and student service models should not be driven solely by a preferred philosophy, but rather by the needs of the current and/or upcoming student population.

This line of thinking also exists when considering new or adapted curriculum programming. It has recently been determined through a strategic planning information gathering period, that parents and staff members, place a high value on implementing more STEM science opportunities for students. Standing in agreement with this, the district has taken steps to implement more of these opportunities, not only here at the middle school, but in other buildings as well.

In an overall sense, administration in this building has tried to focus on a servant leadership model, that aims to provide teachers with the tools they need to engage students in learning, and to connect with them as individuals. Hopefully, Northwest Middle School's teaching staff would state that they are trusted to do their job well, that they are given what they need to do so, and that the administrative staff allows them the freedom to take risks and do what is best for children. Lastly, our school is both proud, and flattered to have been recognized as a high achieving school. It's important to note that our team understands that this recognition is granted largely due to our performance on standardized testing. But it is also just as important to share that while teachers are expected to care deeply about the information they can glean from test scores, there is no message from the administrative offices of this building that test scores can define us. Rather, teachers are asked to focus on what students need. For some the answer may be a rigorous approach to learning. For others, the answer is undoubtedly having a friendly face to connect with, and to feel supported by. The reason for Northwest Middle School's success is without a doubt having the winning combination of a community

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

Northwest Middle School could accurately be described as having little in the way of racial diversity. Though our students do not have the benefit of being exposed to as many different cultures, ethnicities and religious backgrounds as students at other schools may, the diversity of learners and economic backgrounds do provide some exposure to varied experiences. For this reason, a focus related to staff development has been to involve teachers in professional development trainings that speak to addressing these types of differences. One such opportunity was the All-In for Education series, which a core group of staff members attended in 2017. The three-day series introduced this team to the concepts of social justice and cultural competence. For our school, this mostly contributed to an internal analysis of how our team went about serving students who struggle to learn, which is to say practices of equity in instruction.

This has most directly been evidenced in instructional practices that have evolved to be highly student centered, particularly so over the course of the last several years. In the not-so-distant past, students receiving teacher created accommodations for learning needs was something that was reserved for only students with documented IEP needs. The new mindset, and growth of our teachers' conception of this practice, has allowed for similar strategies to be deployed for all students. This has been evident in the forms of assessment, response strategies, planned instruction, and the frequent inclusion of data backed high impact strategies.

Teacher teams, beginning with Building Leadership Team members, volunteered for a district led cohort to study and implement high yield strategies that were made popular by such nationally renowned education researchers such as John Saphier and Jeff Howard. Pairing these classroom skillsets with a knowledge of high yield strategies such as those published by John Hattie, began to empower our teaching teams to provide more individualized instruction, and more directly impact the various learning needs of the students attending our school.

Though our school's efforts to provide more individualized learning for each student, could best be described as a continued work in progress, the steps taken by our teachers over the last several years to gain

knowledge about these proven practices has clearly been a step in the right direction. In a way, we have attempted to address changing the mindset of our teachers in general. Often, veteran teachers unfairly are labeled as inflexible, or unwilling to change their ways. At Northwest Middle School, many of our veteran teachers have actually led the way in shifting the mindset that is now required in order to be considered an effective school.

In perhaps the greatest example of how this looks in our school, accommodations historically granted only to students with IEP goals and documented learning needs, have become common for all students. It has become expected that any student can be given opportunities to learn in smaller settings, or to have a test read aloud by an adult staff member, or be given multiple opportunities to take an assessment. Learning has begun to be viewed as an individual path for each student to explore, and that it is each teacher's role to help that child find the correct path.

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

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It is not uncommon for middle schools to schedule students into an intervention period. It is also not uncommon for this time block to turn into an unstructured schedule filler. Northwest Middle School has gone through many variations of the intervention model over the course of the last ten years. Recently, this model has grown into something our team views as a highly effective system, under which teachers are able to provide direct support and interventions for large numbers of students.

The “Flex Period” model our school uses, is a twenty-seven-minute class period following the lunch block each school day. Students are rostered to the same location for the entire year. These roster numbers are kept relatively small as each staff member in the building is assigned anywhere from twelve to fifteen students. The smaller class size is very important to the success of the model, in that it will allow teachers to move students from their class on days they are assigned to work with specific students. Core content teachers are assigned a day of the week to use as a “skill day.” They are also assigned a second day to request students, which is designated as a make-up day. For each assigned day, teachers fill out an electronic form on which they request students from other rostered locations, to report to their classroom.

On a skill day, teachers send the students rostered to them for Flex to a partner teacher. This allows the room and ability to focus solely on the students they are bringing to their classroom. When selecting which students to bring to their classroom, teachers will often use data supported tools, such as MAP diagnostic results, and those available in our state’s test data reporting system. By identifying students who need these types of intervention, and for which specific skill may be deficient, our teachers are making a great impact. Examples of targeted skill work taking place in those sessions might include, a language arts teacher pulling in a small group of students to work specifically on identifying main idea from a given reading selection, or a math teacher working with a small group of students on strategies for solving linear equations. Teachers are given the freedom to select which students need intervention, and the students chosen range in ability from struggling learners, to high level performers who can be given the opportunity to grow in weaker skill areas. This is particularly useful in addressing the difficult task of making gains with students who already score very high on diagnostic or state tests, or who are deemed as performing above grade level expectations.

Assigned “makeup days”, are reserved for teachers to simply catchup students who have missed work due to absences, or students who need to complete assignments that they may have failed to submit. For these days, teachers are not permitted to rotate students from their classroom, but rather will add needed students to their rostered class list.

In short, Northwest’s version of the intervention period has become a flexible, and organized way for teachers to address both deficiencies in learning, as well as being able to hold students accountable for the work completion expectations we have for them.