

U.S. Department of Education
2016 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

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

Official School Name Academy Charter School
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 801 East Arctic Avenue
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Palmer State AK Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 99645-6179

County Matanuska-Susitna Borough

Telephone (907) 746-2358 Fax _____

Web site/URL http://www.matsuk12.us/acc E-mail barbara.gerard@matsuk12.us

Facebook Page
https://www.facebook.com/pages/Academy-Charter-School/344994258940435 Google+ _____

Twitter Handle _____ Blog _____ Other Social Media Link _____

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*Ms Deena Paramo E-mail Deena.Paramo@matsuk12.us
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Matanuska Susitna Borough Tel. (907) 746-9255

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 Ms. Susan Pougher
(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, write N/A in the space.*

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. The school configuration includes one or more of grades K-12. (Schools on the same campus with one principal, even a K-12 school, must apply as an entire school.)
2. The public school has met their state's accountability requirements (i.e., avoided sanctions) in participation, performance in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics, and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate) using the most recent accountability results available for the year prior to nomination.
3. To meet final eligibility, a public school must meet the state's accountability requirements (i.e., avoided sanctions) in participation, performance in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics, and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate) for the year in which they are nominated (2015-2016) and be certified by the state representative. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
4. If the school includes grades 7 or higher, the school must have foreign language as a part of its curriculum.
5. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2010 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
6. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, or 2015.
7. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's application and/or rescind a school's award if irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state.
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. 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.

PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Data should be provided for the most recent school year (2015-2016) unless otherwise stated.

DISTRICT

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

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located:
- Urban or large central city
 - Suburban with characteristics typical of an urban area
 - Suburban
 - Small city or town in a rural area
 - Rural
3. Number of students as of October 1, 2015 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	13	13	26
1	16	10	26
2	11	13	24
3	13	13	26
4	13	15	28
5	15	14	29
6	14	10	24
7	19	11	30
8	13	17	30
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	127	116	243

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 8 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 1 % Asian
 - 1 % Black or African American
 - 5 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 1 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 82 % White
 - 2 % 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 2014 – 2015 school year: 2%

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, 2014 until the end of the 2014-2015 school year	2
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2014 until the end of the 2014-2015 school year	2
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	4
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2014	234
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.017
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	2

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 3 %
7 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):
Spanish, Russian, Greek

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 0 %
Total number students who qualify: 0

8. Students receiving special education services: 8 %
20 Total number of students served

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional conditions. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <u>1</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>11</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>16</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>1</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>0</u> Mental Retardation | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |
| <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities | <u>1</u> Developmentally Delayed |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 18
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	Number of Staff
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers	12
Resource teachers/specialists e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	6
Paraprofessionals	6
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	1

11. 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 14:1

12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

Required Information	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012	2010-2011
Daily student attendance	95%	95%	94%	95%	94%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

13. **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 2015.

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%

14. 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.

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

To create a learning system that encourages and develops students' inherent abilities to be competent, confident, productive and responsible young adults.

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

Admission to Academy Charter School is open to ALL kindergarten through 8th grade students in the MSBSD via a lottery. Academy Charter programs and activities are free from discrimination with respect to sex, race, color, religion, national origin, ethnic group, marital or parental status, and physical and mental disability. The Academy Charter ensures equal opportunities for all students in admission and access to enrollment. The application is available online on the school's page via the school district website, an active Facebook page, or in person at the school. The application is simple and requires the name of the student, grade level seeking and parent name and phone number. The school advertises the annual opportunity to apply in the local papers. We host a number of tours for interested parents and community members, with almost a tour a week beginning in January thru the end of April.

Academy currently hosts 243 students in grades kindergarten through 8th grade. As a general rule, Academy Charter will enroll all eligible students who submit a timely application by the first Friday in May, unless the number of the applicants exceeds the capacity of the program class, grade level, or building. In event of an excess of applications, as specified by the State of Alaska Attorney General, a lottery is held on the first Friday in May each year. The City of Palmer Chief of Police draws the winning applications in the lottery. As per the Attorney General, the children of staff are provided opportunity for open spaces. In keeping with our "family" philosophy, siblings of currently enrolled students will have first option. Children of Academy Advisory Board members also have a first option for a space. All other students will have an equal opportunity to fill any remaining openings. The Chief of Police draws all applications for each grade level, filling open spaces, and then begins the wait list, in order as drawn. Siblings are immediately moved to the top of the wait list. In the occurrence of more than one sibling waiting for a space in a specific grade level, a lottery is held to determine which sibling is first and so on for the wait list.

During the school year, should an opening occur, the wait list is used, in order, to fill an open space.

At the end of each school year, at the time of the lottery draw, the wait list goes away and is re-drawn using the process listed above. This fulfills the Attorney General ruling that it should not be a "first come, first serve" but a lottery draw to enroll students into Academy Charter School.

PART III – SUMMARY

We, the parents, the students, the staff, and the community are passionate about our school! Academy is family. We are purposeful and geared to cultivate and nurture interesting, well-rounded, deep thinking citizens. Here is our story.

In 1995, the Charter School Act was passed by the State Legislature. Educators and families joined together to implement the best ideas, both new and old, about how to educate children. In August 1997, Academy opened its doors to serve 24 kindergarten students, drawn by the Chief of Police in the annual lottery, representing children from across the Matanuska Susitna Borough School District. Academy grew adding one grade level per year up to the 8th grade; now currently serving 243 students. (Academy Charter programs and activities are free from discrimination with respect to sex, race, color, religion, national origin, ethnic group, marital or parental status, and physical and mental disability.)

Our goal in creating this ever evolving, purposeful, living laboratory with a caring, supportive and structured environment was to focus on the well-being of our students. Academy seeks to create thinkers and problem solvers, and to develop knowledgeable, empowered, well-rounded, caring citizens. The school continues to be successful because it encourages students to thrive, grow and learn in a setting that celebrates their success and outcomes. The end result of this focus on learning is evident in the high level scores the school received on the first AMP testing round in 2014/15 and on the previous Alaska State Performance Index 2012 – 13 and 2013-14 in which Academy earned the top-rated ASPI score of Five Stars.

There were many road blocks and challenges along the way, with the greatest challenge being that charter schools must find affordable, functional, and safe buildings. Fortunately, the Borough Assembly donated 3.77 acres as Academy's permanent campus, which included three old buildings and eight portables. Together, staff and parents dug trenches for water/sewer lines, ripped out walls, and fully remodeled the dilapidated space into safe, viable classrooms. The school campus has benefitted from significant improvements in the last ten years. In 2005, the Alaska Legislature awarded Academy a \$2.5 million Direct Appropriation. In 2012, there was another direct appropriation of \$2 million. In 2013, the final \$2 million was awarded. In three phases over ten years, 19 classrooms, a high school sized gym and an office (42,865 sq.) was built. The neighboring twenty acres was purchased to add to our campus. A 700+ foot gravel exit road was built during one weekend with donated gravel and trucking totaling nearly \$20,000. Our school was built by staff and parents in collaboration with community know-how.

We choose to stay a small school where the principal knows every student, their parents, and their hopes and dreams. The teachers work hard to ensure that every child has successes each day, yet is challenged to deepen their understanding that it's not about quick and easy, but about persevering and doing their best. Students are evaluated for aptitude and ability early in the start of each year and placed in small learning groups with similar like-learners for the language arts and mathematics blocks. These small groups of approximately 13 students are led by teachers trained in innovative curricula such as Core Knowledge and Spalding. The school responds to each student's needs, even in some cases placing students ahead a grade for language arts and/or mathematics and the flexibility in adjusting their placement throughout the year. This flexibility and smaller class sizes allows teachers to target instruction on a personal level not possible in most schools. It keeps students more accountable as they are not able to fly under the radar with poor work habits, incomplete understanding, etc. Teachers build relationships with students in a more intimate setting. Small class sizes are more conducive to a classroom culture of achievement.

In addition to the basic academics of the school, Academy supports a well-rounded learning environment with a variety of experiences, such as Spanish classes for K-8, afternoon labs in a variety of subjects and field trips/hands-on learning. Grades K-8 rotate through sessions of labs that include Art, Writing, Science, Geography, Computers, and Spanish/PE. K-8th grade participates in Tae Kwon Do once a week and K-5th has a choir session weekly. The labs are taught by specialists who are passionate and knowledgeable about that subject area. All 3rd graders are taught piano. Grades 6-8 have intensives twice a year which are week-long hands-on learning experiences in topics such as snow safety, helicopters in Alaska, taxidermy, photography, and art. Friday electives for middle school students run for four weeks and are designed to

create well-rounded, interesting citizens (topics include guitar, snow and ice biking, sewing, dissections). Academy is a seamless collaboration between teachers and parents. This relationship begins with the entrance interview in which the student and the parent(s) meet with the teacher and bring two learning goals for the school year. It is apparent from the get-go that the team is the teacher, the parent, and the student. At the end of the year, during the exit interview with the student, teacher and parents, the goals are evaluated.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

The Charter curriculum contains traditional academic subjects and additional subject areas that make the Charter unique. The Alaska State Frameworks serve as the starting point, and are enhanced with unifying themes and other creative approaches. We ensure ALL students have access to and success in learning high quality, rigorous curricula.

Three long learning blocks are purposefully scheduled to provide language arts, mathematics, and the afternoon labs with opportunity for in-depth learning with introduction, hands on practice, and mastery of a concept or skill occurring in one day. The Charter emphasizes both the acquisition and application of knowledge. The curriculum defines the knowledge, skills, and achievement levels commensurate with proficiency.

The Core Knowledge Sequence (CK) Curriculum provides a strong foundation in literature, history, science, geography, and art. This curriculum is designed to develop students who understand that history and social science are about real people, in real places, solving problems relevant to the students' own lives. Students understand the interrelationships between the peoples of the world, and study the past as the background and prelude to the present. Social studies has an emphasis on geography, map making, and other educational approaches to the awareness of our planet and the peoples that inhabit it. Students read challenging CK literature which teaches complex information about culture, war, and grows our students' understanding about the history of our country and the world. Students with reading challenges read along to audio books and then actively participate in class discussions.

The 90 minute language arts (LA) block develops students who are effective communicators, who love literature, and are lifelong readers and writers. The curriculum is literature based with a strong phonics foundation, specifically Spalding Writing Road to Reading. Every teacher and the principal have participated in Spalding intensive training, specifically 45 hours for Spalding 1 and an additional 45 hours in Spalding 2. Comprehension skills, vocabulary and grammar are integrated within the literature program. Communication skills include speaking and writing, and expand into presentation skills using modern technological tools. Students are paired with like-learners for the LA block to provide challenge and avoid frustration. This means a 2nd grader reading at the 3rd grade level moves to the 3rd grade group for LA. Students are encouraged to progress at a fast pace, with mastery a must. Advanced 8th grade students are able to participate, onsite, in the high school course English 1.

The mathematics program is based on major mathematical ideas and concepts. The math block is aligned K-8th grade, allowing students to be grouped with like-learners, challenged and able to work at a fast pace, allowed to and encouraged to access mathematical studies beyond their age/grade, with mastery a must. Students are taught to work in pairs where they learn the art of explaining their thinking or process for their answer. They are taught that there are many strategies to obtain the solution to a mathematical problem. K-5 students are in math a minimum of 70 minutes each day. Middle school students have math for 90 minutes each day. Advanced 8th graders are able to participate, onsite, in high school credit algebra 1 class. A couple of 8th graders go to the high school to take geometry.

The writing lab is unique. The school added a writing lab to meet the need for more time to develop writing skills in addition to the LA block. In the writing lab, our students learn to write for a specific audience and produce creative writing and poetry, as well as the five paragraph essay. We have excellent writers!

The science curriculum is a multi-year sequence that emphasizes hands-on experimentation and functional knowledge of scientific phenomena. The science teachers are scientists themselves, with degrees in science plus teaching certificates that enable them to develop, organize and teach outstanding, challenging and in-depth science theory and experimentation. It is unusual for an elementary and middle school to provide students with an in-depth exploration and development of skills. The teachers have well-stocked science labs and funds are budgeted to maintain the materials and equipment.

The fundamental key to our success is that the learning is sequential, concepts and skills are taught explicitly by highly trained, top notch teachers and students are allowed to move at a pace that allows them to maximize learning. The supporting element is that the teachers are afforded additional planning time. Through creative staffing methods, common planning time provides staff members with time to engage in professional discussions and brain storm methods and strategies to reach each and every student. Due to the extra planning time, teachers and the principal can meet with individual students to support the student with pathways to success and not let them slip through the cracks.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Academy believes that knowledge builds on knowledge. The school is oriented to interconnectedness and the recurring concepts between the scientific, music and art disciplines and the core subject areas. We guarantee equal access to content rich, rigorous curricula designed to develop the whole child, leveling the playing field for disadvantaged children.

E.D. Hirsh's Core Knowledge Sequence provides our staff with a coherent approach to building knowledge across all grade levels so that every student has the opportunity to learn and be exposed to the basic principles of government, important events in history, masterpieces of art and art appreciation, as well as cultures of people across the world.

In addition to the basic academics of the school, Academy supports a well-rounded learning environment with a variety of experiences, such as Spanish classes for K-8, afternoon labs in a variety of subjects and field trips/hands-on learning. Grades K-5 rotate through 3 week sessions of labs every afternoon that include Art, Writing, Science, Geography, Computers, and Spanish/Fitness. The labs are taught by specialists who are passionate and knowledgeable about that subject area. The labs are 80 minutes in length to allow in-depth learning with time for introduction, hands-on learning activities and mastery in one day. The teachers are specialists, they have additional training or have a degree in their area such as the science teacher has a degree in biology and physical science. When she teaches science, she is passionate, is a scientist herself and truly an expert.

Middle school students are exposed to intensive career- and life skills-oriented learning opportunities. Twice a year week-long hands-on thematic learning experiences for middle schools provide application of skills. Some of the titles of these middle school intensives include: Helicopters in Alaska; Redesigned and Repurposed; Draw It, Go Find It Geocaching; Winter Outdoor Activities, among many others. In addition, Friday electives for middle school students run for four weeks and are designed to create well-rounded, interesting citizens with classes such as guitar, snow and ice biking, sewing, dissections. Academy begins teaching the use of the technology in kindergarten with Computer labs rotation for K-5. Students learn to create, design, research, and to use technology to learn. By the time they are in middle school, each student (6-8th) is assigned a laptop for the school year. They learn to create power points, write drafts, edit, and edit again to create publishable end products. We teach responsible use and make technology available to have the world at their fingertips.

Art is valued and afforded equal time to other content areas during our lab rotation schedule. The teacher is an artist herself and very passionate about art. We believe art and artistic expression strengthens students' convergent thinking as well as divergent thinking, thus building well rounded students able to think more clearly and effectively. The Core Knowledge sequence encourages the study of art history, participation in various art techniques, and using art forms as a primary means of expression. Through examination of the masters, students learn about history, the artist themselves along with the techniques popular during that timeframe. Students are then provided the opportunity to attempt that technique or style of art.

All 3rd grade students study and participate in learning to play the piano because brain science shows that playing an instrument develops the mathematic and spatial side of the brain. Students learn music appreciation and develop secure vocal sound and pitch through once a week choir practice for K-5. The middle school students can elect to learn to play the guitar or participate in concert choir.

A sound mind in a sound body is a focus. We teach that self-fulfillment is defined as an individual's attainment of his or her physical and intellectual best. All students K-8 learn the martial art of Taekwondo once a week. This discipline teaches respect, self-discipline, and teaches life-long toning methods as well as self-defense. Every student also receives training from a personal fitness trainer who teaches methods and techniques of toning, muscle development, and aerobics that students are able to incorporate into their lives.

The study of Spanish in K-8th focuses on students not only learning Spanish, but also developing an appreciation of Spanish speaking cultures. Primary grades are taught using interactive and experiential lessons. Middle school students are able to enter into the Introduction level or into a track that allow them to earn a Spanish High School credit while in middle school. Learning Spanish enhances and grows a better understanding of the English language.

3. Instructional Methods and Interventions:

Academy's belief system is that students are to be provided explicit instruction in the smallest possible like-learner reading and math group. Grouping is accomplished by analyzing student assessment (standardized data obtained during the first two weeks of school). Student strengths and weakness are evaluated along with their learning style and the pace in which they learn best. The focus is to teach to the whole child. Through a constantly evolving personalized learning plan, the learner is provided with multiples avenues, pathways, and the necessary support to obtain success.

Students benefit from both like-learner small grouping (approx. 13) and labs with their grade level peers. This arrangement allows extra adult help, multiple approaches and multiple strategies in an environment that is non-threatening, supportive and sensitive to student progress and needs. Fast learners are allowed to move at a fast pace. Slower learners are provided extra support. ALL instruction is designed to connect learning linking new skills and knowledge, while building student confidence and mastery of skills.

Learning data is constantly analyzed to check ongoing progress and need. Using data, learning opportunities may be individualized to a greater extent. One-on-one instruction is strategically placed within the student's day in order to provide additional targeted instruction. Students never feel penalized with the additional instruction but feel gifted with the opportunity to learn. Regardless of whether a student is gifted or a slow learner, it is evident the Academy staff are student-learning focused and constantly modifying the learning environment, grouping, and delivery of instruction to meet individual student needs.

The multi-year sequence of Core Knowledge linked with the philosophy to engage learners through active participation and use of hands-on experimentation and application of knowledge are the keys to student success. The collaboration between the parent, the teacher, and the student as they set student learning goals cements the relationship and the sense of team. Each year the student grows in their ownership of their learning.

The Spalding curriculum and delivery is compatible with brain science recommendations. It provides systematic, explicit, repetitive opportunities to learn and master skills in spelling, reading and building of vocabulary. Long learning blocks provide in-depth learning with introduction, hands-on learning, experimentation and practice in one day.

Technology programs such as Lexia, ALEKS and MobyMax provide personalized practice and mastery opportunities for students both at home and at school.

Current research findings on brain-compatible instruction and strategies are utilized in every lesson. Teachers are experts in the delivery of instruction and they provide brief brain breaks to maximize learning intake. Teachers and the principal receive ongoing, top-notch, purposeful professional development to hone, develop and achieve the best instruction possible.

Teachers are afforded additional planning time well beyond the negotiated agreement which allows them to have common planning time to work with colleagues and the principal to design learning programs to meet students' needs.

4. Assessment for Instruction and Learning and Sharing Assessment Results:

The principal assesses each kindergarten student with a version of the Woodcock Johnson Test of Achievement to gain an entry benchmark prior to the start of school. The parent observes the assessment. The outcome is invaluable in providing the principal with an understanding of each kindergartener's speech and language entry level, their basic skill development and readiness skills, as well as ability to follow directions. Upon completion of the assessment, the parent is provided an overview of the results.

The first two weeks of school are spent assessing students to determine their learning style, current level, and the pace for success. Students are placed in leveled, like-learner language arts and math 13 student groups.

The 50 word Spalding Assessment is used monthly to gauge progress. AIMSWEB assessment tracks emerging reading skills and fluency. AIMSWEB benchmarks are three times a year. RTI assessed weekly. Authentic assessment is used to track progress and mastery. Project-based assessment is also used. Children's Progress Assessment is used with grades kindergarten – 2nd. Three times a year, computerized MAP testing occurs in grades 3rd thru 8th grade. Annually, all students in grades 3rd thru 8th grade are assessed using the statewide standards-based assessment. Parents receive their child's proficiency report.

Assessment and use of the results is critical in making certain students are placed where they are making the BEST progress. It is the finger on the pulse. Our grouping remains fluid with the goal to modify placement and instruction always according to student need. This practice is used to maximize learning whether a student arrives as a low- or high-performing student. Our goal is for every student, regardless of level of achievement, to grow a minimum of one full year. We recognize children with learning challenges must close the gap faster, so every tool is used. Our school started using response to intervention long before it was a nationwide push.

In August, the child and the parents meet with the teacher(s) during an entrance interview to establish goals and exchange information. Student-led parent teacher conferences are held every October and assessment results are shared. An online grade book is accessible by parents anytime. Parent phone and email contact with teachers and the principal occurs constantly. Parents receive their child's standards-based report card at the end of each semester. Exit interviews in May provide the parent, student and teacher with an end-of-the-year review of goals accomplishment, successes, needs and assessment results.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

Academy is a small school with one class per grade, totaling approximately 243 students that have entered via the annual lottery or as siblings. Students are engaged and motivated in many ways, including through leveling into small groups for math and language arts. Also, each afternoon, grades K-5 have block labs taught by specialists in art, science, computers, geography, writing and Spanish. In middle school, students participate twice yearly in a week-long immersive approach to a variety of projects, including theater, cooking, wood shop, sewing, cold weather survival, etc.

Field trips are used as curriculum enrichment and also as team building activities. Examples include a hiking trip on a local trail or a visit to an apple orchard. Multi-day trips to the Sea Life Center, Denali and Wrangell St. Elias National Parks, Juneau and Washington DC act as mobile learning labs and cement class bonding. With careful budgeting and school-wide sacrifice, all students are able to attend. At Academy, there are only “haves”, no have-nots.

Families have a volunteer requirement and are welcomed at any time. Our year starts with a potluck welcome picnic for all families and staff, where parents and students connect as Academy’s larger community. For more individualized attention, an entrance interview is held between teachers, parents and student to set yearly goals. The school year ends with a school-wide potluck picnic on the last day and follows with individual exit interviews to discuss if goals were met.

The school organizes numerous special events to build community such as Pajama Day before Christmas break, and our annual World Fair in early May. During the World Fair week, classrooms are transformed to reflect in-depth year-long study of different topics. These themes have included the American Revolution, the Renaissance, Greek Civilization, the Vikings, China Past and Present, Insects of Alaska, and many others. Teachers, parents and students work collaboratively to prepare for a community-wide open house to finish the week. The school also organizes two large trips for families every year as a fun community activity with the annual ski trip to Alyeska and a trip an indoor water park.

Teachers are empowered to work hard and stay on the cutting edge of learning techniques. Teachers impart and create innovative curricula, and the block scheduling allows extended learning periods to maximize brain-based learning. The teachers are afforded planning time well beyond the minimum noted in the negotiated agreement. The principal is a guiding force--always available and welcoming everyone that comes to the school. Her modeling of appreciation has led to a tradition of Academy families dedicating a week each year in which they provide lunches and snacks along with gifts and cards for their child’s teachers.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Academy is an alliance consisting of a seamless web of educators, parents, businesses and community services – all dedicated to the students. The Academy Charter addresses parental input by requiring parental involvement. Parents understand they need to volunteer and participate 36 hours per year per child in a wide variety of tasks ranging from help in the classroom to special projects to working in the office. This time allows for access to and utilization of parental skills and abilities that increases feelings of responsibility, commitment and awareness. As a charter school, we do not receive school district maintenance, therefore, we the families and staff maintain our school to be good stewards of our facility that was provided via direct appropriations from the Alaska Legislature.

The Academy Charter Advisory Board, composed of four parents, two community members; two teachers and the principal, meets once a month and collaborates as a think tank to facilitate the attainment of our Charter goals and objectives. This is one more opportunity for families and the community to join together to influence and guide their school.

Academy considers the community and the world to be its classroom. When learning takes place in the world beyond the classroom, the students understand their connection to that world and their responsibilities as productive citizens. The middle school learning intensive provides students with the opportunity to learn from knowledgeable community members, university professors, business owners, and experts in specific topics. For example, during the intensive “Helicopters in Alaska,” local helicopter pilots visited and taught about flying, the students toured the flight control tower and learned about that career, and the Kodiak Coast Guard helicopter landed in our play yard with the Coast Guard crew spending the day speaking about their experiences, training, and career.

Academy integrates real-world experiences into classroom learning and reinforces this with hands-on learning in field trips. For example, the 6th grade writes their own constitution and creates their own governing structure. The class, along with parents, teachers and the principal, fly to the capital of Alaska, Juneau, to spend three days working alongside the Alaska Legislature. The Senators, Representatives, Governor, Attorney General, and many others roll out the red carpet to welcome these students who have come to see the Government in Action. Students write letters, they practice asking questions, they learn to represent themselves and their school in a positive manner, making us proud.

Every year the principal meets with each family individually to learn their hopes and dreams for their child and listen to the parents as they share how they see their child learning and what they hear from their child at home. Academy staff understands that parents know their children best and it is important to engage the parents in these discussions in order to meet each child’s needs and the parent’s wishes.

3. Professional Development:

Every hour spent in professional development (PD) is an hour well spent! It is our ongoing focus on improvement! Academy purposefully designs, plans, schedules and implements a professional development program to build a strong, knowledgeable cadre of staff members and strengthen their understanding of Spalding, Core Knowledge, and Mathematics. The overall goals are to improve student learning opportunities and increase student achievement. The collaborative PD work time enables our team to implement fully the instructional innovations, goals, and philosophy included in our Charter.

Academy’s PD is purposeful. Charter schools can create their own calendar and schedule. At Academy, the ten PD days are grouped in threes to provide intensive, focused learning. At times the entire staff may attend a national conference. Or a national presenter may be contracted to come to Academy to provide cutting edge learning on Spalding or training on new brain science. Every staff member attends and participates so that ALL staff can become experts in the subject area or curriculum and ALL become more effective in their delivery and development of the instruction. The principal as the instructional leader also participates. The goal is to be on the same page with the same understanding with a constant focus on improving! An example of a recent PD opportunity is when Dr. Michael Merzenich, a leading brain scientist and author of *Soft-wired*, presented cutting edge brain science over three PD days in February 2016. All teachers, recess monitors, aides, and the principal attended. Every staff member was positively influenced by the training and able to implement new techniques and strategies immediately to improve student learning!

Academy’s PD focus is based on assessment data and on a needs assessment survey completed by the teacher. The PD theme/focus may be year-long or multi-year. For example, in preparation for adjustments in the math standards, the staff spent two years focused on the teaching of mathematics, with special emphasis on teaching students to explain their thinking and have discourse. The statewide mandated test results positively reflected this effort, with the total number of students’ proficient increasing from 88% to 91%.

Professional development is viewed as critical for the fulfillment of the Charter’s educational goals and therefore, funds are allocated for this purpose, including travel and conference costs, utilizing monies received in revenues, grants and per pupil allocations.

4. School Leadership:

The principal sets the tone, the culture, and builds the team that is called Academy. The principal hires and supervises all staff. The principal observes and assesses staff strength and weakness, surveys the staff to obtain needs and wants and then budgets in a manner to provide staff with the best professional development to enable them to improve their instruction and delivery methods.

The principal not only guides the learning but models learning herself by attending every professional development that is provided for staff including the two 45 hour intensive Spalding trainings.

The principal maintains an open door and is willing to listen and problem-solve in a manner that makes every staff member, every parent, and every student feel valued and that their ideas are important. The parents are a critical piece of the school team and each year the principal meets with almost every student's parents seeking to learn more information about each student and what the parent sees from their perspective.

The school atmosphere is one of respect, encouragement and accountability. The principal individually greets and welcomes every student as they arrive at school. She shakes their hand and says "Welcome to school! I'm so glad you are here!" She models professionalism, empathy, and patience.

Academy Charter School is designed to remain a small school where the principal knows every student by name, their parents, and their hopes and dreams. Students are considered shared by everyone. Due to the school-wide expectations that were created by the staff, are explicitly taught at the beginning of each year to every grade level and practiced, students are held accountable for those expectations. Academy has few disciplinary issues and the focus remains on the business of teaching and learning.

Every decision is driven by the goal of fulfilling the Charter and its attention to the constantly evolving learning environment with increased learning opportunities and individualized programs to meet each student needs. The principal works closely with the families and the community. The Academy Charter Advisory Board, a think tank, made up of parents, teachers and the principal advises on the operation of the school to ensure fulfillment of the Charter goals and philosophy.

The principal models dedication, determination, and willingness to do whatever it takes to accomplish a goal. The principal is a teacher herself. She stepped in during 2015 to teach 2nd grade for eight weeks while the teacher was on family leave. The goal of the principal is to model dedication and the willingness to sacrifice time, talent, and energy for the greater good of the school. The principal encourages and supports teacher leaders to step forward with great ideas and innovation.

Part VI – INDICATORS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS

The single practice most influential to Academy's success is the use of assessment results as the catalyst that drives our constantly evolving learning environment. Assessment data, formative, interim, and summative, drives every decision at Academy and it produces a constant energy, from the very highest level with the principal to all the teachers, stretching from kindergarten to 8th grade. This factor influences all curriculum choices, ability grouping, the organization of hands-on learning experiences, and teacher training opportunities.

Teachers and the principal analyze, discuss and use assessment results to drive instruction and shape the environment to enable students to thrive, grow and learn in a setting that celebrates their success and shores up their areas of weakness. Evidence of this successful practice is seen in the high level scores on the first AMP testing in 2014/15 as well as SBA data 2012-13 (Reading 96% all, Writing 94% all, Math 91% all, Participation 100%, Attendance 94.20% all, Growth ALL 100 %) and the SBA data 2013-14 (Reading 96.32 all, writing 88.96 all, math 89.57 all, Participation 100%, Attendance 95.36 all, Growth ALL 100%) earning Academy the Alaska School Performance Index (ASPI) top rating as a 5 Star School both years!

Assessment data is used to create a student-focused learning environment. The first factor is ensuring the instruction is individualized, rigorous and challenging, but not frustrating. Students are evaluated for aptitude and ability early in the start of each year and placed in small learning groups with similar like-learners. To maximize learning, the school is responsive to the most current learning data showing progress and need. In some cases students are placed ahead a grade for a particular subject matter and/or adjusting their placement throughout the year.

Teachers are empowered through purposeful training opportunities determined after analyzing student achievement data, principal observations and use of staff needs assessment surveys. The principal uses this data to create professional development (PD) opportunities that shape a collaborative culture with a focus on a constantly evolving learning environment. For example, in May 2010, the achievement data showed math as low. In response, the school developed a two year focus on teaching math. Funds were budgeted to provide math PD opportunities such as allowing all the teachers and the principal to attend the National Math Teachers Conference. The impact of this emphasis - in 2012-13 on the statewide mandated testing the number of students proficient in mathematics increased from 88% to 91%.

For all stages in the learning process, all stakeholders have a part in analyzing the assessment outcomes including the parents and the students themselves who are involved and aware of their own progress. This is a formula that works and students are excelling.