

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 [] Charter [] Magnet [X] Choice

Name of Principal Ms. Susan Hallman

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

Official School Name Okemos Public Montessori-Central School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 4406 Okemos Road

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

City Okemos State MI Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 48864-2553

County Ingham County

Telephone (517) 706-5401 Fax _____

Web site/URL http://www.okemoschools.net E-mail sue.hallman@okemosk12.net

Twitter Handle _____ Facebook Page _____ Google+ _____

YouTube/URL _____ 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.

Date _____

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent*Dr. Catherine Ash E-mail catherine.ash@okemosk12.net

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

District Name Okemos Public Schools Tel. (517) 706-5000

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

Date _____

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board

President/Chairperson Ms. Melanie Lynn

(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, 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):
- 4 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 2 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 1 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 7 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	31	28	59
K	32	33	65
1	42	23	65
2	32	25	57
3	26	32	58
4	28	31	59
5	0	0	0
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	191	172	363

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 20 % Asian
 - 5 % Black or African American
 - 6 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 59 % White
 - 9 % 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: 1%

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	1
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2014 until the end of the 2014-2015 school year	4
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	5
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2014	356
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.014
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	1

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 0 %
3 Total number ELL

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

Tamil, Hindi, Mandarin Chinese

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 7 %
Total number students who qualify: 24

8. Students receiving special education services: 8 %
29 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.

- 8 Autism
- 0 Deafness
- 0 Deaf-Blindness
- 0 Emotional Disturbance
- 1 Hearing Impairment
- 0 Mental Retardation
- 0 Multiple Disabilities
- 1 Orthopedic Impairment
- 6 Other Health Impaired
- 2 Specific Learning Disability
- 10 Speech or Language Impairment
- 0 Traumatic Brain Injury
- 0 Visual Impairment Including Blindness
- 1 Developmentally Delayed

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 11
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	14
Resource teachers/specialists e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	5
Paraprofessionals	21
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	2

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 26:1

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	96%	96%	96%	95%	90%
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.

Together...educating with excellence, inspiring learners for life.

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

As a controlled growth school we have a limited number of seats available. In January we survey our current families to determine who will be returning the following school year and whether there are any siblings interested in attending as they are our first group accepted. This information allows us to determine how many seats we will have available. In March we open a two week window at which time families are invited to apply. This is not a first come first served process. At the end of the two weeks we look at all applications. If we have more applicants than seats, which is almost always the case, we have a system in place to accept our 3 and 4 yr. olds, Kindergarten and 1st -4th grade students. Three and four year olds apply through Community Education. Of the 39 students accepted at this age about half of our seats are for those who need child care and about half do not. A lottery system is utilized for both groups. Kindergarten applicants are divided into resident students and schools of choice students. Okemos students are accepted first but if there are more applicants than seats a lottery system is used. Finally, for our 1st – 4th grade students we consider prior Montessori experience first. Applicants are divided into 4 groups: Okemos with experience, schools of choice with experience, Okemos without experience and schools of choice without. As with the other groups a lottery system is employed if we have more applicants than seats. We do not use any academic or behavioral criteria as a part of our selection process.

PART III – SUMMARY

Okemos Public Montessori (OPM) at Central is located in Okemos, Michigan adjacent to East Lansing, home of Michigan State University. The Okemos Public School (OPS) district includes four elementary schools (one Montessori and three traditional), a 5/6 building, a 7/8 building and one high school for a K-12 enrollment of approximately 4,100 students. The Montessori program serves Pre-K through 8th grade students with additional classrooms in both the 5/6 building and 7/8 building. In addition to having State of Michigan teaching certification, all of the Montessori teachers have earned Montessori teaching credentials by attending accredited teaching programs.

For many years, the Okemos schools have been considered among the top in the state and with education being a high priority for our community and our families. Family involvement and support are an integral part of what makes OPS the excellent school system it is. The community is ethnically diverse with a small population of at risk students. Our school reflects the same; families that value education regardless of their ethnicity or economic status. As a choice school all families provide their own transportation. This commitment to their child's education and our school provides a foundation of support for our entire school family.

Okemos Public Montessori is currently in its 14th year. The initial purpose of the program was to provide an alternative, but equally excellent, form of instruction in order to attract families from both inside and out of our district. The Montessori program is comprised of 335 students as young as 3 years old through 4th grade. In addition to the Montessori program we have two district programs in our building; Begingergarten – a class for young 5's and an ASD classroom. Those classes, totaling 28 students, use a curriculum designed to meet their specialized needs.

Consisting of approximately 40 students in two classrooms, the Montessori program began in 2003 and was housed in one of the traditional elementary schools. Continuing to attract families, the program moved to another elementary school the following year where it remained for two years. At the end of the 2004-2005 school year, the program had grown to 180 students and the two programs (Montessori and traditional) no longer fit within one building. Beginning in the school year of 2005-2006, the Montessori program moved to its own building with all classrooms using the Montessori philosophy of instruction. In 2010, the district reorganized and closed two traditional buildings. Because the Montessori program was continuing to grow, it was moved to one of the newly closed and physically larger schools. With the growing number of interested families this move accommodated up to an additional 70 students into the program. Currently we have 335 Montessori students, an increase of almost 300 students!

Over the years, the reputation of Okemos Public Montessori has grown within the district to a point where we have more Okemos residents applying and being accepted than schools of choice families. This is very significant as all of our elementary schools are seen as excellent, and knowing that families are choosing the Montessori program is a credit to how far we have come.

Providing excellence in education is a goal that is fundamental to our district and our school. This belief is evidenced in everything we do and in the educational decisions we make. All staff are expected to instruct with excellence and as a school, we encourage teachers to learn and grow and provide opportunities to do that whenever possible. Staff have some common planning time together and use it as needed. We also have data days three times a year where grade level and support staff meet over a full day to determine appropriate student groupings for instruction based on data. In addition, students are released two hours early once a month so that staff can meet for professional learning communities. These scheduled times provide opportunities for reflection, dialogue, and professional growth focused on supporting the needs of all students.

As a part of Okemos Public Schools, Okemos Public Montessori is bound by the Common Core State Standards. However, some of the materials we use vary from the traditional schools and our method of instruction is considerably different. We have multi age classrooms consisting of 3 – 6yr. olds which we call PPK (pre-primary kindergarten), 1st/2nd grade (Lower el) and 3rd/4th grade (Upper el). Once a student

enters a classroom he/she remains there for 2 – 3 years. This establishes an in-depth relationship between teacher and student and promotes a deep sense of family and community. In addition, the older students are seen as mentors for the incoming students as they model both the classroom expectations regarding behavior as well as the academic expectations. We also have a paraprofessional in each classroom whose primary purpose is to help with management and support students as they work, so that the classroom teacher can focus on her instruction.

Within the classroom, our teachers use a variety of instructional strategies as well as differentiating with small groups whenever possible. It is rare to see whole group lessons unless it is an overview of a particular subject area. Direct instruction, practice work, and follow up are most often done with small groups of individuals.

As a public Montessori, we believe we embody the best educational practices. We are held accountable to a set of common standards, but are able to deliver those in a unique way which truly meets the needs of all students.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

While our method of instruction may vary from traditional schools we are part of a district that expects nothing less than the best from all of our schools. In addition, like all public schools in Michigan, we follow the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

First and foremost when determining instruction in our school, we look at the CCSS and the Montessori works (materials) that we have access to. We determine whether the Montessori works provide teachers adequate resources to instruct in a way that addresses all the standards in each of the four core curricular areas.

To ensure that all of our teachers are meeting the standards in a timely, organized, and effective manner each grade level has been given professional release time over the last two years to work on developing a scope and sequence for both reading and math that emphasizes the Montessori method as the primary system of instruction. This scope and sequence looks at the CCSS in each curriculum area, how they are addressed using the Montessori works, what if any traditional materials are used and how each area is assessed. If an area is lacking, we supplement with additional Montessori works or more traditional materials such as textbooks.

When teaching reading, all teachers adhere to a 90 minute literacy block. Six years ago, the district adopted Reading Street as its core reading program. This program provides a framework for our core reading instruction as well as additional materials that complement the Montessori Language works. The moveable alphabet, sandpaper letters, grammar boxes and language towers are but a few examples of the Montessori works utilized for literacy instruction. Targeted skills are addressed in whole group settings at the beginning of each weekly Reading Street lesson. This instruction is delivered in a variety of ways depending on teacher style and the needs of students in the class. Formative assessments throughout the week are used to determine which students would benefit from additional instruction with guided practice as well as those who are ready for extensions. In addition to providing core instruction (Tier I), teachers also implement interventions/strategies (Tier II) for any student not meeting the grade level expectations in early literacy, decoding, fluency and/or comprehension. Increased levels of support are delivered by our At-Risk aides if needed.

When the district moved to a new math program, Everyday Math, a number of years ago we chose not to include that as our regular math program as we believed the Montessori materials more than adequately met the CCSS. Maria Montessori understood that effective math instruction moves from very concrete to the abstract. The curriculum and materials she developed reflect this through her attention to the progression of skills not only for each age level but as a whole, from preschool to upper elementary. Research shows that reducing the cognitive load for students enhances their ability to focus on the learning target. This too, is embedded into our instructional approach through the varied use of the same materials for all age levels. Materials such as the bead cabinet are used for exploration and one to one correspondence with preschoolers, for skip counting with Kindergarten and early elementary, and squaring and cubing for upper elementary students. In addition to the materials, talking about math is a critical component of what we do. Teachers use ‘number talks’ to have conversations with students where they are asked to explain their thinking and answer the critical question, “How do you know?” As in reading, teachers provide guided practice and Tier II support in response to formal and informal assessment data as an ongoing practice. When needed, our At-Risk aides support students at all ages who may need additional support in the area of math as well.

Beginning in 2015-16, after a two year study and pilot with 17 selected teachers, the district adopted a new science curriculum. The TCI Bring Science Alive program aligns with the Next Generation Science Standards. This program includes student-centered lessons, easy to implement investigations, and online text, simulations and interactive presentations. This comprehensive program blends rich, standards-based curriculum and a combination of print materials, kits for investigations, and online resources to fully engage

the learner. Teachers also incorporate Montessori lessons on botany, zoology, functional geography, classifications, and Great Lessons as part of their science instruction.

In the area of social studies, the district utilizes the Michigan Citizenship Curriculum that is comprised of four distinct disciplines: history, geography, civics and economics. This model curriculum was developed by Oakland Schools and includes sample lesson plans grounded in research and best practices. The online link (www.micitizenshipcurriculum.org) allows teachers access to the lesson plans and lesson/unit resources to use as they see fit. Teachers integrate Montessori lessons in social studies as well to provide extension opportunities for learners.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Okemos Public Schools is known for its commitment to the arts and believes that is as important to our students as the academic content we are responsible for providing. For this reason, each of our students goes to a 'special' every day for 45 minutes. These specials include: physical education, music and art.

Our music instruction aligns with the 2014 National Arts Standards, with an emphasis on creating, performing, presenting, responding, and connecting to various genres and styles of music. Music education at OPM is guided by the methodologies of Edwin Gordon's Music Learning Theory, and Orff. Music Learning Theory is a research-based approach to music learning in which students are encouraged to develop their individual musicianship in a process similar to language learning; that is, our students explore, listen to, converse in, create and improvise in music. Orff offers students opportunities to use traditional folk songs and classroom instruments to enhance their musical experience. Overall goals in music include children developing to their potential in music through singing, movement, dance, rhythm and instruments. Children are exposed to a wide variety of songs and dances from multiple cultures with the goal of connecting to others and the world around us through music.

Our art teacher uses the new visual art core standards with the four strands of: creating, connecting, presenting and responding. Process or investigations are emphasized over teacher led projects which have a uniform look as the outcome. This process occurs through material based centers that students rotate through. When students are allowed to explore their own ideas visually they gain confidence in the language of art. Recognizing that it is important to expose students to different types of art, the lessons always begin with a group focused investigation i.e. landscape painting, and the core strands are incorporated into this lesson.

The guideline for physical education instruction is portrayed in the K-12 Physical Education curriculum guide for Okemos PE teachers. We believe that a systematic physical education program is essential in contributing to the individual student's physical, social, intellectual, and emotional well-being. The student who is sound in body and mind is better prepared to deal with the physical and mental stresses inherent in an ever-changing society.

The Okemos Public Montessori physical education program utilizes the developmental approach to teaching, which believes every student develops and matures at different rates. Students are continually challenged at their various ability levels. The mental processes of planning, timing, judgment, and recall require the physically active student to be a thinking, responsive student. Guided physical education experiences bring a student to a level of social development characterized by a spirit of cooperation, sportsmanship, and respect for one's self and others.

Physical Education program goals include demonstrating age appropriate competence in selected motor skills, knowledge of selected cognitive concepts, competence on indicators of physical fitness (as utilized by the Presidential Fitness Tests), age appropriate competence in selected sport related personal, social, and attitudinal skills and lastly, exposure to selected sports and games that contribute to lifelong physical activity.

Two years ago our community supported a Technology Bond that included the purchase of personal learning devices (one to one) for all students. The implementation of this initiative began last year in grades seven

thru 12. This year, the students in grade K through six received Chromebooks. Teachers are beginning to utilize these devices in a variety of ways, including: direct instruction, follow up practice, formative and summative assessments, research, projects, blogging, etc. As a district we are utilizing the Google for Education resources. These resources allow the sharing of documents, so that students and teachers can provide feedback to students in “real time”. We are continually looking for ways to use the personal learning devices to expand the classrooms beyond the four walls and push learning to new heights in ways that are challenging and engaging for our students.

3. Instructional Methods and Interventions:

Using a Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) we are able to effectively meet the needs of all students, especially those that are not meeting grade level expectations.

We believe that effective instruction for all students begins with a strong core within the classroom. We achieve that in a number of ways. First and foremost, instruction time for literacy and math are protected so that all students are present for the lessons. Opportunities are provided to teachers to learn effective teaching strategies from one another by observing in another classroom or by being observed (TLT’s - Teachers Learning Together). Another fundamental component of our philosophy is to deliver targeted instruction to small groups based on assessments, in other words, meaningful differentiation. While science and social studies utilize larger group instruction, literacy and math are almost always delivered within a small group. This type of instruction allows our teachers to truly know the strengths and weaknesses of their students thereby providing a strong core in the classroom.

Because our teachers take ownership of their students’ learning, initial support beyond core instruction begins in the classroom. Using classroom data, teachers provide mini-lessons for both the struggling students with the intent of re-teaching a specific concept or for students who are ready to go beyond. We also utilize specific research based interventions such as: Incremental Rehearsal, 6 Minute Solutions, Rocket Math, Rewards, etc.

Once it has been determined that a student needs support beyond the core and Tier II in the classroom, the teacher shares data with our Response to Intervention (RtI) Coach and/or the Child Study Team and together a plan is put into place to provide an additional layer of Tier II support. This usually involves the student leaving the classroom three - five times a week for very specific research based interventions implemented by our RtI Coach, At-Risk aides or Resource Teacher. Each grade level also has a protected time for Just Right Groups. This time allows us to combine our resources and maximize the 30 minutes of instructional time by grouping students from all classrooms in the grade level based on their shared learning needs and determined by the data we have been collecting and monitoring. If scheduling and student needs align, the At-Risk aides or Resource Teacher might push in rather than pull out for extra support beyond what the Just Right Groups provide. Students who receive this support are progress monitored weekly to ensure that the intervention is meeting their needs and improvement is shown. At any time an intervention can be changed if data shows that they are progressing and need less support, or if they are continuing to fall further behind and need a change in that support (program or frequency of intervention). Some of the research based interventions we use are: Road to Reading, Road to the Code, Number Worlds, and PALS Math/PALS Reading.

Even with the best systems of support, there are always a few students who need more than a strong core instruction, Tier II supports within the classroom and an additional Tier II layer outside of the classroom. These students need very specific, direct, intentional instruction. Because of progress monitoring and ongoing communication between the classroom teacher and all support staff, it is no surprise when we make a determination to evaluate further, possibly resulting in an Individual Educational Plan (IEP).

As a staff, we are driven to ensure that all students meet the grade level expectations. Recognizing that each student achieves those expectations in different ways, we are continually monitoring our own progress as educators to become more effective and efficient in our core curriculum as well as the supplemental supports we offer at all tiers for all students.

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

At Okemos Public Montessori we believe that when we truly know the needs of our students, we are better able to deliver instruction that is intentional and meaningful to their needs. We begin by collecting data through the use of a variety of assessment measures. This data is then used to drive our instruction in an effort to increase student achievement. In order to ensure that teachers have the necessary data at their disposal, we have specific systems set in place that provide opportunity to look at the data, reflect on the specific needs of the students and determine a plan to help them be successful.

Every student in our school is given the aimsweb screener in fall, winter and spring. Once these assessments are given, we hold data days for each grade level. In addition to the grade level teachers, we also include our RtI Coach, school psychologist, resource teacher, principal and At-Risk aides. We look at our aimsweb data as well as data from: M-STEP, MAZE, Reading Street weekly/unit tests, mid-year district math test, end of year district math test, fact fluency tests, pre/post assessments for initial placement into a specific intervention group and any on-going progress monitoring. By working together and considering all students 'our' students, we leave with a specific plan for students who are working to meet grade level expectations, those at grade level expectations and those exceeding grade level expectations. This includes delivery of research based interventions and extensions both within the classroom and outside of the classroom.

Meaningful interventions are reevaluated on a continual basis. Therefore, in addition to our data days we have an early release once a month where students leave two hours early and teachers work with their grade level colleagues. At this time teachers look at their student's most recent data to determine whether the planned support is providing the instruction they need and adjust if necessary. Some grade levels have common planning time and this provides another opportunity to talk about and adjust instruction. Because we believe our teachers are the most knowledgeable about each of their students, they also can adjust interventions based on the progress monitoring data they are receiving.

Parents meet with teachers two times a year for conferences. Teachers share data in all subject areas and discuss specific interventions their child might be receiving. The RtI Coach is also available to meet with parents. Recognizing that parents are a critical component of the success of a student teachers are available throughout the year to meet with parents on an as needed basis. We also use a standards based report card that parents receive twice a year.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

It is not unusual to have a newcomer, staff or parent, come into Okemos Public Montessori and comment about how ‘peaceful’ the school seems. Peace education is an integral part of the Montessori philosophy and is intentionally taught within our school. Through lessons on grace and courtesy, the students are able to communicate respectfully, think of other’s needs and consider the whole classroom community.

Each classroom has an area set aside, a peace table or peace corner, where students can go to resolve conflict or just go by themselves to restore a sense of peace. Often times this area has books on conflict resolution (age appropriate), flowers, a candle or a picture. If more than one student goes to the peace area to try to resolve a problem there is an item, usually a flower or small stone, which is held by the person speaking. When that person has finished speaking, he/she passes the object to the next person as a signal for them to speak. This continues until all parties feel like they have been heard and there is a positive outcome. Depending on the age of the students and their maturity, this may be done in the presence of an adult or with the students only.

To complement the peace education we have developed five behavior expectations for the building. These expectations form the acronym PEACE i.e. P - positive attitude, E - everyone is respectful, etc. A few years ago a small committee worked to develop lesson plans that correlate to each expectation and include books and examples of what each of these looks like. At the beginning of the year and throughout the remainder of the year, classroom teachers teach, model, and review these expectations. Specialists also follow these expectations which provide consistency within the building and as students move from classroom to classroom.

Academic success has a greater chance of occurring when there is a positive relationship between a student and his/her teacher. A sense of family and community is therefore important and cultivated between the teacher and student. Having a student for two to three years allows a truly meaningful relationship to develop and flourish. Teachers feel a deep sense of loss when their students leave their classroom and students feel like they are leaving ‘the best teacher ever’.

Building community among the staff is equally important. With a total staff of over 45 it is important that there is time provided to connect professionally as well as socially. With the many opportunities to get together to talk about students or professional growth: data days, PLC’s, CST meetings, PD, etc., teachers build a sense of community through these professional conversations. In addition, we build in some intentional social gatherings, such as monthly Tossed Tuesday where a salad bar is provided to all staff and holiday gatherings outside of school where all staff are invited.

Teachers are recognized for their outstanding commitment through the Okemos Education Foundation (OEF) which gives grants to teachers for classroom materials that enhance students’ education as well as paying for professional development that enhances their instruction. A number of our classroom teachers take advantage of these generous grants. Each year the OEF also recognizes outstanding teachers in our district through the Commitment to Excellence award, including some of ours.

Finally, we celebrate staff during Staff Appreciation Week. The PTO provides a breakfast one morning, families are asked to bring in treats or flowers throughout the week, and the office provides a lunch one day as well as something special in addition. For the last two years staff have signed up to receive a 10 minute head/neck massage at some point in the day. They love this but they have earned it and are worth it!

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Our mission statement, Together...Educating with excellence, inspiring learners for life, very intentionally begins with ‘together’. We believe that for students to be truly successful we need students, staff, and

families to commit to working together for the common goal of supporting students.

Before a new school year even begins, we send newsletters from both the office and teachers welcoming students. Additionally, many teachers send personal notes of welcome and some even make a phone call home to the families. This initial connection is important as we work to partner for the benefit of each student.

Parents are welcomed and encouraged to take an active role in the school. We have a number of parent volunteers who work with a specific classroom on a regular basis and others who go where and when needed. Meet the Masters, a program that brings works of art into the classroom is delivered exclusively by our parents.

Our Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) is an active parent organization that sponsors a number of family events throughout the year. They organize a Welcome Back Potluck the week before school starts. Families are invited to bring a passing dish and chairs or a blanket to sit on. This takes place outside in our courtyard. It truly seems that every family attends! On the first day of school, we have a welcome back assembly for all students and invite families to attend if possible. After the assembly parents are invited to join other parents in the cafeteria for light refreshments, supported by the PTO. In addition, our PTO sponsors a carnival, the Science Fair, Mileage Club and provides refreshments for the favorite program of the year, our Grandparents' Tea.

Within the first two weeks of the school year beginning, we hold a Curriculum Night where all parents are invited to attend a session with their child's teacher to meet them and learn more about the classroom. In an effort to better inform parents about our systems of support for students both behaviorally and academically, this year we offered an opportunity for parents to attend a short overview of what MTSS looks like in our building. Every couple of years, we hold a Parent Information night that focuses on one curricular area. Two years ago, we invited parents to an evening targeted towards literacy and how we support those students who need additional instruction and those who are ready to go beyond.

With Michigan State University as our neighbor, we take advantage of some of the things they have to offer. College students serve as mentors to our gifted and talented students. We also welcome teacher candidates into our classrooms.

Our Student Council, led by our fourth graders, engage in community service throughout the year choosing a number of community organizations to support such as the food bank, Valentine's for Seniors in a local retirement home, Humane Society and St. Vincent de Paul to name a few.

Many of our teachers hold a gratitude ceremony a couple of times a year. Students write a short essay on why they are grateful for someone in their family, school or local community and then those people are invited to attend. It is a wonderful way to instill a sense of appreciation in our students for those around them.

3. Professional Development:

Okemos Public Schools and Okemos Public Montessori believe that providing time for teachers to engage in professional learning and conversation is critical for the success of all students. There are three ways teachers can take advantage of professional development: the district provides 30 hours of professional development that is built into the school year; each building can provide its own professional development; and many teachers seek out additional professional learning on their own through outside conferences or other avenues.

District provided professional development includes two full days, once before school begins and once mid-year, as well as two hour sessions throughout the year. The full days generally focus on district initiatives and/or curricular updates such as: Reading Street, TCI Science (new this year), 1:1 devices (new this year), Cultural Competence, Special Education updates, etc. In addition, students are released two hours early once a month. During this two hours, which we refer to as Professional Learning Communities

(PLC), teachers meet with their grade level colleagues or with their subject specific colleagues (i.e. art, music, special education). The majority of these shorter sessions are building specific and student specific. Teachers answer one of the following three questions: 1) What are my students supposed to learn? 2) How do I know if they are learning it? and 3) What do I do if they don't know it or already know it? Curriculum, effective instruction, student data and interventions are the focus of the PLC's.

In addition, the principal supports professional development specific to OPM with a focus on best practice. Teachers Learning Together (TLT's), based on the work of John Hattie and Kevin Feldman, has been an area of emphasis for our staff the last three years. All of our teaching staff have attended conferences led by Kevin Feldman and have been involved in professional learning and conversation looking into John Hattie's research. Part of TLT's involves teachers videotaping themselves, observing other teachers and being observed by others. Time has intentionally been set aside to allow staff to be observed and to observe. Classroom teachers, the RtI coach, resource teacher and principal are involved in these observations where the focus is on learning rather than evaluation.

Finally, teachers can pursue professional development on their own. A number of teachers will attend conferences through our local Intermediate School District. These usually focus on research based interventions for both academic and behavioral support. Two years ago a group of teachers, including the principal, participated in a book study with Randy Sprick's CHAMPS - Safe and Civil Schools, which focuses on establishing very specific routines and procedures within the classroom, intentionally teaching those to the students and building in time for review.

In order to provide instruction that meets the needs of all students it is critical that teachers are continually engaged in learning and conversation that focuses on best practice. We not only believe that, we act on it through these professional development opportunities.

4. School Leadership:

As in all successful schools leadership takes many forms. We believe that all members of our school community, staff, parents and students, have the ability to be leaders recognizing that may look different for each one.

As the visible leader, the principal demonstrates leadership in a number of ways. She disseminates information to both staff and parents. She supports teachers in their effort to continually improve and provides opportunity for them to meet as a grade level for continuing professional development when a specific need arises. She is a positive and professional role model to staff, parents and students. Another responsibility is to recognize, allow for and encourage others to share their talents in a leadership role, when appropriate. Our school provides a number of these opportunities.

Our School Improvement team is comprised of a teacher representative from each grade level, our RtI coach, resource teacher, school psychologist, school social worker and the principal. We meet monthly to collaborate about a number of topics including sharing student data, addressing student issues as related to academics or behavior, developing/modifying school procedures and brainstorming ways to support staff as they become more effective instructors.

Our Behavior Team which consists of the social worker, school psychologist, RtI Coach and the principal, meets weekly to go over the data as reported in School-wide Information System (SWIS). We ask questions, look at trends, determine if additional data is needed and if so what and who will collect the data. If need be, we meet with the teacher to determine what interventions have been put into place and what we can do to support the teacher.

We have a number of district committees with a representative from each school. The representatives return from these meetings and share with our staff any relevant information. With the addition of one to one devices for our students this year, we have two teachers who are Technology Coaches. These teachers assist other teachers specifically with applications and lessons that can be used within the classroom.

We also have student leaders. Some of our upper elementary classes partner with lower elementary or kindergarten classes for 'reading buddies'. This allows the older students to form relationships with the younger students and to act as mentors. In some cases, this can be extended to 'working buddies' on a research project or 'behavior buddies' if either student needs additional support in this area.

Fourth graders are invited to participate in both Student Council and to be a student safety. In addition, we have a number of students at all levels who participate in the Peer to Peer program where general education students are paired with students from our ASD classroom. The focus is on modelling appropriate social behavior and the pride in the general education students as they realize they are making a difference is wonderful to see!

Part VI – INDICATORS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS

We believe that the Montessori philosophy of instruction is at the heart of what has made our school so successful. We are fortunate to be in a school district that has and continues to support this alternative form of instruction.

Research based characteristics of a strong educational system such as ongoing assessment, differentiated instruction in small groups, data driven instruction, immediate and specific feedback, meaningful follow up activities and strong Tier I instruction are embedded within the Montessori classroom.

One of the fundamental principles of the Montessori philosophy is observing the child. With their Montessori training, our teachers have learned to pause at various times during the day and take time to simply observe a student whether the student is involved in a lesson or working during independent time. This purposeful observation allows the teacher to authentically assess where each student is on an ongoing basis without having to rely on a paper/pencil assessment. Continual observation and informal assessment of all students allows the teacher to be better able to intentionally plan both instruction and follow up practice activities that are meaningful to each student. It is evident when talking about students at a Child Study Team or at data days, the knowledge and data teachers have about any particular student is quite remarkable.

Equally important when delivering a lesson is understanding the skills necessary to ensure a student is ready to master an area of learning. The Montessori method recognizes that there is a very specific sequence of skills needed before that can occur and it is critical that the teacher knows what comes before and after in the sequence and where the student is within that. Only by understanding this and knowing the student can a teacher effectively plan instruction that meets each students' needs. Utilizing the Montessori skill sequence with the CCSS provides for the best possible learning outcome.

A hallmark of Montessori education is its hands on approach to learning. Students work with specially designed material, known as a work, until they have mastered the lesson. Each work teaches only one single concept or skill at a time going from the concrete to the more abstract. Built into many of the works is a 'control of error' which allows the students to independently assess their work and correct any errors. Through this, students learn to become critical thinkers by recognizing, correcting and learning from their mistakes. As students progress, the work is replaced ensuring that the level of challenge continues to meet their needs. Given that there is only one of each work, our students are not all working on the same activity at the same time, rather they are each working on their own follow up activities. This also affords the learning of time management at an early age.

Another critical component is the use of small groups. Both the Montessori classroom and research regarding best practice show that there are many benefits to students when instruction is delivered within a smaller setting. When one observes in our classrooms, it is these small groups that will be seen most often. Delivering instruction in a smaller setting allows for a number of effective teaching strategies including: allowing students to be actively engage in their learning rather than passively receiving, providing opportunities for the teacher to give immediate and specific feedback, making it easier to notice a student who is having difficulty in a lesson, allowing for discussion among the peers to explain their thinking and allowing the teacher to take a step back or move ahead more quickly depending on the students. Additionally, it is not unusual to see a teacher dismiss some of the students in the group and then take a few minutes to quickly re-teach or practice a concept or provide an extension for those who need it.

While we recognize that the support staff, interventions and core curriculum we have in place are a significant part of our success, we strongly believe that the Montessori method of instruction combined with the accountability of following the CCSS sets us apart from a traditional school and is the difference that makes our program the success it is.