

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

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Mr. Mark Heagle

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

Official School Name South Elementary School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 2522 Greenly Street

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

City Hudsonville    State MI    Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 49426-9643

County Ottawa County

Telephone (616) 669-9362    Fax (616) 896-1160

Web site/URL  
http://www.hudsonvillepublicschools.org/south    E-mail mheagle@hpseagles.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. Nicholas Ceglarek    E-mail nceglar@hpseagles.net  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Hudsonville Public Schools    Tel. (616) 669-1740

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board  
President/Chairperson Mr. Kenneth Hall  
(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

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

1. 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

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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):
- 7 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 2 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 1 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 10 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	24	16	40
K	40	31	71
1	40	38	78
2	31	35	66
3	42	40	82
4	38	23	61
5	26	31	57
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
<b>Total Students</b>	241	214	455

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 2 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 3 % Asian
  - 3 % Black or African American
  - 4 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 88 % White
  - 0 % Two or more races
  - 100 % Total**

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

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2014 – 2015 school year: 6%

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	13
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2014 until the end of the 2014-2015 school year	15
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	28
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2014	450
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.062
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	6

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

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 33 %  
Total number students who qualify: 151

8. Students receiving special education services: 11 %  
53 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.

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

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

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers	18
Resource teachers/specialists e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	5
Paraprofessionals	11
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 26:1

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

<b>Required Information</b>	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012	2010-2011
Daily student attendance	96%	97%	95%	96%	96%
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.

<b>Post-Secondary Status</b>	
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.

Our goals are to provide students with opportunities to reach their highest potential, and to nurture respect, responsibility, and a positive self-image.

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

## PART III – SUMMARY

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South Elementary School is one of seven elementary schools within the Hudsonville Public School District located in Ottawa County in West Michigan. South serves approximately 455 pre-kindergarten through Grade 5 students who come mostly from within the City of Hudsonville. Our student population is made up of predominantly Caucasian students with about one third of our students participating in the free/reduced-price meal program, higher than the district average of 20%.

South Elementary recently underwent a physical move from its original location, started in the 1950s as one of the three oldest elementary schools in Hudsonville Public Schools. Due to student enrollment growth, we moved to Jamestown Township during the summer of 2013, continuing with our same student population. Over the summer of 2016 we plan to move back into the City of Hudsonville due to continued enrollment growth across the district.

Our mission at South Elementary School: We, the South School family, believe all students are individuals and are capable of learning. Our goals are to provide students with opportunities to reach their highest potential, and to nurture respect, responsibility, and a positive self-image. The goals will develop collaborative and productive members in our society. We recognize that success can only be achieved through the cooperation of staff, students, parents, and members of the community in a welcoming and safe environment.

Every year, South Elementary reviews its instructional practices and makes adjustments based on data from both district and state assessments. Researched best practices, founded on Robert Marzano's strategies for effective instruction, are used each day and monitored. We have also implemented practices based on the work of Ruby Payne, Richard Allington, and Lucy Calkins. Differentiated groups are used to meet the needs of all students and provide an engaging, challenging, and meaningful learning experience. Capturing Kids Hearts strategies are used regularly to build supportive classroom communities and relationships. Members of the South staff work from the mindset of doing whatever it takes to help students succeed. Supported by our Parents Club, numerous volunteers, and community partners, students experience a unique learning environment that also cares for their social, emotional, behavioral, and physical needs.

Hudsonville Public Schools is one of the leading districts in West Michigan for academic performance. South Elementary students continue to improve their performance on local and state assessments. Recognized during the 2014/2015 school year by the State of Michigan as a Reward School for High Progress, achievements gaps continued to close, especially for our economically disadvantaged subgroup of students. We believe our students' steady progress is a result of continued parent partnerships, community supports, a strong curriculum and instructional practice, and staff commitment to do whatever it takes to help students succeed. Staff members willingly take responsibility for reaching all students, consistent data review, adjusting instruction, creating targeted interventions, and learning together through our school improvement process.

As part of our commitment to support all students toward success, we offer a number of opportunities beyond the core curriculum to help our students achieve success both academically and socially. Opportunities include a weekly recognition of positive behavior, dedicated intervention blocks, online learning resources for home, Summer Reading Club, free after-school tutoring, YMCA Impact Program, Girls on the Run program to promote positive choices and self-esteem, South Running Club, Kids Hope USA (mentoring program), Substance Abuse Violence Education Program for fifth graders (partnership with Ottawa County Sheriff's Department), Hand2Hand (food distribution), Children's Advocacy Center presentations, WatchDOGS, and various social support groups.

## PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

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### 1. Core Curriculum:

South Elementary School has adopted the Common Core curriculum for English Language Arts (ELA) and math. Curriculum areas are designed to meet the individual needs of students. District pacing guides direct time spent on all core subject areas, but allow for some flexibility based on formative assessment results. Students progress along a continuum of learning by following a scope and sequence from pre-kindergarten through high school.

#### Reading/Writing

ELA instruction is aligned to the Common Core standards. Our staff utilizes a researched-based workshop model of instruction and learning in both reading and writing. In kindergarten through second grade, at least ninety minutes each day is dedicated to foundational reading skills in the areas of decoding, comprehension, and fluency. Third through fifth grades devote sixty minutes to applying these skills and developing higher level thinking strategies. Students are also engaged in forty-five to sixty minutes of daily writing. Writing instruction gives students opportunities to develop and structure content within narrative, informational, and opinion genres.

Both reading workshop and writing workshop begin with short, focused mini-lessons that present clear learning targets based on grade level standards. These lessons incorporate authentic texts from a variety of genres and include teacher modeling and active engagement for students to practice skills before independently reading or writing. Based on Allington's research, the majority of the workshop time is given to students to actually do the work of reading and writing. Teachers confer with students during independent reading and writing to formatively assess understanding of the learning targets, as well as to provide individualized instruction and support. Flexible small groups are convened to address specific needs that enable students to meet grade level expectations. Teachers regularly administer pre-tests and benchmark assessments (Michigan Literacy Progress Profile, Fountas and Pinnell, and Developmental Reading Assessment) to gather data that guides daily instruction and informs intervention planning for students. Additional reading opportunities are provided through Scholastic Reading Counts, Raz Kids, Starfall, Study Island, after-school tutoring, and Summer Reading Club.

#### Math

Math instruction is aligned to the Common Core standards using Math Expressions material. Our daily math instruction is a minimum of a sixty minute block of time. During this time students take part in direct instruction, guided and independent practice, fact fluency practice, review of previously learned material, assessments, and interventions. At the younger grades, a daily math routine is reviewed to support the understanding of counting, money, and general number sense.

After observing student growth from the ELA workshop model, some staff members are beginning to implement components of the workshop model with students participating in various activities based on a learning target. This structure also allows the direct instruction to be more focused on student needs by reducing the size of the group, allowing for more targeted instruction in terms of remediation and extensions.

All grades emphasize problem-solving methods and encourage students to explain their thinking through "math talk" and written constructed responses. The process of solving problems is emphasized as much as finding a correct solution. To solve problems, students utilize number sense in addition and subtraction in the lower elementary grades and multiplication and division in the upper grades.

For ELA and math, formative and summative assessments are used consistently to determine student understanding. Data from these assessments informs lesson planning, student groups, and interventions.

#### Science

Science instruction is aligned to the Michigan Grade Level Content Expectations and includes units in the

disciplines of Science Processes, Physical Science, Life Science, and Earth Science. The instruction of these units spirals from kindergarten through fifth grade. Reading and writing play an integral role in science as students study new information. Informational texts at varying levels are made available to students so they can practice non-fiction reading as they learn science concepts. Students are also asked to respond in writing as a way to strengthen their informational writing skills in an authentic manner. Assessments are administered at the conclusion of each unit.

### Social Studies

Social studies instruction is aligned to the Michigan Grade Level Content Expectations. Each grade level focuses on the social studies strands of history, geography, civics, economics, and public discourse within their particular learning targets. More specifically, from youngest to oldest our students learn about relationship with others, families and school, our local community, the State of Michigan, the regions of the United States, and the history of the United States. Similar to science, reading and writing play an integral role in social studies. Informational texts at varying levels are made available to students so they can practice non-fiction reading as they learn social studies concepts. Students are also asked to respond in writing as a way to strengthen their informational writing skills in an authentic manner. Assessments are administered at the conclusion of each unit.

## 2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Our music, art, and physical education (PE) instruction support our school mission of developing collaborative and productive members in our society. Music and art standards are based on Michigan Standards and Benchmarks (Grade Level Content Expectations for Visual Arts, Music, Dance, and Theater). Our students have opportunity to showcase their musical and artistic skills to our community a few times during the year: at our whole-school winter holiday music program, at our Fifth Grade Showcase (art and music), and at our annual Art Showcase (approximately seventy-five participants) hosted at Hudsonville's City Hall.

Physical education standards are based on the Michigan Physical Education Standards and Benchmarks. Students have the opportunity to participate on the South Running Club (approximately forty participants) and our Girls on the Run team (approximately thirty participants), both punctuated by respective 5k experiences. In addition, all pre-kindergarten through fifth grade students can participate in the annual Turkey Trot with varying running/walking distances based on student age. Finally, all fourth and fifth grade students participate in the annual Field Day with each student able to choose three different physical activities in which they represent our school.

At the district level, each content area has developed a sequential curriculum based on the state framework. Each content area teacher plans instruction, develops student learning targets, creates student assessment guidelines, and implements research-based best practice strategies. Through our school improvement process, teachers of art, music, and PE commit to teaching strategies and providing opportunities for students to practice and strengthen their reading, writing, and math skills while in these classes. As an example, while in music class our music teacher reinforces the understanding of fractions while teaching students about note values (whole note, half note, quarter note, etc.). This type of cross-curricular alignment allows students to see the same concepts in different setting, increasing the chance of learning the concept. Pre-kindergarten through fifth grade students participate in fifty minute daily art, music, and PE classes on a three-day rotation resulting in one hundred minutes of instruction for every six days of school for each specials class (art, music, and PE).

Classroom teachers through a laptop sign-out structure currently teach technology standards. State technology standards are divided into kindergarten through second grade and third through fifth grade strands. Students use technology to collaborate and communicate, to reinforce basic skills in content areas, to research and problem-solve, to complete assessments, and to share with their families what they are learning and doing in class. Pre-kindergarten through second grade students spend approximately sixty to one hundred twenty five minutes a week using technology to enhance their learning while third through fifth grade students spend approximately one hundred twenty to one hundred eighty minutes a week using technology to enhance their learning. Many of the technology programs used by students allow them to

review key academic skills in a self-paced manner including remediation and extension opportunities. Keyboarding is introduced to our second grade students with instruction and monitoring taking place through fifth grade. Individual classrooms and/or students utilize our laptops, iPads, iPods, and Apple TVs on a daily basis.

### 3. Instructional Methods and Interventions:

The South Elementary School staff is dedicated to helping all students reach their full potential. Although not at the level of a large urban school, our socio-economic makeup challenges us to tailor instruction to meet the varying needs of diverse learners. Our primary lens for accomplishing this task is differentiation. Understanding that not all students learn in the same manner, staff members strive to understand each individual learner and then prepare lessons, learning experiences, and interventions that honor these needs. Classroom teachers, instructional paraprofessionals, and special education staff team together to provide interventions within classrooms and in pull-out form when in the best interest of the student.

Instruction in ELA takes place within a workshop model that includes direct instruction, guided practice, independent practice, conferring, and intervention. Direct instruction is based on learning targets from the curriculum and is taught in small chunks with authentic text and teacher-created models. The majority of the workshop time is given to students actually practicing their skills in reading and writing while individuals or small groups of students meet with a teacher or instructional paraprofessional. Conferencing with students within the workshop structure allows teachers to meet individual needs by reteaching and/or providing enrichment opportunities.

Instruction in math, science, and social studies is initially delivered through direct instruction. Students are then given opportunities to learn through use of manipulatives, dialogue, experiments, and simulations. Staff members seek to honor varying learning styles by providing experiences in multiple modalities. Often times reading and writing is incorporated into these content areas as students read non-fiction text and write for multiple purposes.

Formative and summative assessments play a large role in our instructional process. Continuous monitoring of student progress leads to informed decision making regarding next learning targets, lesson design, and intervention support. When students begin to fall behind curricular expectations, staff members respond quickly to implement interventions that will help get students back on track. Intervention supports include a reading paraprofessional, instructional paraprofessionals, intervention blocks, after-school tutoring, and Summer Reading Club. We believe that with a continuous loop of instruction and assessment, we are better able to differentiate instruction and interventions in a timely manner to help our students succeed.

South Elementary incorporates technology in various ways across the curriculum. Technology continues to play an increasing role in curriculum as teachers utilize multiple resources (Apple TV, iPads, blogs, laptops, iPods, document cameras) to enhance instruction. Students use technology to collaborate and communicate, to reinforce basic skills in content areas, to research and problem-solve, to complete assessments, and to share with their families what they are learning and doing in class. Technology also offers students the opportunity to extend learning into their homes through online resources.

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

South staff members review data compiled from classroom, district, and state assessments to guide our work in helping students succeed. Toward the close of the school year, teachers meet together to discuss students who are passing from one teacher to another. Discussions are focused on strategies that worked with individual students during that school year with expectations that those same strategies would be implemented in the fall of the following school year to minimize the impact of the student's time away from school. Teachers and paraprofessional staff have access to students' prior assessment data to help them meet individual needs right away. Even during our Summer Reading Club, students' reading levels are shared with staff so they can better support students as they select appropriate books and confer.

Once the school year gets underway, teachers assess students' reading, writing, and math skills using tools

such as Michigan Literacy Progress Profile, Fountas and Pinnell, district writing rubrics, benchmark interim assessments, Math Expressions unit assessments, and Delta Math. Data from these assessments is shared with intervention paraprofessionals so they can target their support of students.

From a State level perspective, South teachers annually review MEAP/M-STEP data to identify holes in our curriculum and instruction, to look for achievement gaps across student subgroups, to review longitudinal student growth, and to compare our performance against our sister schools, our local Intermediate School District averages, and the State of Michigan averages. Data is presented in graphic form for comparison purposes, but also in non-graphic form when reviewed for curriculum and instruction holes. After review of the data, our School Improvement Team and staff offer improvement ideas – some of which may have immediate impact on student learning while others take longer to implement but have potential for long-term, institutional growth. To target some of the specific achievement gaps, we have implemented our Summer Reading Club and free after-school tutoring sessions with transportation.

Teachers continually monitor data from ongoing formative assessments, ensuring classroom-based instruction (Tier 1) meets students' needs. Intervention supports are put into place when it is determined that a student has not mastered a grade level objective. If, after implementing and refining interventions, a student has not yet found success, staff may ask for a support team (classroom teacher, school psychologist, school social worker, special education teacher, principal) to convene to further review intervention options and/or the appropriateness of an evaluation for Tier 3 support.

Student assessment results (local and State) are shared with parents through a variety of means: progress reports, emails, phone calls, report cards, conferences, newsletters, Parents Club meetings, Title 1 parent information meetings, school and district websites, and our annual report. As parents have questions about what the data means, staff engage in conversations (verbal and written) to clarify what the data is saying, what we are working to improve, and how they can partner with us for further individual and school growth.

## **PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS**

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### 1. School Climate/Culture:

We have dedicated ourselves to thinking outside the box to meet the needs of students and their families whenever possible because we know that when real needs are met, students are more available to learn. Our beliefs turn into actions such as meeting families at their homes or providing transportation for families, meeting physical needs such as food, partnering with community organizations to provide services such as dental work, offering free after-school tutoring with transportation, and volunteering at our Summer Reading Club within one of our attendance area neighborhoods. This shift in our thinking is one reason we believe our students continue to experience marked growth and an improved school culture.

Each morning our school routine is to start the day with the Pledge of Allegiance followed by our school promise: Today I'll be responsible, show respect, and do my personal best. We define for our students, and they for us, what it looks like to be responsible when it comes to behavior and learning. We talk about giving our personal best efforts even when the work is difficult. When students fall short of following our promise, we address the behavior just as we would an academic need, by intervening with additional instruction and progress monitoring.

Most of our teaching staff have been trained in Capturing Kids Hearts. As students enter their classrooms, they are greeted at the door by their teachers for a welcome and check-in. Since our teachers are committed to knowing their students well, this brief interaction allows them to see who might need some support right away in order to be more prepared for learning. Students and teachers create social contracts that address how students will treat each other, how students will treat their teacher, and how conflict will be handled within their classroom community. Regular class meetings are held to review expectations, to hear from students what needs to be addressed within their classroom community, and to simply enjoy learning about each other.

Family members impact our learning environment by volunteering. They directly and indirectly support student growth by listening to students read, through flashcard work, by putting academic and art work around the building, by sharing their knowledge, and by showing a smile to our students. They provide invaluable support for student activities such as trip chaperones, class parties, and other school-wide initiatives. Others provide support at home through assisting their child with homework, cutting out laminating, and donating classroom supplies.

Our Parents Club sponsors rollerskating parties, popcorn days, school spirit weeks, a carnival, book fairs, and holiday parties that students find enjoyable and strengthen our school culture. Classrooms also pair up during the school year as Bus Buddies, Reading Buddies, and for reading/writing celebrations. Establishing cross-grade level student relationships adds to the positive culture. Younger students, when they see their older reading buddy, often run up to greet them. Our older students help their reading buddies discover their intrinsic value to the school community through these interactions.

### 2. Engaging Families and Community:

South Elementary staff members are blessed to have strong parent partnerships. Parents generously partner with staff through communication (in person, via phone, via email), participation at school events and through home support, and by volunteering at school. Over the last few years we have averaged two parent members on our School Improvement Team who volunteer their time to review achievement and perception data, offer improvement suggestions, and serve as a sounding board for the improvement ideas of staff members. Parents engage with us by attending Parents Club meetings, Title 1 Parent Information meetings, and Parent/Teacher Conferences. Over the past five years we have average a 96% attendance rate for parent/teacher conferences.

Specific to family engagement in the learning process, parents offer school staff ideas to help their students better achieve at school while also acting on the recommendations of school staff. They support their

children at home by listening to them read, by assisting with homework, and by sharing with their children the value of giving their personal best in the learning process.

South Elementary students, families, and staff are blessed to have such a supportive community around us. Community partnerships currently provide weekly mentors for students, food assistance to families, annual dental work, exposure to community helpers (firefighters, sheriff's deputies), access to a complex clubhouse for our Summer Reading Club, underwriting of our YMCA Impact Program, presentations to promote personal safety, and more. The support of our community partners directly assists the academic growth of our students (i.e. tutors) while other partnerships indirectly impact academic growth by meeting physical needs (i.e. free dental work).

The South Elementary School community has also been able to support some of our local community organizations over the past few years. Each year, through our PE teacher, we have been able to donate food to a local food pantry and funds to the American Heart Association through our Jump Rope for Heart participation. We also have special projects we take on during certain years. Our most recent project was a coin war to support the Children's Advocacy Center. Teachers do a great job of connecting these projects to the curriculum and discussing with students the importance of giving back to the community that has been so supportive of us. The positive feelings associated with helping others support our positive school climate, leading to increased student engagement and growth.

### 3. Professional Development:

As a school team, we recognize that we have more to learn together in order to support the learning of our students. We are appreciative of district, building, and local opportunities to grow as professionals. There is a balance of professional development focused on keeping us on the same page instructionally while offering individualized professional development based on the needs of individuals or groups of staff.

One of the most powerful professional development opportunities provided to teachers and the principal is learning rounds. Teachers have been given the opportunity to visit their peers and observe their craft around self-selected growth areas. Release time is provided to accomplish this task and many teachers have taken advantage of this opportunity. Learning rounds have taken South teachers and the principal to classrooms within our building as well as classrooms in sister schools across the district. The end product is improved instruction toward increased student achievement as teachers bring back ideas that are implemented for whole classes and individual students.

A second powerful adjustment to professional development recently made at the district level is EdCamp. This structure of professional development allows teachers to select their own learning experiences during professional development days. Teachers can select from specific topics of interest generated by staff surveys or select a topic of their own. This concept has overflowed to some of our building staff meeting time as well. Teachers meet together in small groups to study, share ideas, and plan next steps toward increased student achievement.

A recent change we have made at South over the past few years is tailoring some professional development experiences for our instructional paraprofessional team. Paraprofessionals and teachers were surveyed to inform the selection of and planning for these learning opportunities. Based on the results of the surveys, paraprofessionals have received training from district staff in the areas of math (strategies for multiplication and division) and ELA (strategies for conferring).

In addition to staff input regarding professional development, student data also informs our professional development selection. As we review data and identify areas of weakness, we seek training that will strengthen our professional skill set so we can adjust our practices toward increased student achievement. Recent examples of this process include training on supporting economically disadvantaged students, research-based strategies to support English Language Learners, and strengthening our formative assessment practices.

As a learning organization, we recognize the need to further our own growth as professionals. Whether it

be informal gatherings of staff reading a common professional book about math talk or a more formal professional conference, our professional development selections are made with staff input and are guided by student data. We attribute some of our continued achievement growth to steady, consistent professional development that directly focuses on impacting student academic, social, and emotional growth.

#### 4. School Leadership:

South Elementary School is blessed to have a number of leaders on staff. Teacher and paraprofessional leaders are involved on the School Improvement Team, present at staff meetings and larger professional learning experiences, organize and supervise intramurals and safety patrol, assist the Student Advisory team, mentor colleagues and student teachers, lead our WatchDOGS program, organize our Summer Reading Club, lead tutoring groups, and serve on district committees. Further, they lead by example when partnering with parents and colleagues. All of these efforts stem from the shared belief that students can achieve great things when the environment and instruction is differentiated to meet their unique needs.

As one detailed example of staff leadership, a handful of teachers organize our annual Summer Reading Club. This group of teachers takes on the responsibilities of reserving a location, purchasing necessary books and supplies, inviting eligible students, and soliciting and organizing staff volunteers. The committee of teachers purposefully selects books from a wide variety of genres and reading levels to meet the specific reading needs of the participating students. Each year a program evaluation is completed to determine if the efforts are paying off in increased student reading achievement. Results of the program evaluation are shared with the full staff.

There is no way one principal can lead this building. Better stated, there isn't a need for there to be an administrator-heavy leadership structure at South Elementary School because of the leadership skills and professionalism of the entire staff. The role of the principal is to provide what is needed by staff so they can perform their professional duties to the best of their abilities. At times this includes financial support, collaborative problem solving, learning together, and professional coaching. Teachers and instructional paraprofessionals provide input regarding their professional learning needs that will strengthen their skills and in turn impact student achievement. The role of the principal is the same as every other staff member in the building – do whatever it takes to help our students reach their highest potential.

Teachers understand the power of working together toward a common goal. When we have reviewed data, debated options, and decided by consensus on how we want to move forward, we have found that our decisions are better, implementation is done with more fidelity, and our students are the beneficiaries. Working relationships among staff reveal a high level of trust, camaraderie, and positive peer interaction.

## Part VI – INDICATORS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS

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In succinct terms, the one practice that has had the most influence on consistent growth is the continuous process of formative assessment. We do this by reviewing formative assessment data, allowing formative assessment data to inform our next instructional steps, providing targeted instruction and intervention, and looping back to formative assessment without allowing roadblocks to remain unchallenged. Instructional staff have worked together to learn and implement solid formative assessment practices. Ideas and resources have been shared at formal staff meetings as well as informal grade-level discussions. Some formative assessment practices are individualized such as conferencing with students during reading and writing workshop sessions. Other formative assessment practices are whole class practices such as exit tickets, individual whiteboard use, and turn-and-talk.

When formative assessment is used on a regular basis, there is no shortage of data. Our goal is to intervene and instruct as soon as possible based on student data. For example, as a teacher or instructional paraprofessional conferences with a student, he or she may uncover a student misconception about the given topic. The instructional staff member can make immediate use of the data to reteach that content so the student is better prepared for subsequent learning. An example at the whole class level would be a teacher asking his or her students to show their math work and solutions on individual whiteboards. Depending on what the teacher observes, he or she may choose to adjust the trajectory of the lesson to support a large number of students or make a mental note of who needs intervention later that lesson, day, or the following day.

Perseverance is the glue that holds this process together. Students may struggle with the first intervention we provide. They may need the content taught in a different way or with different materials. They may need multiple repetitions to store the information in long-term memory. Staff have a shared belief and working agreement that together we will do whatever it takes to help each student take another step along their learning progression. This may mean giving up support staff time to meet a greater need, collaborating outside school hours, meeting physical needs, and allocating funds to provide students with after-school and summer learning opportunities.

The steady increase in student achievement is due in large part to staff understanding and implementing this process on a regular basis. Waiting for a summative assessment is too late and often wastes valuable learning time. Formative assessment practices allow us to obtain real-time data each day that informs our instructional decisions and strengthens our resolve to find the key that opens the next door of achievement for each student at South Elementary School.