

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

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Mr. Timothy Lee Garcia

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

Official School Name McCook Elementary School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 1500 West 3rd Street

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

City McCook State NE Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 69001-2152

County Red Willow

Telephone (308) 345-5681 Fax (308) 345-4948

Web site/URL http://www.mccookbison.org E-mail tgarcia@mccookbison.org

Facebook Page
http://www.facebook.com/McC
ook-Elementary-

Twitter Handle 561920740607886/?fref=nf Google+ _____

Blog http://mcelementary.weebly.com Other Social Media Link http://www.facebook.com/groups/71823814821

YouTube/URL / 4714/

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*Mr. Grant Norgaard E-mail gnorgaard@mccookbison.org

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

District Name McCook Public Schools Tel. (308) 344-4400

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. Tom Bredvick

(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):
- 2 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 1 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 4 TOTAL

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

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	18	13	18
K	61	44	105
1	46	31	77
2	69	50	119
3	34	49	83
4	0	0	0
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	228	187	415

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 1 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 1 % Asian
 - 1 % Black or African American
 - 11 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 85 % White
 - 1 % 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: 19%

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	33
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2014 until the end of the 2014-2015 school year	45
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	78
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2014	415
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.188
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	19

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

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

Spanish

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 51 %
Total number students who qualify: 213

8. Students receiving special education services: 17 %
70 Total number of students served

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

<u>5</u> Autism	<u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment
<u>0</u> Deafness	<u>6</u> Other Health Impaired
<u>3</u> Deaf-Blindness	<u>3</u> Specific Learning Disability
<u>1</u> Emotional Disturbance	<u>25</u> Speech or Language Impairment
<u>1</u> Hearing Impairment	<u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury
<u>0</u> Mental Retardation	<u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness
<u>4</u> Multiple Disabilities	<u>22</u> Developmentally Delayed

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 3
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	23
Resource teachers/specialists e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	11
Paraprofessionals	18
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	4

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 18:1
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%	95%	96%	96%	95%
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.

It is the mission of the McCook Public Schools community to Equip ALL Students to Succeed in a complex global society.

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

Located in the rolling hills of Southwest Nebraska, McCook's history stretches back to 1879, when it was a small settlement named Fairview on the banks of the Republican River. In 1882, the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad (C,B & Q) chose McCook as a division point as it moved westward across the state. The city of McCook was established and named in honor of Alexander McDowell McCook, a Union General in the Civil War. McCook was settled by many Germans from Russia who were fleeing persecution in that land. Three of Nebraska's governors came from McCook: Governors Ralph Brooks (1959-1960), Frank Morrison (1961-1967), and Ben Nelson (1991-1998). McCook is also the hometown of Senator George Norris, the father of the Tennessee Valley Authority and rural electrification in America. Today McCook is a bustling community of 7, 698, and has all the comforts of urban living with plenty of small town charm.

McCook, like many rural Nebraska communities, can boast of friendly people, excellent schools and low crime. McCook serves as the economic hub for a wide swath of southwest Nebraska. The town eventually built three neighborhood elementary schools, East Ward, West Ward, and North Ward for K-4 grades, Central Elementary School for 5-6 grades, Junior High School for 7-9 grades, and a Senior High School for 10-12 grades. McCook Junior College was established in 1928, the first in the state of Nebraska.

Shortage of space, inadequate wiring, leaking roofs, and lack of efficient air climate control at the elementary schools forced the McCook School Board to find a satisfactory solution to these problems. Three bond issues were presented to the district's voters before one was passed in May 2004. The district ended up selling the East and West Ward buildings and adding to and renovating North Ward. In October 2005, all elementary students in kindergarten through third grade were consolidated into McCook Elementary School. A preschool is now located at McCook Elementary and the Developmental Learning Center, formerly located on North Highway 83, moved to the school.

Mission Statement: It is the mission of the McCook Public Schools' community to equip all students to succeed in a complex global society.

McCook Public Schools adopted the Professional Learning Community (PLC) model in 2010. The staff is highly collaborative and meets weekly to review student data and plan strategically to accommodate students who may not be mastering objectives, or to identify those who might benefit from multi-leveled instruction. Students with disabilities are fully included. The school uses targeted and systematic interventions that are enabling staff to provide assistance for students experiencing difficulties, especially in reading and math. These principles continue to be utilized with the Three Tier Response to Intervention (RtI) Pyramid. Instructional differentiation is utilized for all students.

McCook Elementary School has 423 students in grades PreK-3. McCook is a school wide Title I school. The school has two school improvement goals involving technology (iPad Cart and Chromebooks) and vocabulary (using L to J). The school has one pre-school classroom, twenty-two kindergarten through third grade classrooms divided by class size, two Title I teachers, and two special education teachers, and six specials teachers (Art, Counseling, Library/Technology, Music, Physical Education).

McCook Elementary starts each school year with a "Walk to School" night so students can bring their supplies, see their classroom and meet their teachers. This takes place the eve before the first day of school. Each morning, students recite the Pledge of Allegiance and the McCook Elementary Promise: "Today I will be safe. Today I will be respectful. Today I will be responsible. I will make today a great day."

McCook Elementary is a Title I school that utilizes "Walk to Read" and "Walk to Math" programs with small group instruction in the subjects of reading, language, spelling and math. Students move to the group that is working at their correct level of difficulty. Placement is determined by a universal screener (AimsWeb), the STAR Reading test, CRT's and PLC team collaboration. McCook Elementary School provides additional educational opportunities with our Extended School Year Literacy and Math Program held for three weeks in July for students who require intense small group interventions. We also provide a

High Ability Learners (HAL) after school program for students identified as high ability to stimulate and challenge gifted students.

This past year McCook Elementary implemented Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBiS) which emphasizes a safe, positive and healthy environment to support learning. Expected behaviors are defined, taught, and reinforced.

Our school strives to build relationships with staff, students and parents. Our Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) supports our classrooms and library with proceeds from Book Fairs and Family Carnival Night, and provides Accelerated Reader (AR) incentives. We celebrate our students, staff, and school accomplishments throughout the year.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

It has been the practice of McCook Public Schools and more specifically, McCook Elementary School to utilize the Nebraska State Standards as our core curriculum. In areas where the State of Nebraska hasn't developed or identified specific standards, McCook Public Schools and more specifically, McCook Elementary School will implement the National Education Standards as our curriculum. However, as we have moved in to the development of the PLC process in our school system, one critical addition we have made to our curriculum has been to empower to grade level TEAMS to develop and include any standards they can support as critical or essential for our students to master at any specific grade level. In empowering our grade level teaching TEAMS to create standards for the curriculum, we have generated a high level of buy in from our teachers to ensure that all students master the created and identified curriculum.

To support the identification, comprehension and implementation of the curriculum, our teaching TEAM completed a process of identifying the “essential standards” from the curriculum that must be taught to mastery at each grade level. To accomplish this, our board of education approved a 2:00pm student release time on Wednesdays throughout the academic year to allow teachers to collaborate. Each grade level teaching TEAM created a three ring target with the curricular standards identified as essential being placed in the bulls eye ring, the nice to know curricular standards being placed in the second ring, and the fun or interesting to know curricular standards being placed in the outer ring.

McCook Elementary believes that it is imperative that all students learn at high levels. Our mission is to ensure that all students are prepared to be successful in a complex global society. Curriculum identification plays a significant role in the structure of our educational system. Our district identifies the core curriculum before adoption of researched based materials takes place. Vertically aligned teaching teams make up a committee that analyzes and evaluates the top series choices in each content area. Teachers study the materials to see how they support curriculum in alignment with the essential standards before they make their final decision. This evaluation of resources provides our teachers a deeper understanding of the standards that have been identified as our curriculum in all content areas. We found that in identifying our essential standards, we no longer have to teach the all of the materials found in a series, but we are able to identify and find information supporting the mastery of the standards being assessed.

Our school realizes that students must develop strong foundations in phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. As a district we adopted a core reading series that scaffolds through grade levels, providing these critical components. The series offers explicit instruction and ample practice in each of the five key reading components. Our curriculum integrates grammar, writing, and spelling to provide a well-rounded Language Arts program.

Most recently, we adopted a new math series to support mastery of the identified essential standards of our curriculum. In order to build comprehension, this series teaches concepts using a concrete-pictorial- abstract learning progression to anchor learning in real-world, hands-on experiences. Problem solving is at the heart of the curriculum. McCook Public Schools provided adequate training for the teachers before instruction began. Trainers will continuously support teachers during the first year of adoption with workshops and classroom support.

Being a primary elementary school, Pre- Kindergarten through 3rd grade, we primarily focus our time and support on students achieving mastery of the essential standards found in the reading and math curriculums. However, through the PLC process, our district has also taken the necessary time and resources to aligned the science and social studies curriculum vertically from Kindergarten through 12th grade just as we do with reading and math. This vertical alignment process is critical to ensure that the curriculum is being supported at every grade level and that specific standards are specifically assigned to grade levels and not repeated from grade to grade.

To support the science and social studies curriculum instruction learning blended and incorporates reading

strategies along with teaching the essential content. Students are engaged in reading and writing, which develop comprehension skills in nonfiction text.

Little Bison Preschool provides early learning experiences and high quality instruction for young children. We use High-Scope curriculum to develop children's intellectual, academic, physical, social, and emotional development, which vertically aligns with Kindergarten entry skills. This process occurs continuously through "play" because students apply the skills they learn. Four principles guide our children's growth and learning are children are active learners, children learn in unique ways, learning is more meaningful when it is integrated across all areas of development, and learning is continuous.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

McCook Elementary Music classes include Kindergarten through 3rd grade. Second-third grade classes meet twice weekly for 25 minutes. Kindergarten-first grade meets 2-3 times weekly for 20 minutes.

The curriculum is designed around the National Music Standards, and comprised of elements of the Orff and Kodaly curriculums. We follow the four major K-12 National Fine Arts Standards, which include: Create, Perform, Respond, and Connect.

Instruction and learning involves musicianship through singing, playing instruments, speech, and movement. Classes offer a potential for active and creative music making by all children. In addition, instruction focuses on the vocal exploration of music using folk songs from the student's cultures.

Each class begins by analyzing, reading, and performing a musical rhythm as well as a melodic line. There are kinesthetic movements and games incorporated in the learning.

We talk about composers from different musical time periods, learn about that composer's life, and what was going on in history at that time. Students are able to relate and connect prior knowledge of history and culture as they learn more about famous composers and their music.

Students perform music programs throughout the year for parents and the community.

The McCook Elementary School library is an integral part of the total educational program of our school. It serves the students and faculty in meeting the teaching and curriculum goals of the school. Our media schedule involves library skills classes for every grade at least once a week. Kindergarten through third grade have technology classes once every two weeks. All grade levels at McCook Elementary utilize the computer lab for technology and educational programs. Second and third grade students are taught keyboarding as well as other computer skills. The library media specialist uses the Standardized Test of Achievement in Reading (STAR) test scores to help students further develop their reading skills through the selection of books for reading practice at school and at home. Students are encouraged to take Accelerated Reader (AR) quizzes on the computer.

Physical Education at McCook Elementary focuses on developing mature locomotor movements and non-locomotor skills. Developing these skills allows students to participate in a wide variety of physical activities. All students at McCook Elementary have physical education every day. K-1 students have 20 minutes each day and students in 2-3 have 25 minutes each day. During that amount of time, students engage in physical activities that elevate breathing and heart rates. Students learn appropriate sportsmanship and how to work in a team environment. All students are given the opportunity to participate in a track and field day at the end of the year. In physical education, students learn about the different events and have a chance to work on their skills before choosing the events that they would like to compete in. This event gives students a great chance to show their abilities to their parents and teachers.

The McCook Elementary art room is a TAB art room, which means; Teaching for Artistic Behavior. The new Nebraska Fine Arts Standards focus on experimentation and idea development for elementary students and skill development past 2nd grade. Our room is center-based and includes: Drawing Center, Inventor's Center, Painting Center and Mixed Media Center. Some of the skills and/or Traits that students learn from "acting like artists" include "Envisioning—helps to picture a story in their heads or a finished project so we

know what to do next. "Engage and Persist"—mistakes are a part of creating. We talk about learning from them and not giving up! "Grit" is a big part of creating and making ideas work. "Reflection"—Artists think about what they did well, what they would do different and how to make it work better next time. "Stretch and Explore"—reach beyond what we think we can do and accept mistakes as a way to learn. "Observe"—artists and scientists are both good at observing the world around them. We try to notice things. "Develop Craft"—practice and trying to make our art look better each time helps us with motor skills and craftsmanship.

3. Instructional Methods and Interventions:

McCook Elementary School believes that all students can learn at high levels by utilizing highly effective teachers working collaboratively within Professional Learning Communities. Essential learnings have been established and all core curricular subjects have been aligned to establish a viable curriculum. It is the practice of every grade level to ensure that every child is exposed to whole group instruction using research based strategies. Teachers have been trained in Madeline Hunter's Instruction Theory Into Practice (ITIP) to ensure consistency in lesson planning and delivery across all grade levels. Workshops and trainings have been provided to assist teachers in developing their instructional practices.

Teachers at McCook Elementary use a variety of instructional methods. These include, but are not limited to, direct instruction, small group, teacher led, student led, blended learning, cooperative learning groups and independent practice. In addition to core instruction, daily time is set aside for WIN time. WIN time engages our entire student body and staff in a variety of academic work which includes reading intervention, math intervention, enrichment, and writing. Everyone is involved in a minimum of 30 minutes of WIN time daily. Technology is an integral part of our instruction. Students have access to diverse technology based learning tools to include 2 ipad carts for Kindergarten and 1st grade and 2 Chromebook carts which are used in 2nd and 3rd grade. In addition two computer labs are available to all students. Every regular education classroom is equipped with an interactive whiteboard to enhance student learning.

McCook Elementary employs the Response to Intervention (RtI) process in all grades. This process promotes the achievement of instructional goals while guaranteeing the success of all students. We use a 3-tier instructional model with this process (Tier 1 focuses on prevention, Tier 2 focuses on interventions, and Tier 3 implements remediation). Tier 1 is effective core instruction for every student. This tier is comprised of clearly defined essential learnings which are taught to all students. Tier 2 is secondary instruction for students who haven't yet acquired these essential learnings. Tier 2 provides additional support to these students in either a one-on-one or small group setting. A more intense intervention is provided for specific students in Tier 3. The RtI team meets weekly to discuss and explore strategies to support student learning. RtI support is executed in a systematic, timely manner.

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

McCook Elementary School implements the use of formative and summative assessments. All students are given academic screenings in reading and math three times a year. AIMSweb is used as a universal screening tool, which gives parents and teachers baseline data of a student's current level of performance. Data guides the teacher in instructional planning and programming. AIMSweb allows teachers to progress monitor throughout the school year.

Students are given the STAR assessment to determine appropriate reading level. They are tested quarterly to determine their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) identified by test results. Teachers, students, and parents are provided the results. The ZPD guides students selection of books.

Vocabulary is a focus for McCook Elementary. We utilize the L to J recording system to increase vocabulary acquisition in all content areas. Students are assessed weekly and allowed self-reflection. Data is collected by individual students, classes, and grade levels and distributed to a district website and communicated to parents. Results allow teachers to focus on non-mastered terms.

Common formative assessments are used to gather data. Students are given common assessments within

their respective grade levels that are aligned with the identified essential standards. Data is collected and analyzed weekly with grade level teams and monthly with the principal. Data gathered from these common assessments is collected and reviewed at above mentioned meetings. Students in 2nd and 3rd grade take the Iowa Test of Basic Skills each school year. Third grade participates in the Nebraska State Accountability test in reading and math. These results are published in the local newspaper, the school website, Nebraska Department of Education website, and are shared with parents, community and stakeholders.

Informal assessments are ongoing in classrooms through observation and continual checks for understanding. Teachers use a variety of techniques to observe students. For example, students use individual dry erase boards to demonstrate their understanding, solve problems with manipulatives, and use computer based programs which provide the teacher with feedback and evidence of learning.

Assessment is a fundamental piece of RtI. Assessment of students in Tier 1 directs programming for those students in need of enrichment, as well as those in need of more support (Tier 2). Assessment in Tier 2 provides the RtI team with evidence to place a student back to Tier 1 or provide additional support in Tier 3. Learning gaps for all students are addressed through the RtI process.

The week before school starts, all incoming kindergarten students come in small groups to go through baseline kindergarten skills through a variety of assessments. The results are used to heterogeneously place students into sections, ensuring a balanced ability level classroom. These assessments are used throughout the year to track growth and guide instruction/intervention.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

In our school, we know we have a unique and powerful opportunity as teachers to engage our students to ensure their success. Learning improves when students are inquisitive, interested and inspired. At the beginning of the year teachers will do student inventory surveys to identify information about the student that can be used when constructing lessons. By knowing the interests of students, teachers have the ability to bring identified interests into activities to personalize the learning. This is especially valuable when providing Tier II interventions or Tier III remediation.

To help our staff with student engagement, we completed a book study of *Teach Like a Pirate*, which focuses on developing and engaging participatory set, or “hook” to capture student interest from the beginning of a lesson. We also include celebrations such as Nebraska’s birthday and Dr. Seuss Day – “Read Across America” during the first week of March. Storytelling and sing-a-longs are part of the Nebraska celebration. Dr. Seuss’ birthday celebration is an activity that brings in readers from the high school and the community.

Building relationships with our students and staff is an important part of our school culture and PBiS process. We have established the “Precious Moments” project to build relations with our students. We make a commitment to spend two minutes a day for ten days talking with a student to get to know them better. The Teachers Helping Each Other (THEO) was established to support staff members on a weekly basis. Teachers are assigned to one another to give support and to remind each other that we are in this together. We also have used the “NED” character development program that centers around three stepping-stones: “Never give up,” “Encourage others”, and “Do your best”. This program provides positive motivation and specific direction that leads to success.

We have a great staff that supports each other. Our climate committee organizes activities and time for the teachers to forge relationships and collaborate. Our social committee makes sure we take care of each other during times of need and times of celebration. We have celebrations for our school success to affirm the care and value we place on our students and staff. Activities include: smoothie day, wreath making project, dinner theatre with spouses, Christmas tea, and monthly birthday luncheon celebrations. In addition, our PBiS Leadership TEAM hosts monthly “Forging Relationships” activities for all members of our staff that will consist of a TEAM-building activity, a snack, and some time for teachers to simply get to know one another on a more personal level.

Our principal begins each week with a message supporting our behavior basics and providing students guidance concerning being safe, respectful, and responsible in all we do. He also brings in the component of demonstrating a caring behavior towards others and putting the feelings of others before our own. Students also receive school-wide recognition by the principal for Accelerated Reader points and L to J Vocabulary assessments via announcements, assemblies, celebrations, and pictures.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

McCook Elementary School is proud of our success in working with students, families and our community. In addition to parent/teacher conferences, we hold informational meetings open to the community allowing them to provide feedback of our school process. This year, presentations have been focused on PBiS, PLC’s, RtI, and Title I. Parents and community members serve on our PBiS, School Improvement, and Parent Advisory Committees. We utilize parent surveys to determine needs, interests and ideas. A weekly/monthly newsletter from Teachers and our Principal goes out to inform parents of upcoming activities and enlighten them on learning being mastered within the classroom and throughout the school. McCook Elementary School’s Facebook page is another way we share photos and videos of the activities that are taking place.

McCook Elementary School has a strong PTO that assists with student needs and drives parent

involvement. They provide two Book Fairs that are open to the public. They also organize a Family Fun Night that allows families, friends, and community to enjoy an evening of fun, food and games. Our PTO participates in service projects for our students and supplies funding for additional activities and materials.

We have high school students that come to our school and serve as mentors to those students who need extra support socially and emotionally. They also conduct academic activities such as Math Magic and tutoring, as well as help out in our classrooms assisting students.

We have parent volunteers that help out in the classroom by listening to students read or assist in helping students.

McCook Elementary has an active relationship with the McCook Community College, as they provide athletes to come and read to our students. They also provide free family nights to come watch their sports teams play.

Our school participates in state and locally funded Backpack Programs. Teachers fill bags that ensure students get the nutrition they need over the weekend.

On Veterans Day, we invite veterans to join us as we thank and honor those who have worn the uniform of the United States Armed Forces. It has become a tradition that brings in approximately 40 veterans and spouses, along with many parents and community members.

Community Service projects are another way to involve our students. Students visit various retirement communities, nursing homes, plant trees, and clean up trash in area parks.

McCook Elementary has a broad and in-depth system that ensures our students and community members feel safe, welcome, and connected to our school.

3. Professional Development:

McCook Public Schools implemented the Professional Learning Community (PLC) process, which guides professional development. ALL professional development is directly aligned in support of components found within the PLC process and focused on student learning and achievement through district-led professional development.

What Students Need to Learn?

Teachers collaboratively identified Power Standards determined to be critical for students to master at their respective level. Teachers became proficient at unpacking and vertically aligning essential learnings. With this process, our teachers narrowed our scope and sequence and focused on learning at Depth of Knowledge (DOK) as identified on the Table of Specifications. Power Standards were placed at the Bulls-Eye of our learning target and became our focus for student mastery.

How Students Will Learn the Information?

As Dr. Rick DuFour stated, “A TEAM is a group of people working interdependently toward the same goal.” Our teachers organized as TEAMS and developed a collective commitment of collaboration. The sharing of instructional strategies, development of common lesson plans and common formative assessments, shared responsibility of data analysis, and a TEAM approach to all Tier I and Tier II instructional strategies and interventions became consistent.

What Will We Do When Students Learn or Don't Learn the Information?

McCook Elementary School has embedded the Response to Intervention (RtI) process. In Tier I (Preventative Core Instruction) we guarantee that ALL students will receive on grade level instruction with re-teaching, employing a different strategy, with opportunities for those who do not reach mastery. When the pacing guide dictates, we must move to the next Power Standard. Students unable to achieve mastery of the previous Power Standard enter Tier II Intervention Phase. While receiving Tier I Preventative Core Instruction, teacher-TEAMS collaborate and create time in the students' schedule to provide learning

interventions for the previous Power Standard not mastered until the students achieve mastery. For the few that don't achieve mastery, we move into our Tier III Remediation Phase. Tier III identifies the specific learning deficit and students are provided additional instruction with a research-based program to close the gap. When students reach mastery, extension activities are provided focusing learning at a deeper DOK.

Extensive professional development opportunities through Solution Tree across the country and locally provided our teachers the skills necessary to effectively and successfully implement these selected components of the PLC process. We ensured we had at least one teacher on every grade-level TEAM who attended a PLC Summit/Institute, and developed a PLC Leadership TEAM within our building at McCook Elementary School. We continue to focus on student learning and achievement in all we do.

4. School Leadership:

The principal at McCook Elementary incorporates a shared leadership philosophy. He has developed a collective commitment to the PLC process and delegates responsibility throughout the staff. He effectively communicates that student learning and achievement is our fundamental purpose and that all decisions we make should be justified in supporting our students in doing so. Our school's mission is clear and concise and our umbrella expectations of being safe, responsible, and respectful are communicated daily.

Our leadership structure involves staff members having responsibility delegated to them by serving in specific roles and/or on leadership TEAMS. We have two assistant principals who are fulltime teachers. One assistant principal primarily focuses on student behaviors and physical security of the school while the other focuses on assessment and instruction. Both assistant principals lead book studies, develop and lead presentations, develop and share specialized knowledge, and support the philosophy of the principal. All teachers and paraprofessionals have the responsibility of focusing on student learning and achievement.

Every grade-level TEAM (K-3) has one or two members who has attended a PLC Summit or Institute and has a deep understanding of the PLC process. One or both of the members are a part of the PLC Leadership TEAM and are responsible for sharing the vision of the principal out to their respective grade-level TEAMS. These members serve as the liaison between their grade-level TEAMS and the principal with issues specifically concerning the PLC process. All staff members have the ability to come directly to our principal with any issues or questions they may have, but the grade-level TEAM leader is usually able to provide them the guidance necessary.

Our school has a Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Leadership TEAM that leads the development of a positive school culture. The principal serves as the "Pilot" and the TEAM selected a "Co-Pilot" to assist in fulfilling the leadership role. Each grade-level TEAM has a member on the PBIS Leadership TEAM. The TEAM also includes two parents, our school psychologist, counselor, and behavior specialist. Members are tasked with leading their respective grade-level TEAM in the PBIS process and have an equal voice on the leadership TEAM.

Our school has a Parent Advisory Committee (PAC). Teachers and support staff have presented specialized information about the programs within our school to the PAC and collaboratively developed solutions and/or applied suggestions garnered from feedback or input from our PAC members.

Our school has a School-Community Connection activity where teachers are present live on local radio and talk about school initiatives, results, achievements, programs, and other information our stakeholders and community would be interested in. Our parent volunteers get involved with this process and provide listeners a parental viewpoint of what is taking place in our school.

Part VI – INDICATORS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS

The one component employed in McCook Elementary School that has provided us the most success is the PLC Process.

An all staff book study of Learning By Doing provided research based guidance for development of the PLC process & culture. To begin, teachers were supported in developing “Power Standards” or “Essential Learnings”; what students must master to be successful at the next grade level. Year 1 we developed 6, year 2 we increased to 12, and we currently identify 12-18 Essential Learnings per subject.

The next step was unpacking the standards and finding the resources to lead our students to mastery of the standards. In unpacking the standards not only did teaching-TEAMS have to determine how information would be transferred, but also when. Grade level teaching-TEAMS, which include Special Education & Title support staff, had to collaborate and vertically align skills in a top-down fashion to ensure that all standards were mastered at the appropriate grade level without repetition. We garnered a deep understanding of and appreciation for the collaborative process required to do what is best for student learning and achievement.

We developed a collective commitment that it was the shared responsibility of all staff members to lead our students to learning, not just teach and hope they get it. This meant that we had to have a deep understanding of creating an effective lesson plan. We implemented Madeline Hunter’s Instructional Theory Into Practice (ITIP) model exclusively across all grade levels to combat the inconsistency that was identified in this reflective phase. Thus far we had done a good job of identifying “what” our students would learn, but we had to determine how we would know.

We were able to identify assessments as our next critical step to supporting student learning and achievement. Developing an understanding of formative, interim, and summative assessments and how each is involved in learning allowed us to generate a deeper appreciation for feedback and student reflection and involvement not only in the learning, but also in assessment. When students demonstrated mastery of the standard, we had a plan developed to provide them enrichment. For students not demonstrating mastery, re-teaching utilizing a different learning strategy was initiated and the cycle repeated until either mastery was achieved or the pacing guide required us to move to the next standard.

In order to continue to lead students not mastering the standard at the time of transition to the next standard, we implemented a three-tiered Response to Intervention process. Students would enter Tier II for intervention until mastery of the standard was demonstrated. For a small percentage of students, Tier III remediation with specialized instruction was initiated to close the learning gap.

We are in a state on continuous improvement within our PLC process. The PLC process is not simply what we do, but it has become who we are.