

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 [] Choice

Name of Principal Michelle Venera Gadaleta

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

Official School Name Essex Fells School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 102 Hawthorne Road

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

City Essex Fells State NJ Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 07021-1312

County Essex County

Telephone (973) 226-0505 Fax (973) 226-0451

Web site/URL http://www.efsk-6.org E-mail mvgadaleta@efsk-6.org

Twitter Handle _____ Facebook Page _____ Google+ _____

Other Social Media Link

YouTube/URL _____ Blog _____ http://instagram.com/EFSchool

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*Mrs. Michelle Gadaleta E-mail mvgadaleta@efsk-6.org

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

District Name Essex Fells School District Tel. (973) 226-0505

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 Mrs. Carol D'Alessandro

(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):
- 1 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 0 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 0 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 1 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	13	13	26
K	16	19	35
1	18	14	32
2	18	10	28
3	7	13	20
4	12	12	24
5	5	18	23
6	10	11	21
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	99	110	209

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 4 % Asian
 - 2 % Black or African American
 - 2 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 1 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 84 % White
 - 7 % 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: 10%

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	7
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2014 until the end of the 2014-2015 school year	14
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	21
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2014	209
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.100
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	10

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

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

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

8. Students receiving special education services: 14 %
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.

- 5 Autism
- 0 Deafness
- 0 Deaf-Blindness
- 1 Emotional Disturbance
- 0 Hearing Impairment
- 0 Mental Retardation
- 0 Multiple Disabilities
- 0 Orthopedic Impairment
- 9 Other Health Impaired
- 12 Specific Learning Disability
- 1 Speech or Language Impairment
- 1 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: 6
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	2
Classroom teachers	15
Resource teachers/specialists e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	14
Paraprofessionals	3
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	5

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 13:1
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%	95%	93%	93%
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.

Essex Fells School, where Studies Pass Into Character.

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

Essex Fells is a small, close-knit, suburban town made up of multigenerational families and dedicated community members. Alumni regularly visit Essex Fells School to revel in the progress while maintaining its traditions and reflect on their fond memories from elementary days past. Recently, the Superintendent gave a tour to the graduating class of 1965 who was enamored with the charm and timeless nostalgia it brought back. Essex Fells, a purely residential town, takes pride that EFS serves all students of the community from preschool through grade six and has frequently been referred to as the "gem" of the neighborhood. The school is comprised of two buildings on the same campus. The Primary Building hosts Preschool through Grade Three students and the Upper Building, Fourth through Sixth Grades. A rotunda separates the two allowing students to travel between them on a daily basis to attend "Specials" classes.

With two class sections at each grade level and an average class size of thirteen within a fully inclusive setting, the staff is able to tailor strategies to each child's learning style. Full time general and special education teachers educate the students in a team teaching approach one hundred percent of the day. In an effort to build consistency, grade level planning time is incorporated into their schedules daily. Cross grade level articulation is also encouraged and supported to build preparedness and a progression of expectations between grades. Teachers, administration, parents, and support staff pride themselves on knowing each student on a personal level and collectively sharing knowledge and experiences with each other about the learners to best meet their needs. One way this is evident is through our Intervention and Referral Services Team and monthly Student Progress Meetings. Each child identified as needing support other than what is provided in the classroom is discussed at length with the Superintendent, Learning Consultant, School Psychologist, I&RS/504 Coordinators, Speech/Language Therapist, Basic Skills Instructor, Art Therapist, current and past teachers to determine what additional supports/services could be provided to meet the student's needs. The School Nurse, Occupational Therapist, Physical Therapist, and Specials teachers are consulted along with the parents and students themselves to paint an accurate picture of the learner as a whole child. Essex Fells School front-loads supports in the lower grades in an effort that the proactive approach will build students' foundational skills as they develop and grow throughout the grades. Basic Skills, enrichment, and speech push-in support add to the pyramid of supports in place at the youngest grades. This approach has proven successful as students develop into mature learners and are measured by district and State assessments. Student growth is tracked with multiple measures and results are analyzed regularly to inform and modify future instruction.

The families of Essex Fells trust in the academic decisions the Board of Education and Administration have set forth for the school district. The BOE is made up of five committed parents who work cooperatively with administration to best advocate for the community and all students who attend EFS. Community leaders and residents are proud of the school's accomplishments and work closely with the staff to build a relationship between its students and townspeople. The Essex Fells Police Department, Fire Department, Mayor and Council, and various committees work with the school community to insure we develop a sense of pride in the town for the students to pass down through generations. This relationship is evident as the 6th graders participate in impactful experiences with town leaders. A few examples are: the Mayor taking the 6th graders on a tour of NYC and the 9/11 museum to share his experiences of the events that day. His reflections of the trip experience are incorporating into his graduation address at commencement. The students work with parent attorneys for several weeks to develop a Mock Trial that is heard in Newark Federal Court by a parent who is also a Federal Court Judge. In addition, Police Officers walk through the school regularly and work with students through the LEAD program. Furthermore, 6th graders attend the borough's Veteran's Day ceremony at Borough Hall and invite the Veterans back to the school for a reception where they engage in a question and answer dialogue about their time in the service.

The town can be proud that EFS is known for small class size, inclusive educational settings, individualized instruction with one on one attention, and consistent and ongoing home/school communication within a nurturing environment. The academic rigor paired with developmentally appropriate character education supports, lead only to the success and growth of every student that walks the halls of EFS both scholastically and social-emotionally. With our highly trained staff members, cutting edge technology, and high academic standards and performance there is no surprise that we are considered by some as that high achieving

"private public school."

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

Essex Fells School provides Preschool through Sixth Grade students with a rich and rigorous curriculum. Preschool students attend a three-hour session where instruction is engaging and encapsulates appropriate developmental activities. The fully inclusive classroom boasts two highly effective teachers who work cooperatively to identify student needs and set the foundation for academic success. Preschool students participate in daily specials as part of an enriching curriculum. Language Arts milestones include the introduction of phonemic awareness and the FUNdations Reading Program. Gross and fine motor skills are both gained and strengthened through the use of small group activities and one-to-one teaching models. Independence is fostered through tray work focused on self-help skills, fine motor development, academic reinforcement, and real life connections. Students transitioning into Kindergarten from EFS Preschool are ready to learn and flourish with the opportunities presented in the early childhood curriculum.

Teachers in each successive grade work collaboratively to adequately prepare students for each grade level. The primary grades, kindergarten through third, create engaging learning environments through multi-sensory approaches. Teachers implement benchmark assessments in order to address the specific learning goals of each student. In Language Arts, teachers individualize small reading instruction through Developmental Reading Assessment Scores. Guided reading opportunities allow students to gain fluency, comprehension and oral reading skills while working closely with a teacher. Moreover, students improve reading skills through close readings of Anthology texts during whole group instruction. Multiple Language Arts blocks are dedicated to implementing the foundational tools to become exceptional writers. Extensive and consistent unit studies provide writing instruction for mastery of frameworks and genres. Students apply learned concepts through modern online programs such as StudyIsland and RAZkids. Students gain a strong understanding of language in the FUNdations Reading Program implemented through third grade. In order to strengthen core areas of language, both lower and upper grades complete grammar units focused on the conventions of writing and vocabulary along with their application across the curriculum. The teachers supplement where needed in order to support lower level learners and routinely modify assignments. Each school year begins with individual assessments that identify each student's learning level. Assessments are compared to identify similarities in the ranking measures. Teachers review multiple means of assessments to target the best learning style for each student. Further, through Individualized Education Plans, special education students are monitored through behavior analysis as well as targeted goals and objectives. Though the curriculum is plentiful in resources, teachers supplement based upon individual class needs. While the core curriculum is a significant guideline, teachers do not find it binding. Primary grade instruction is teacher guided and tailored to foundational skill sets while the upper grade students are encouraged to become independent learners.

Social Studies instruction has been designed with respect to the expectations set forth in the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards. Teachers instill key concepts regarding communities at local, state, and national levels. Students in the lower grades study the significance of local community aspects and leaders, a student's place in relation to these locations and how this further branches out to a larger scale. Significant historic events and leaders comprise social studies coursework and expand into the upper grades. Within these grades, studies incorporate U.S. history and later ancient civilizations. Recently, teachers have implemented current event articles through the programs Newsela and Achieve3000. Through each program's reading level identification, students are exposed to relevant social information while maintaining their individual learning levels. This approach to learning allows student to access Language Arts and Social Studies simultaneously.

Science and Math curricula are intertwined as most recently evidenced in Science Technology Engineering Arts and Math programming. Curricular science approaches include STEAM initiatives and interactive learning. Currently, the science initiatives align to the approaching Next Generation standards and are therefore under continuous revision. Teachers imbue opportunities for students to work beyond the classroom in order to tie curriculum standards to life skills. Students participate in engaging learning opportunities that apply knowledge from multiple subject areas to global concepts. Through STEAM

initiatives, teaching teams collaborate to provide rich learning environments and hands on approaches to learning. Students develop leadership and team building skills within this college and career readiness path. This further supports the sixth grade's seamless transition into the regional middle/high school. The sixth grade team works cooperatively with the regional middle school to ensure that students are well prepared and easily acclimated.

In addition, the recently implemented TREP\$ Marketplace, which is an abbreviation of Entrepreneur encourages and supports students in creating, marketing, and selling products to the school community. This learning strategy provides students with independent learning skills while aligning to curriculum grade level goals. Teachers at each grade level implement age appropriate science and math lessons while simultaneously challenging student development. Teachers in the lower grades, emphasize the use of manipulatives to foster concrete learning experiences. Within every grade level, student centered investigative learning promotes fundamental content knowledge and is observed through daily math blocks. Fully inclusive classroom models allow for small group instruction to support students that require extensive support. Further, math practices extend to include technology programs such as IXL and Study Island. Students access relevant course topics through both whole class instruction and independent study. The progressive approach to using technology within math allows students multiple means of learning. Students performing above grade level utilize online accounts to strengthen skills beyond the classroom. Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth is contracted for students performing more than one grade level above in Language Arts and/or Math as an enrichment opportunity in addition to their grade level curriculum.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Curriculum takes on many faces at Essex Fells School, as learning opportunities often extend outside of core subjects and even beyond classroom walls. Utilizing content areas in new ways has supported the district's ability to develop learners who are truly college and career ready. The recent pilot of a Science Technology Engineering Arts Mathematics (STEAM) program, funded through efforts from the Essex Fells Foundation for Educational Excellence, was spearheaded by the school's Art Teacher and select content area teachers. This hands-on and innovative program has exceeded expectations of incorporating the arts into classroom subject matter in ways that both enrich curriculum studies and further engage students. In addition to STEAM, Essex Fells focuses its efforts to utilize both pre-existing programs, and newly designed courses, as a consistent component of education. Students of all ages attend Art, Technology, Physical Education, Music, Art Class Meeting, and Media classes on a weekly basis; fine-tuning skills and extending their exposure to new mediums in educational practice.

Recent additions to the Art department include an in-house kiln, four pottery wheels, and the exploration of 3D printer usage. These, and a variety of other resources are utilized as part of an annual Music, Art and Technology Show. At this "gallery" event, multimedia projects completed from Technology classes cover the school's hallways and splash brightly across computer screens and iPads, displaying cutting edge work from the early ages of preschool and beyond. The evening opens with an instrumental and choral performance followed by pockets of musicians lining the halls to provide music during the art/tech presentation. In support of independent selection, students at the school can also enroll in orchestra, band, chorus, and small-group instrumental programs. An emphasis on tradition is formally exhibited during all school-wide concerts through the singing of the school's alma mater, "Hail Essex Fells", a song know by all.

Success beyond core curriculum drives the educators at Essex Fells to open new doors for the students attending. A one-to-one laptop initiative in grades 3-6 allows the daily whole-class use of progressive programs such as Achieve3000, Rosetta Stone, Google Docs and Classroom, and Newslea. Students are also provided with individual email accounts, external hard drives, and website accounts, extending access after school hours and giving the option for independent practice. Media classes introduce students to a multitude of authors and texts as they access databases and compile research for assignments in different content areas. Through the Media program, accomplished authors visit Essex Fells to review the impacts literature has had on their lives. Technology such as Smart boards and document cameras can be found in almost all content areas, yet not everywhere. Students at Essex Fells begin learning cursive penmanship in second grade, increasing its inclusion in the curriculum year after year. This traditional writing practice, often deemed "ancient", is highly regarded by the school's educators for its influence on student writing

fluency.

Physical Education, Health, and L.E.A.D. classes at Essex Fells work to develop the children's awareness for fitness and daily life choices. PE classes address sports skills and overall fitness with focus on team building, strategical approaches, and sportsmanship. Whole school PE events are scheduled annually including Olympics and Project ACES. At every grade level the curriculum works towards growth in mental and physical development. Students work with peers to discuss the importance of "healthy living" for today and tomorrow. The school also focuses on supporting others in their efforts to maintain a life of health as well, participating in fundraising events such as Jump Rope for Heart. The 2015-2016 classes recently raised funds and awareness, attaining a new personal donation record that surpassed \$25,000. Focus on nutrition can also be found in the daily lunchroom at the Elementary School. Children select lunch from a fully organic menu, balanced by fresh vegetables and fruits five days a week.

Art Class Meetings are a unique program hosted by the school's Art Therapist, who meets each week to discuss character education with classes. The students use art as a method of reflection and expression after they take part in open discussion. The design of this course allows children to review topics of acceptance, confidence, peer interactions, and conflict resolution. This development of a positive learning culture greatly aids in the sense of community that exists amongst all at Essex Fells.

3. Instructional Methods and Interventions:

Essex Fells School approaches instruction in a progressive, open-minded, and thorough manner. Programs and curriculum are revised and updated to align with the latest standards-based research on a continual basis. Teachers have daily team planning periods to insure students across a grade level are receiving the most effective and comprehensive lesson delivery possible. The teaching staff has been proactive about aligning curriculum as soon as standards changes are made. They make necessary curriculum changes to insure those minimum requirements are far exceeded through unique, genuine, and authentic learning opportunities in their classrooms. Students use technology as an everyday tool in their learning. Over the last several years, through a one-to-one laptop initiative in the upper grades, I-Pads to support educational apps and emersion World Language curricula, desktops in every classroom and Media Center, Smart Boards, Document Cameras and the numerous leveled web based programs the students utilize on a regular basis, it is no wonder why they had a seamless transition to the next generation of State assessments. Individual student data from the numerous programs enable the faculty to identify and pinpoint student strengths and weaknesses on an ongoing basis in order to modify and tailor student programming to their level.

The Intervention and Referral Services Team and Child Study Team meet monthly to review and modify plans for every student identified by a teacher and discuss possible future candidates for supplemental services. Whether a need is academic such as basic skills instruction to fill in identified gaps in skills acquisition or enrichment programming beyond the grade level curriculum differentiation, a plan will be developed with all stakeholders and reviewed after 10 weeks to make further recommendations for the intervention. In the event of a behavioral or emotional need, interventions such as a behavior plan, social skills, mentors, or art therapy can be scheduled and will again be monitored and modified on a short-term basis. The team is constantly brainstorming innovative and effective approaches to support the students, teachers, and parents when a student is not meeting the expectations of the grade level.

In addition to typical teacher correspondence, parents are contacted on a regular basis to complete the triad of support when a student is receiving supplemental services. A comprehensive arsenal of informal and formal assessments track our students growth over their tenure at Essex Fells School. Traditional teacher observation and functional student performance are paired with standardized assessments such as Developmental Reading Assessments, AimsWeb, Measurement of Academic Progress, and Partnership for College and Career Readiness to create a student profile that encompasses a look at student performance from a global perspective. Input from parents, the school psychologist, District Art Therapist, and teachers round out the comprehensive picture, which is considered when discussing a student's progress. Much of the success EFS experiences can be attributed to each individual child being examined not solely through their academics but also through a child's social-emotional development as well.

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

Essex Fells School is committed to providing a thorough and well-diversified picture of each student through multiple measures on an ongoing and consistent schedule. Teacher observation combined with district created assessments and standardized tests give a sense of how the whole child performs in comparison to themselves, their peers, as a grade, school, state-wide and nationally. The students of Essex Fells School learn at a very young age that they are accountable for their work and that they must take pride in each task to best reflect their true abilities. After each assessment period, data is shared with staff and analyzed as grade level teams to identify students that may need further support or extended challenges to meet their full potential. Assessment data such as the graphs from Measurement of Academic Progress are shared with parents two to three times per year to track student growth and interpret what needs, if any, the child is exhibiting through that growth measure. Developmental Reading Assessments and Lexile Levels are also used to determine a child's growth is progressing at a developmentally appropriate rate.

Teachers utilize short skill based assessments on a daily and weekly basis to create and modify lessons and groups to target specific areas of weakness/enrichment for instruction. In addition, student portfolios are developed to review with parents and future teachers as a timeline of learning. Computer administered assessments and programs such as MAP and Achieve 3000 along with our technology rich curriculum have proven to prepare students for the next generation of state assessments as evidenced by our level of success on the recent implementation of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career tests. Essex Fells is pleased that the parents in our educational community valued the importance of this assessment through a one hundred percent participation rate in its initial administration. BOE members and parents have commented on the high performance of EFS students on the PARCC tests and were pleased with the consistency across grade levels and subject areas.

Essex Fells staff maintains current pedagogical skills through ongoing professional development opportunities including long-term in-service training and short term outsourced workshops. The teachers consistently reflect on their lessons as part of the observation/evaluation process. In addition, the Student Growth Objective mandate is a valid process at EFS, rather than a compliance indicator. Teachers approach their craft in a serious and committed manner providing the students not only a top rated education but also positive role models in all facets of their learning.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

Essex Fells School begins each day with a positive message from the Superintendent/Principal, along with a 6th grade volunteer, from the Project Wisdom program. This message is often woven into reflective writing assignments and discussions within the classrooms. Lessons such as these contribute to the confidence and trustworthiness the EFS Community feels towards the teachers who consistently maintain the school's structure of excellence. EFS educators transcend their personal values through the implementation of authentic curriculum and self-selected professional development.

Monthly Spirit Meetings are hosted on the first Friday of each month for the entire school community where expectations are reaffirmed and students are recognized for showing acts of Respect, Responsibility, and Kindness. These sessions also take time out to acknowledge students' positive academic accomplishments through our Bengal Pride Award Initiative. It is an environment that exudes school pride through reflection on values, goals, and daily mindfulness. Student council directed themes stimulate cohesiveness amongst the student body as evidenced by the use of peer buddies between 6th graders and preschool/kindergarten students and mascot leadership. To conclude each meeting, the value of tradition is expressed through a choral reciting of the EFS chant. Excitement echoes as students proudly announce, "Good, Better, Best! Never let it Rest! Until Your Good is Better and Your Better is Best! Go Bengals!"

Weekly Class Meetings guided by the district Art Therapist reinforce the behaviors that support a positive climate and culture conducive to learning and growing at EFS. Students generate genuine discussions focused on conflict resolution, confidence building, and effective communication skills. Mentor relationships are assigned and developed as needed to assist students requiring peer support and others in need of assertiveness training. The students' ability to foster a positive learning environment through implementation of these skills, results in recognition through "Bengal Pride Awards". A themed initiative of earning 200 school-wide awards is developed annually. Attainment of this goal results in recognition through an innovative party/trip. Themes such as "Soaring to New Heights" and "We're all Different Fish but we Swim Together" come to life as students take part in multi-sensory and engaging activities both on and off campus.

The students come together for several all school activities such as the Earth Day Glen Clean-Up to build camaraderie within the school family. 5th and 6th grade students begin and end each year with activities focused on team-building. In September, a ropes course trip and sleepover promote new relationships among the students encouraging each other through numerous team building activities. In June, a rock-climbing trip and camping sleepover including adventure education obstacles culminate the year solidifying the importance of teamwork, trust, and encouragement among each other.

In addition to funding the all school party, the Essex Fells Parent Teacher Association and Educational Foundation provide numerous opportunities for our students and staff to extend the learning beyond the boundaries of our school budget. A Musical, Variety Show, Study Hall, Cultural Arts Programs, After School Enrichment Classes, Teacher Appreciation acknowledgement, Lunch Clubs, and pilot programs such as Science Technology Engineering Arts and Math only scratch the surface of the commitment these organizations exhibit towards enriching the opportunities at EFS. This priceless collaboration between community and school drives success beyond the limits of the classroom.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

"We, the teachers, students, parents, and administration of the Essex Fells School, comprise a vibrant, interwoven community with shared goals and values. Each of us is an important contributor to the success of the entire community. We are an established community of learners – but also a community with values that go beyond academic achievement. Our goals include the constant promotion of civility and support for one another." The preceding statement is the opening comment from our Parent/Student Handbook and establishes the accountability each stakeholder holds for the success of Essex Fells School, it's students,

and community.

Due to our small class sizes, the teachers are able to develop a personal relationship with each family he/she serves. Weekly correspondence to each family at EFS is a regular occurrence. Positive accomplishments within the classroom are shared with parents via phone call or e-mail. Conversely, if a student should earn lower than a 70% on any given assignment, the parents are also contacted to discuss the preparation and a plan of remediation moving forward. Personalized comments on report cards along with face to face conferences in the fall and spring formally address student progress; however, numerous meetings take place in between those opportunities should a teacher or parent deem it necessary.

This year a parent portal was introduced to all parents of preschool through 6th grade students. This online tool offers parents an opportunity to review student progress through a grade book format of assignments, assessment, and corresponding comments. In addition, report cards are fully electronic and can be accessed by parent through any device. Teachers can track parent access and determine whether a parent has logged in to view student progress and to what frequency. Parent Visitation is an event when nearly all families come to spend time in the classrooms to capture a reference as to where, how, and with whom their child interacts on daily basis making grades and feedback more contextual.

A weekly school-wide bulletin titled The Week At A Glance is developed and disseminated via our electronic community outreach system. Upcoming events, an address from the Superintendent, PTA Press, Student Council News, Borough opportunities for students, and special school events are all included. Parents are welcome to attend events at the school, which are broadcasted through the WAAG. A recent special activity advertised through the WAAG was Family Fun Night. No homework was assigned and families were asked to spend quality time together. They write a short description about what they did and share it in class.

The school's Safety Team hosts three Parent Academies for parents to attend during the school year. Topics such as Childhood Anxiety, Substance Abuse, Internet/Social Media Safety, and CPR certification are presented to interested parents during the school day or after hours. Parents are also invited to attend our monthly Student Spirit Meetings to hear the important messages encouraging Respect, Responsibility, and Kindness while also experiencing student recognition for Bengal Pride Awards in front of their peers, teachers, Superintendent/Principal, and EFS mascot, Mr. Bengal.

The school website www.efsk-6.org is an easily navigated site where parents can access calendars, teacher websites and assignments, district and BOE information and current announcements. We are currently updating the site as to provide an even more effective means of communication with parents and community members alike. A school Instagram account has been developed for parents to gain a glimpse into the daily activities their students are engaged in. Teachers submit photos of classroom activities to administration for approval and posting in a secure manner on the site so that only parents can access the images.

3. Professional Development:

Essex Fells School supports its faculty with a combination on long-term ongoing in-service trainings as well as short-term outsourced workshops. Grade level planning periods everyday have been made a priority when developing the master schedule over the past several years. This precious time allows colleagues to plan lessons and projects together, check in during the process, and reflect on the outcomes. In addition, administration also employs substitute teachers on a monthly basis in an effort to support cross grade level and subject specific articulation. Curriculum review and revision, lesson development, assessment analysis and project brainstorming are all topics of discussion during these productive and impactful sessions. A consortium PD afternoon is set aside each year to allow for the four sending districts of the regional middle/high school to share and align curriculum as much as possible to best aid in the transition to West Essex. When new programs are being considered the teachers pilot units of the programs to compare and assess their effectiveness. After adoption, the teachers are supported through training as evidenced by recent opportunities from Achieve 3000, Empowering Writers, and Conquer Mathematics.

A peer team of veteran teachers lead a district program coined BEST, Building Excellence and Synergy Together to offer support on current district topics to any staff member on a monthly basis. Non-tenured teachers are required to attend, as are first year teachers along with their mentors. Tenured staff members are invited to participate in discussions on a myriad of topics such as report card comments, conferences, observations, trip planning, and administrative expectations. This collegial approach has offered a non-threatening environment for staff members to ask questions and gain advice from peers.

A Language Arts Consultant oversees the pure implementation of the Foundations program at the K-3 levels as well as assisting with the development of Wilson trained teachers for intensive reading intervention. She helps with the organization of ongoing Language Arts initiatives such as the National Writing Project. The NWP through Rutgers University supports our second through sixth grade teachers as writers themselves as well as teachers of writing with three trainings per year over the course of three years. The consultant acts as an additional level of support armed with numerous certifications and years of experience and has developed a positive rapport and trust with EFS teachers.

Essex Fells teachers are highly educated mainly due to the demand and expectations of our district. Continuing education opportunities are encouraged and supported financially for teachers to remain current in their given subject area. Faculty Meetings go beyond the save the dates of upcoming event types of agendas. Monthly turn-key training from teachers who have attended a variety of professional development activities give an opportunity to other teachers to glean new ideas and information from all subject areas. Anyone interested can gain further details from the teachers who shared to apply to future Professional Learning Community meetings. Mandated trainings are completed through an online program and can be accomplished on each individual teacher's timeline.

4. School Leadership:

The Essex Fells School is lead by a Superintendent/Principal who is the sole administrator for the district. Although that presents challenges as far as wearing many hats, it does afford the educational leader the unique opportunity to become invested in all phases of each district/school initiative. It is rare to experience a Superintendent that can participate in every level of an initiative on such an intimate level. Seeing a project from its inception, through the stages of planning and implantation, and follow it through to the delivery at the student level is a special opportunity for an administrator and one that is appreciated at EFS. Having been in the district for over 6 years, the consistency and continuity provided by EFS's administrator has proven to benefit the district as evidenced by the increase in all academic performance areas, efficiency in fiscal decisions, and development of personnel support and effectiveness. An Administrative Assistant serves as a Confidential Secretary to the Supt./Principal as well as the School Secretary. She assists with personnel documents, State reporting, agenda development, substitute assignments, and parental correspondence to name a few.

The Superintendent/Principal works closely with the Board of Education made up of five dedicated parents of EFS students. The BOE shares the sentiments that having consistent leadership lends to a solid and established learning environment for students. Parental relationships with administration are one of respect and trustworthiness. Parental outreach and integration into the school's educational process is on the rise and a priority for the current administration. The BOE is supportive of the administration and upholds their oath of representing the community voice and all students of EFS while remaining a policy making board.

Two lead teachers are assigned to coordinate the I&RS/504 team, assist with State testing, lead BEST, and serve as teacher in charge should the administrator need to be out of the building. These teachers, one assigned to each of the buildings, provide an additional level of support to new and veteran teachers alike and many times serve as a liaison between staff and administration. They serve on numerous committees with other colleagues and assist in the interview process of new hires. During the summer months, these teachers are eager to assist with the updates and new initiatives involved in the opening of a school year.

The School Business Administrator oversees all financial aspects of the school/district. In addition to BOE budget procedures, the business office manages the PTA and Foundation purchase order paperwork as well. As exhibited through recent budgets and audits, the district is financially healthy while maintaining the 2%

cap and delivering a Reward School level education as defined by the NJDOE. An Administrative Assistant assists with the payroll, purchasing/receiving, Student Data System, NJSMAART reporting, and Alert system to name a few. The BA oversees Buildings and Grounds, Maintenance projects, and daily tasks. Recent accomplishments in that area include the successful replacement of all four boiler rooms over the course of four budget years in addition to major security enhancements including 32 cameras, monitors, door and window security upgrades.

Each administrative endeavor at EFS begins and ends with student safety and success at its crux. The relationships built in and out of the school have all lead to the successes of our students and community as a whole. It is an honor and privilege to work in a unique and special environment among such scholars of distinction.

Part VI – INDICATORS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Former students often return to visit EFS with words of affirmation as to how well prepared they were for their academic placements beyond EFS whether it be at the regional Middle/High School or a Private School setting. In addition, for several years, The New Jersey State Assessment of Skills and Knowledge demonstrated a majority, over 90% of our students in the proficient and advanced proficient range. Most recently, our practices were validated through the students meeting or exceeding expectations across all grade levels on the new State assessment, Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers.

As educators, the EFS staff often reflects on recent-past performances to determine how we should mold a plan for moving forward in educating the students of Essex Fells. Everyday classroom experiences encompassing innovative lessons, real world trip experiences and enriching assemblies are all considered along with student work samples and assessment results to create a road map of future initiatives for the school. In addition to student performance and teacher observation, parental feedback and community input is gathered on a continual basis to best develop an accurate picture of the school's perception from all angles. Only after you have identified and taken responsibility for all weaknesses can we begin to strengthen and overcome any and all obstacles that prevent EFS from becoming your best. Fortunately, we are in a position where it is often a difficult process for staff to identify a means in which we can improve based solely on standardized assessments. Only after we have taken a deeper dive into what makes up each child we educate do we begin to uncover areas that can be strengthened and challenged both academically and social-emotionally. Student portfolios are an example of how teachers collect valuable growth data of our students. This work is shared with parents not only at conferences but at student centered opportunities such as the 6th grade poetry share when parents come in to review the student work over time with their child.

The distinct difference between Essex Fells School and other schools is the level of parent involvement. Family and friends attend student events at school in staggering numbers. The Parent Visitation, Costume Parade, Olympics, Concerts, Musical, Variety Show, and Trep\$ are a few of the events where nearly all families are represented. This investment of time and support for the students of EFS reflects the priority of education among the community of Essex Fells.

It is apparent that EFS provides a highly individualized program to students, maintains an intimate relationship with parents, and is supported by administration so that the trifecta of supports can encourage a child through each area of development as he/she grows at EFS. It is this approach that proves successful for our school community. Self-reflection, curriculum revision, programming review, and assessment analysis on a regular basis leaves no area of uncertainty. Essex Fells School operates at its pinnacle each day. With that level of attention, success is the outcome, for "Change is the only constant, if the desire to consistently improve is a common goal."