

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. Daniel J. Moore

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

Official School Name Oconto Falls Elementary School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 415 Maria Volk Drive

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

City Oconto Falls State WI Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 54154-1254

County Oconto County

Telephone (920) 848-4476 Fax (920) 848-4454

Web site/URL http://www.ocontofalls.k12.wi.us E-mail danmoore@ocontofalls.k12.wi.us

Twitter Handle _____ Facebook Page _____ Google+ _____

YouTube/URL _____ Blog _____ Other Social Media Link _____

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

Date _____

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent*Dr. Dean Hess E-mail deahess@ocontofalls.k12.wi.us

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

District Name Oconto Falls School District Tel. (920) 848-4471

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. Ron Leja

(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
 - 2 High schools
 - 1 K-12 schools
- 6 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	37	39	76
K	44	26	70
1	39	41	80
2	47	32	79
3	50	40	90
4	35	47	82
5	40	32	72
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	292	257	549

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 2 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 0 % Asian
 - 0 % Black or African American
 - 1 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 94 % White
 - 3 % 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: 8%

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	26
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2014 until the end of the 2014-2015 school year	20
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	46
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2014	544
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.085
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	8

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 1 %
4 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: 46 %
Total number students who qualify: 253

8. Students receiving special education services: 19 %
104 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>13</u> Autism | <u>1</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>3</u> Deafness | <u>12</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>6</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>1</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>56</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>4</u> Mental Retardation | <u>2</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |
| <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities | <u>6</u> Developmentally Delayed |

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

	Number of Staff
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers	28
Resource teachers/specialists e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	15
Paraprofessionals	24
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	3

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 20:1

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

Required Information	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012	2010-2011
Daily student attendance	96%	96%	96%	96%	96%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

13. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**

Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2015.

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.

Our district's mission is "to provide a high quality comprehensive education program for all students." Our school's motto is "committed to excellence".

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

Oconto Falls Elementary School (OFES) is the largest school within the Oconto Falls Public School District, a rural K-12 district located approximately 30 miles northwest of the city of Green Bay, Wisconsin. The district offers a rich quality of life for its residents; abundant recreational opportunities; and the advantages of a small town lifestyle. The community possesses a diversified economic base, excellent medical facilities, and a strong tradition of quality schools.

OFES has a current enrollment of 549 students enrolled in pre-kindergarten through 5th grade. This enrollment has increased by approximately 4% over the past ten years. This is in contrast to the overall district enrollment, which has declined by approximately 11% over the past ten years. This declining enrollment, and the subsequent reduction in state aid, has resulted in reduced funding for personnel, supplies, equipment, and services.

The ethnic and cultural diversity of students attending OFES is limited, although in recent years this has slowly been changing. Currently the student body is approximately 6% non-white, and the population of English Language Learners is even smaller – only 1%. Two other demographics that are important when considering OFES are disability status and economic status. Currently 19% of students at OFES have identified disabilities, and 46% come from economically disadvantaged households – up from 33.5% ten years ago. Meeting the needs of these student groups has become a priority for the staff at OFES.

The OFES community continues to take pride in its traditions, programs, and history. Upon entry into the school, you see the school's motto, "Committed to Excellence", displayed prominently. It is the first of the school's core beliefs – that "good enough" is not enough but rather excellence is the goal of everything we do. It is an ambitious goal ... but one that we believe is essential to our work.

While the basis of the National Blue Ribbon School award nomination is core area academic achievement and growth, which are obviously important goals for schools, we feel that providing students with a balanced program that takes into consideration all aspects of student development is equally important to our success as a school. We strive to do this in a number of ways.

In terms of academic development, our school's Response to Intervention program screens all children four times a year and identifies not only struggling learners but also students who are exceeding grade-level expectations. Each grade-level has an Intervention/Enrichment period of between 45-60 minutes built into its schedule that allows teachers to meet student needs at their individual level. In addition, teachers differentiate their daily instruction and assessments in order to meet students' diverse academic needs.

The artistic and creative development of all students is also important at OFES. Each year examples of student work are included in a district-wide art show at the local community library, and individual concerts are held for each grade-level. In addition, an "All Arts Day" is held every April to expose students to various artistic mediums. Every other year, an artist-in-residence program is incorporated into a school week, with past projects including the creation of a school mural, the composition of a school song, and the creation of stained glass windows for our cafeteria. For students interested in performing arts, OFES sponsors several Destination Imagination teams each year to enhance students' creative problem solving.

The physical development of students is also important. In addition to physical education classes being provided at each grade-level, students take part in two outdoor recesses per day, along with occasional "brain breaks" within the classroom throughout the school day. This year, a movement room was created to provide students with attention deficit disorder and other sensory/motor delays a place to participate in research-based exercises throughout their school day. OFES staff offer after school open gym opportunities bi-weekly for students of all abilities.

In terms of student social and emotional growth, classroom guidance time has been added in recent years to give counselors an opportunity to proactively teach and reinforce positive relationships. Counselors have also developed screening and monitoring tools in order to better identify students in need of more intensive

interventions and to track their progress. In order to cultivate innate leadership skills, a peer leader program offers fourth and fifth grade students an opportunity to promote school-wide character education initiatives.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly in terms of helping children reach their full potential, OFES strives to build positive relationships with students and families. Students know that they are important to everyone at OFES. Staff members “go the extra mile” as a matter of course in order to help students achieve success. They are flexible, compassionate, and inclusive. The staff at OFES understands that, if approached with passion, open mindedness, and a little humor, there is no better job than working with children. By conveying this feeling to students and families, the result is a great culture for learning at OFES.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

After Wisconsin adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in 2010, the staff at OFES worked for several years to supplement the existing curriculum (Wisconsin Model Academic Standards) with resources in order to better align to the new standards. In 2012-13 and 2013-14, CCSS-aligned mathematics and English language arts textbooks were piloted and selections ultimately adopted.

For the past two years, teachers at OFES have started to approach science in a similar manner through the integration of the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) into the existing science curriculum. Our overall belief is that curriculum needs to be a flexible, progressive, and evolving plan.

Reading/English language arts:

Each grade-level receives 120 minutes of reading/English language arts instruction per day, consisting of whole group comprehension, guided reading groups, independent literacy activities, and word study instruction. Several specific areas of foundational reading and writing skills are incorporated into our balanced and differentiated reading/English language arts instruction.

In relation to basic reading skills, 1st through 5th grade teachers devote approximately 20-30 minutes per day to word study instruction. Pre-kindergarten (4K) and kindergarten (5K) devote approximately 20-30 minutes daily to explicit phonological awareness instruction/activities, using the Literacy Link Program. This instruction is reinforced by specialists during interventions to target similar areas of phonological need.

Comprehension instruction at OFES is built upon consistent grade-level instruction, with adjustment based on student needs. The Houghton Mifflin Journeys reading series guides comprehension skill/strategy instruction. Teachers utilize a 30 minute Intervention/Enrichment period at each grade-level to provide additional Tier 1 small group phonics/comprehension support for students in need. This period is particularly valuable to our advanced students, who are able to explore more challenging texts in greater depth.

In regards to our core writing instruction, approximately one half of our teachers are currently piloting a writer's workshop model. Teachers provide students with explicit strategy-based mini-lessons and then utilize individual conferencing to guide students. The pilot results have been very favorable, particularly in regard to students' motivation to write.

Mathematics:

Each grade-level has scheduled a minimum of 60 minutes of daily mathematics instruction, with the Pearson enVision mathematics series providing the basic structure for instruction. Grade-level teams collaborate weekly in order to adjust pacing, set learning goals, make modifications, and supplement/reinforce the materials with complementary technology programs such as Moby Max and Studyladder. Emphasis is placed on the use of mathematical strategies, vocabulary, and problem solving skills, with particular focus on the incorporation of the Standards for Mathematical Practice into instruction. If students are struggling or excelling in our math instruction, the Intervention/Enrichment period can provide additional instruction time to either remediate or extend skills for diverse learners.

Science:

As previously stated, our science curriculum is evolving as teachers seek to incorporate the more rigorous and relevant Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) into the curriculum. We are using a variety of resources in order to meet the NGSS. At the lower grade-levels, we have sought to integrate science instruction into English language arts instruction through the use of thematic units, which have included guest speakers and virtual field trips, along with other written supplements supporting that unit. At the upper grades, this integrated approach is also followed; however, additional blocks of time are also scheduled specifically for science instruction. At these grade-levels, students complete inquiry based learning in order to produce physical projects. For example, 5th grade students study basic physics

principals such as force, motion, inertia, and friction in order to build cardboard racing sleds, in the “Cardboard Classic” sledding race held at the local tubing hill.

Social Studies:

The social studies curriculum at OFES is taught in a similar manner to science, providing students with integrated thematic units and additional content focus at the upper grades. Mentor texts such as biographies, autobiographies, historical fiction, and realistic fiction are used widely at all grade-levels to teach social studies content while furthering literacy. Websites, current events, and other supplementary resources are also used to make learning relevant. Finally, the social studies curriculum seeks to anchor learning in real life with engaging activities and experiences such as field trips to museums, community service projects, project based learning, and exploring other cultures through virtual field trips and literature.

Preschool:

The Oconto Falls School District was one of the first in Wisconsin to develop a 4K program for all children. The OFES Early Childhood (EC) and 4K program curriculum is tightly aligned to the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards (WMELS) and provides children with a play and sensory-based learning environment. In recent years, as the academic rigor of K-12 education has increased, the EC, 4K, and 5K teachers have collaborated to ensure that CCSS-based learning targets help inform the WMELS-based instruction at the EC and 4K level so that children are well prepared for subsequent grade-levels. The positive impact of our EC and 4K programs is most apparent as children are transitioning to 5K with higher level skills and readiness to continue learning.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Encore classes offered at OFES include art, physical education, music, guidance, technology, and library. This instruction takes place in a one hour encore block built into each grade-level’s schedule. We strongly believe that the education and development of the whole child is of equal importance to the teaching of academics; therefore our commitment to teaching these encore classes has not wavered. We feel that it is crucial that children are enabled to discover their full range of talents and interests.

The physical education (PE) curriculum supports the physical, intellectual, and social-emotional development of all students. Students have the opportunity to maintain adequate levels of physical fitness through not only class time in the gym but also through swim safety classes, cross country skiing, archery, snow-shoeing, and physical fitness tests. The PE curriculum engages students and helps inspire them to pursue a lifetime of fitness related activities. 4K students have PE for 30 minutes one time per week, as do students requiring adaptive physical education. 5K and 1st grade students receive PE for 30 minutes three times per week. 2nd through 5th grade students receive PE for 30 minutes two times per week.

The music curriculum provides students with a variety of opportunities for active engagement and involvement in music as students sing, play instruments, create, read, and notate music; evaluate performances; dance and move; and learn about music theory, practice, and history. Individual grade-level concerts are held throughout the school year to give students rich performance opportunities. 4K students have music for 30 minutes one time per week, as do students requiring adaptive music instruction. 5K through 5th grade students receive music instruction for 30 minutes two times per week.

The art curriculum is based on the Wisconsin Visual Arts and Design Standards. Art from various time periods, cultures and styles are introduced with each project. Proper art vocabulary is acquired as the students develop skills within the guidelines of the elements and principles of art. Creativity and craftsmanship are both stressed in art classes. In the age of “instant” information, students learn how to take their time to achieve quality results. At OFES, students in each grade-level produce projects in a variety of mediums, including ceramics, paintings, drawings, printmaking, and crafts. Each year, new art projects build on the skills students learned in previous years. 5K through 5th grade students receive art instruction in a 60 minute block once per week.

The technology curriculum taught at OFES is based on the development readiness of our students. Students in 2nd through 5th grades receive technology instruction for 30 minutes two times per week in our computer

lab. Keyboarding skills are a focus at the youngest grades, along with the introduction of basic word processing programs such as Microsoft Word. At the upper grades, keyboarding skills are enhanced, and more advanced applications such as Microsoft Publisher and PowerPoint are introduced. These skills are then applied in the core curriculum areas such as English language arts, science, and social studies through the creation of technology-based projects.

The guidance curriculum at OFES is guided by the Wisconsin Comprehensive School Counseling Model, which encourages schools to integrate a comprehensive approach to develop, support, and nurture healthy, resilient, and successful learners. Students in grades 4K through 5th engage in topics such as decision-making, career awareness, peer relationships, conflict resolution, academic support, substance abuse education, and multicultural awareness. Students in 5K through 2nd grade have guidance class for 30 minutes two times per week, and students in 4K and 3rd through 5th grade have guidance for 30 minutes one time per week.

Finally, library instruction is provided to all students in 4K through 5th grade for 30 minutes one time per week, with students also having the option to check out books at other times throughout the school day. At the lower grade-levels, books are set aside based on different curriculum themes to enhance classroom reading. The library program strives to build student literacy skills and reinforce the place of curriculum concepts in other contexts. This year, the OFES library has joined with over 540,000 other students around the globe in a global Read Aloud, with educators from around the world sharing their reading experiences with other classrooms through the use of technology.

3. Instructional Methods and Interventions:

The underlying instructional approach at OFES is multifaceted. Teams spend time each week collaborating around instruction and assessment to ensure consistent grade-level teaching that is aligned to current grade-level standards. This collaboration helps reinforce and extend learning for individual students and groups of students. By taking this approach, the diverse learning needs of students in each classroom can be met through differentiation of both instruction and assessment.

In addition, OFES strongly adheres to the gradual release of responsibility model in all subject areas as a core foundation of instruction. We have found that explicit modeling and guided practice, followed by facilitation of independent practice, provides students with the best opportunities for success. The foundation of our Response to Intervention (RtI) system is the universal instruction that classroom teachers provide to all students. By differentiating instruction and implementing the gradual release of responsibility model, teachers are able to successfully meet the needs of most students in their classes.

OFES has made a conscious effort to align our academic interventions to the core instruction that students receive so that they complement, rather than compete, with each other. Our RtI system of “tiers” is best visualized as a wedding cake, with several layers stacked on top of each other and supporting higher levels. Each tier of intervention, starting in the classroom, is built upon previous tiers of intervention, and at no time is a tier removed until the student’s needs have been remediated.

As a part of the RtI process, universal screeners are administered four times per year to all students to determine their growth and levels of proficiency. Coinciding with the universal screenings are grade-level data meetings in which all student assessment data is reviewed. The focus of the data meetings is two-fold. The first focus is to review data to identify any students who did not meet our benchmarks and determine if additional interventions may be needed, as well as to identify students who are above the 90th percentile for enrichment. The second focus is to review data for students already receiving intervention to analyze progress and determine if the intensity of the intervention is appropriate and adjust accordingly based on student progress and need. As interventions become more intensive, the focus is on providing more instructional time in that area with specialists or other trained staff, in collaboration with core teachers and core instruction.

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

OFES utilizes assessment results in multiple ways. Grade-level teachers use daily formative assessments, such as observations, questioning and discussion, exit/admit slips, individual whiteboard responses, think/pair/share, worksheets, and kinesthetic assessments, to inform their instruction. These assessments provide immediate feedback on how teachers can adjust their instruction to better address student needs.

Other types of summative assessments, such as weekly quizzes, essays, chapter and unit tests, and student projects, are used to evaluate student proficiency at a point in time. Both formative and summative assessments are used to gauge student growth, which is ultimately our primary goal. Depending upon the ability levels of students in the classroom, assessments may be differentiated. Standards-based grading allows teachers to accurately assess students when giving such differentiated assessments.

Assessments are also a key component of our RtI system at OFES. Our system of universal screeners includes three separate assessments in both reading and math in order to better determine specific student needs as well as prioritize levels of concern. Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark assessments, Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS), Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), and various AIMSweb assessments are utilized as part of the universal screening process. At OFES, we regularly analyze the validity and reliability of our universal screeners in order to ensure that they are accomplishing their purpose. The aforementioned screeners are also used to progress monitor students who are receiving Tier II (monthly) or Tier III (weekly) interventions, as well as students receiving special education services. These progress monitoring results are analyzed, and patterns of learning behavior that would result in adjustment of the intervention are considered. The progress monitoring tool used is dependent on the focus of the intervention.

The results of the assessments are communicated to the parents in a variety of ways. Teachers at all grade-levels communicate daily with parents through assignment notebooks, and parents of 3rd through 5th grade students also have access to their child's grades online. OFES also creates formal progress reports and report cards six times per year. We send home assessment results, as well as letters explaining the scores, for our PALS, MAP, and all required state assessments. Students who participate in Title I and special education have individual assessment score sheets and AIMSweb graphs sent home multiple times per year. Parent-teacher conferences, held October and March each year, are well attended and provide excellent opportunities for maintaining strong two-way communication regarding student progress.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

The culture of OFES is like that of an extended family or a close-knit team. The primary focus of teachers and staff is not just making academic gains, but rather nurturing and supporting the growth of the whole child. All staff members contribute to this culture – both professional and support staff alike. Our daily goal is to create a climate that is welcoming, safe, positive, and conducive to learning and growth.

High expectations for both academics and behavior exist at OFES. Rules are reasonable, fair, and clearly stated. As a school, we adopted a common set of Expectations for Student Behavior in all areas of the building to increase consistency. Positive relationships are critical – if students feel that staff members care about them, they work harder to meet expectations. The primary motivator for students is genuine and meaningful praise, given to reward effort and improvement. When behavioral expectations are not met, consequences are assigned judiciously and with an eye toward learning, not punishment.

Occasionally different types of incentives are offered when classrooms, grade-levels, or even the whole school joins together to meet a particular goal. For example, prior to Christmas this year, our school reached a goal for collecting items for the local food pantry, and the incentive was a 20 minute sledding party and hot chocolate afterward for each grade. It was a simple, inexpensive, and fun way to bring everyone together. Service projects like this are an important component of our school culture, as they encourage children to think beyond themselves and to give back to the community. Other examples include our participation in the Polar Plunge (Special Olympics) and our support of the Honor Flight Network (veterans), to name a just a few.

Staff members also need to feel valued and supported in order to be effective in their work. The collaborative culture at OFES helps colleagues feel connected and less isolated. The principal strives to listen to concerns from staff and to respond in ways that help them to be successful. While expectations for staff are high, they are grounded in practicality, reasonableness, and a focus on real results. Staff appreciate this pragmatic approach. Annual traditions and celebrations help bring a sense of history and togetherness to the staff as well. Overall there is a strong feeling of pride that exists at OFES. Staff members care about students and they care about each other.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

The staff of OFES recognize that what happens outside our school walls impacts the development of our students when they are at school. OFES has a significant number of students who have a variety of very challenging backgrounds and needs. Each student situation requires time, patience, empathy, and collaboration within our school and with outside agencies in order to best serve students and their families. On a daily basis, we have to apply Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory to a significant number of students who come to school with unmet basic needs. We address these needs in many ways.

At OFES, we offer a morning breakfast program and a school based child care program for our students. We collaborate with the local Lionesses Club to provide free school supplies in the fall and free winter clothing items for children in need. Every Christmas season we have a program called Holiday Hope. Through donations of staff members and community organizations, these families are given basic living supplies, presents for Christmas, and food for the holiday season. Our community has a food pantry, and staff and students hold food drives throughout the school year in addition to our staff's monetary donations through our "Blue Jean Monday" tradition.

We work to meet other physical needs as well. Each fall, the Lions Club provides eye screenings to our students, and this early screening has caught a number of serious eye issues very early. The Lions have provided assistance to several students who could not afford glasses. Over the years, OFES has partnered with the county to provide vaccinations during the school day. Local dentists come into school annually to provide sealants to our students. We have also reached out to our local physicians group and presented

information to them regarding school RtI processes so that we can better collaborate in meeting student needs.

Our focus is not just on working with families in need but on connecting with all families. OFES has an active parent group, Partners in Education, which holds book fairs twice per year, helps maintain our playground, fund raises, plans celebrations, provides birthday books to each student, and volunteers in the building. On All Arts Day, artists from the community converge at OFES and share their many talents with our students. Local business have been extremely generous in their support of student learning through offering field trip experiences and other types of support. Our students' success is a result of school, community, and parents working together.

3. Professional Development:

OFES approaches professional development in a focused manner, subscribing to the belief that “the enemy of the great is the good”. Consequently, we carefully consider major area(s) of professional development that will be most beneficial to student learning and then focus our efforts and limited resources accordingly. This is a challenge, as there are always new and exciting ideas to consider. We do occasionally re-prioritize as circumstances demand; however, we do strive to follow through with professional development initiatives that have been deemed important.

Decisions regarding professional development needs are based on a collaboration of staff and administration. Once we have determined a focus, a core group of teacher-leaders is enlisted to become expert in the particular area, with the ultimate goal of sharing the knowledge and skills gained with colleagues throughout the building. As proficiency is achieved by a growing number of staff members, the new learning becomes the standard throughout the building. Empowering our staff with the capability of sharing their expertise has resulted in consistently high standards throughout the building.

A good example of this approach is currently occurring at OFES in the area of writing. For years, staff have observed that students' writing skills have not met expectations. During the 2014-15 school year, teams at each grade-level, working under the leadership of the reading specialist, developed writing rubrics to promote greater consistency. This school year, ten teachers are piloting a best practice writers' workshop model of instruction, with the reading specialist serving as the instructional coach. The results of the pilot have been very encouraging, and additional teachers have volunteered to join the pilot next year. Following the 2016-17 school year, we will have extensive conversations around writing instruction and will formalize our direction.

Professional development at OFES also occurs regularly in a less formal way. Staff members are constantly sharing their knowledge and skills to build the capacity of their colleagues. For example, technology integration is an ongoing focus of our staff, and several staff members are the recognized leaders/"go to" persons when there are general technology questions. Other staff members have explored various online instructional resources, such as MobyMax, XtraMath, and Studyladder, when there was an identified need for intervention and enrichment activities. They researched possible options, experimented with them, and then presented to the staff their recommendations. Still other staff have volunteered to become team trainers for the online data management system eduCLIMBER. In short, there is an effective combination of formal and informal systems of professional development that exist at OFES.

4. School Leadership:

The leadership philosophy within OFES is solidly founded in developing a shared vision and planning between the building principal and staff. The building principal is diligent in his research and planning related to school improvement that often starts with an important “big idea”, which is then framed in a practical way for staff. Staff collaborate with each other and the principal to develop that big idea into a shared vision which is founded in research and based on student needs as they exist at OFES. Once the vision is developed there is a continual process of review and revision that is led by the building principal and key staff members.

An example of building leadership using this shared vision can be seen in the process that was used to develop a stronger building schedule. The principal shared a few key features that would be needed in the building schedule, but then allowed staff to take this big idea and develop a schedule that provides more consistency for learning and maximized important learning times for students. The structure of some staff members' schedules, particularly core teachers, needed to change significantly in the new model. Therefore, several of these teachers were an integral part of the schedule development process to gain their insight. Because of creating that shared vision, the outcome of the schedule was viewed positively by staff and has been an important part of creating a system to improve student learning.

Other staff members at OFES also assume leadership roles, based on their areas of expertise, in order to constantly drive improvement. The elaborate RtI system at OFES was initially developed through the collaboration and leadership of our reading specialist and school psychologist. Informal leadership can also be found throughout OFES – within each grade-level and department. Staff members understand that, if they have a thoughtfully considered, innovative idea that is in alignment to our schools mission of being “committed to excellence” in terms of our student program, they are encouraged to take the initiative and run with it.

One final aspect of the leadership philosophy at OFES is an appreciation for the importance of the free and respectful exchange of ideas. There are many strong personalities among the staff and a variety of perspectives regarding the best manner of educating children. Sometimes tensions are high and there is disagreement. However, we strive to always maintain respectful relationships while engaging in vigorous professional dialogue around ideas that are best for students. We are all on the same team.

Part VI – INDICATORS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS

While it is difficult to single out one practice as being the “most important” to the success of OFES, the consensus is that staff collaboration has driven the overall academic gains, particularly in regard to closing achievement gaps. There is a great deal of collective knowledge, skill, and experience that exists among our school staff, and collaboration around key issues of teaching, learning, student development, and student growth honors this.

At OFES, collaboration takes place on a number of levels. At the most structured level, collaboration takes place four times per year through grade-level data meetings. Facilitated by our school’s reading specialist and Title I coordinator and attended by the grade-level teams, principal, and other specialists, at the data meetings review and analyze the benchmark assessment scores of students in each grade-level. As a part of the dialogue, progress monitoring data is also examined for students who had previously been identified for Tier II or Tier III interventions in the RtI process. Most importantly, collaboration as to the most appropriate interventions for students takes place at these meetings. It is a highly involved process in which everyone assumes responsibility and accountability meeting student needs. All too often, we hear that some students “fall through the cracks” in schools; however, at OFES, we believe that we are able to catch all students because of this systematic process of collaboration.

Another level of collaboration that takes place more frequently is the weekly grade-level team meeting. Built into our building schedule is a 60 minute block of time for encore instruction, and it is during this time that teams meet, generally one or two times per week. At these team meetings, core curriculum planning takes place, common assessments results are analyzed, individual student needs are discussed, and the overall grade-level climate is constantly reviewed. Having this time built into the school day has furthered the culture of collaboration and professionalism tremendously.

One final level of collaboration takes place through the Principal’s Advisory Committee, which meets monthly. Made up of representatives of each grade-level and department as well as support staff, this group offers the principal input on school matters that require discussion and in-depth problem solving. Whenever issues of significance have arisen, such as master scheduling, common behavioral expectations, and standards-based grading, the Principal’s Advisory Committee has weighed in. The result has been better decision making and a feeling among staff that they have a true voice in the direction of the school.