

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

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Mr. Richard Edwards

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

Official School Name Ft. Caspar Academy

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 4100 West 38th Street

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

City Casper State WY Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 82604-4453

County Natrona County

Telephone (307) 253-3400 Fax (307) 253-3450

Web site/URL http://fortcasparacademy.com/ E-mail richard\_edwards@natronaschools.org

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\*Mr. Steve Hopkins E-mail steve\_hopkins@natronaschools.org  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Natrona County School District #1 Tel. (307) 253-5200

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

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_  
(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

The original signed cover sheet only should be converted to a PDF file and uploaded via the online portal.

*\*Non-public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, write N/A in the space.*

## Part I – Eligibility Certification

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

1. The school configuration includes one or more of grades K-12. (Schools on the same campus with one principal, even a K-12 school, must apply as an entire school.)
2. The public school has met their state's accountability requirements (i.e., avoided sanctions) in participation, performance in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics, and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate) using the most recent accountability results available for the year prior to nomination.
3. To meet final eligibility, a public school must meet the state's accountability requirements (i.e., avoided sanctions) in participation, performance in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics, and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate) for the year in which they are nominated (2015-2016) and be certified by the state representative. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
4. If the school includes grades 7 or higher, the school must have foreign language as a part of its curriculum.
5. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2010 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
6. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, or 2015.
7. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's application and/or rescind a school's award if irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state.
8. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
9. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
10. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution's equal protection clause.
11. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

## PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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Data should be provided for the most recent school year (2015-2016) unless otherwise stated.

### DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 27 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 5 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 4 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 36 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	0	0	0
K	27	45	72
1	36	35	71
2	46	34	80
3	40	38	78
4	38	42	80
5	37	42	79
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	224	236	460

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 2 % Asian
  - 0 % Black or African American
  - 7 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 87 % White
  - 4 % 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: 17%

This rate should be calculated using the grid below. The answer to (6) is the mobility rate.

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2014 until the end of the 2014-2015 school year	34
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2014 until the end of the 2014-2015 school year	48
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	82
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2014	469
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.175
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	17

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

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):  
Spanish, Swahili, Russian, Chinese-Mandarin

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 21 %  
Total number students who qualify: 97

8. Students receiving special education services: 7 %  
33 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.

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

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 1
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	3
Classroom teachers	22
Resource teachers/specialists e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	6
Paraprofessionals	11
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	2

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 19:1

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

<b>Required Information</b>	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012	2010-2011
Daily student attendance	94%	95%	94%	95%	95%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

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

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

<b>Post-Secondary Status</b>	
Graduating class size	0
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	0%
Enrolled in a community college	0%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	0%
Joined the military or other public service	0%
Other	0%

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.  
Yes    No X

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.

Let students learn in a structured environment, educate students' intellect and character, advocate parental involvement, ready students with core academic skills, and nurture high standards.

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

Students are not directly selected to attend Fort Caspar Academy any differently than students at any school in Natrona County School District. Natrona County School District has an open enrollment system. Families enroll at Fort Caspar Academy through the district enrollment office and are given a seat at Fort Caspar Academy based on their school request to the district. As long as there is space available at Fort Caspar Academy, students are enrolled. A first come, first served method is used. Once classes are full, parents may choose to place students on a waiting list if they desire. Students on the list are called back as space opens during the year. This is the same process used for all schools in the district. Bussing is provided district-wide so that transportation is not a bar to students attending Fort Caspar or any other school.

## PART III – SUMMARY

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Fort Caspar Academy (FCA) is a public elementary school serving the community of Casper, Wyoming. Casper is a regional center for energy production in central Wyoming. The economy of Casper is largely based on the oil, coal, and natural gas industries. As such we are subject to “boom and bust” economic cycles. As a larger community in a rural state, Casper also serves as a center for retail sales and medical services. The families of Casper, Wyoming reflect this blend of socio-economic strata. One interesting aspect of our energy-driven economy is that during “boom” times households headed by parents with lower levels of education can earn a six-figure income. Students from these families may not qualify for the Free and Reduced Lunch program. Families that have realized financial success without post-secondary education may not value education in the same way as those with a higher socio-economic status. Additionally, students may not arrive in kindergarten with the foundational skills and background knowledge of others in their socio-economic peer group. When our state’s economy enters a bust cycle, as we have just begun in the last year with the fall of oil prices, these families fall on especially hard times. The hardships of situational poverty that come with joblessness become more prevalent, including higher rates of transience, homelessness, and hunger. As a rural state in the center of the country, Wyoming does not have the racial and ethnic diversity of other parts of the country. However as with the rest of the nation, our Hispanic population continues to grow. Fort Caspar Academy serves approximately 460 students in grades kindergarten through fifth grade. Our district, Natrona County School District, employs a district-wide school-of-choice model. Our students at Fort Caspar Academy reflect the ethnic and socio-economic diversity present in our community. Fort Caspar Academy is a center for English Language Acquisition instruction and support within Natrona County School District and therefore brings an additional number of language learners to our school.

Fort Caspar Academy was started in 1995 by a group of concerned parents and educators who wanted a challenging, rigorous curriculum for their children. Their vision was for a back-to-basics classical education that included: a consistent, school-wide behavior management program, an enriching curriculum, strong parental involvement, and a collaborative effort by parents, students, and staff. As a result of this effort, along with two other forward thinking schools, Natrona County School District became a “school of choice” district, to accommodate a variety of parent options and learning styles of students.

For the past 20 years in the Natrona County School District, Fort Caspar Academy has been one of the top performing schools. For the past three years, Fort Caspar Academy has been recognized as one of the few excelling schools in the state of Wyoming.

Fort Caspar Academy is one of only 13 accredited Spalding Language Arts Schools in the United States. Spalding is a multisensory, total language arts program that encompasses reading, writing, speaking, and listening. This child-centered program supports the physical and emotional well being of every child. This program has allowed Fort Caspar students to achieve superior language arts performance.

We use the strengths of My Math along with Saxon math curricula. These programs forge a customized math curriculum that covers all standards at a full grade level ahead. Our practice of using the direct instruction approach to teaching students, allows us to set an accelerated pace in all classrooms to insure that all students are challenged and engaged.

In 1997, Fort Caspar Academy became an accredited Core Knowledge School. Core Knowledge has allowed us to embrace development of the whole child including: a rich background in cultural understanding, the arts, sciences, history, and development of character formation. Core Virtue instruction is essential to enable students to choose high-integrity life styles and become the future leaders of our country. Fort Caspar Academy uses highly trained, classified teaching assistants both to support classroom teachers and provide small group remediation to close learning gaps for specific students. Furthermore, our Response to Intervention team structure identifies and aids students struggling in tier 1 classroom instruction. Our tutoring model monitors student progress and differentiates the needs of identified students.

There are many facets to Fort Caspar Academy’s leadership model. Adult leadership includes a Building Leadership Team, grade level professional learning communities, a highly involved parent advisory group

called the Governing Council, and a strong building administrator who guards Fort Caspar Academy's mission and vision. Student leadership includes an active student council that not only conducts fundraisers, but also adds to a positive school atmosphere. Student council members practice leadership skills by assisting with the FCA school store, researching potential extracurricular activities, and keeping an open ear to their classmates.

## PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

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### 1. Core Curriculum:

Fort Caspar Academy chose The Spalding Method as the choice curriculum for language arts. The founding principal and parents researched and explored a variety of successful language arts programs throughout the United States. They found The Spalding Method met all of the requirements of a highly successful language arts program. Especially appealing was the direct instruction approach to teaching, recommended classical literature, phonics based approach to spelling, and the connection of writing and reading. Our data has shown that students typically perform at or above grade level due because of our fidelity to The Spalding Method.

At early grade levels, the Spalding Method is very explicit with the foundational skills of Common Core. Students learn phonemes, and phonograms as representations of phonemes. Students write, read, and hear the basic phonograms, quickly gaining familiarity with many kindergarten and first grade phonemic awareness and phonics skills. Students are emergent readers by mid-year in kindergarten. Students continue to learn foundational skills of phonics using phonograms and rules of when to use which phonogram to spell and read irregularly-spelled words in middle grades two and three.

Students become proficient in grade-level and above grade-level foundational skills early and are able to begin reading classical literature at young ages. The literature our students read are in line with the exemplars found in Common Core ELA Standards Appendix B. In third through fifth grades, students search for understanding of character traits, how they change, and how the students' beliefs contrast with those of the characters. Concepts such as drawing inferences and conclusions about people in the book based on their words and actions are important focus points brought to life through reading complex classical literature.

Teaching mathematics at the elementary level has become heavily debated in recent years with the advent of Common Core Standards. We have come to the realization that there is no perfect published program. Mathematics instruction is best provided based on research-based application of a variety of instruction to meet standards. Therefore, our FCA staff has taken upon themselves to use professional judgement and the "art and science of teaching" to glean best practices from multiple published curriculum sources. After a thorough study of math standards, grade level teams have pulled materials from Saxon, MyMath , Khan Academy, Moby Max, Learnzillion, and other valuable resources.

Through the use of Saxon Math, students concretely learn the foundational skills of operations, measurement, and geometry. Like phonemic awareness and phonics are to language arts, these skills are foundational to mathematics. Students learn algorithms and become fluent with math facts. Our use of My Math and the other sources provide teachers with materials and ideas for teaching students the more intricate details of numeracy and conceptual thinking in math. Teachers use researched best practices support students as they learn to use manipulatives and models and develop an understanding of what happens "behind the numbers" as they solve problems and develop mathematical thinking.

FCA uses FOSS (Full Option Science System) to address current state science standards. FCA teachers use a hands-on, inquiry approach to teaching science concepts, which are facilitated by the use of FOSS kits. enhance the experience by taking students on field trips that offer exposure to real life situations. Students learn the scientific method as the basis for scientific thinking and experimentation. Science content learned is based on a mixture of FOSS kits available for each grade and the Core Knowledge sequence.

FCA uses Natrona County School District's social studies selected curriculum, learning about concepts of government, and city, county, and state history. We take advantage of Wyoming's rich history by including many hands-on field trips to various historical sites. Social studies content learned is a blend of learning about local and state history, concepts of government, and geography, map skills, and history content from the Core Knowledge sequence.

Science and social studies instruction at FCA also uses the Core Knowledge sequence. The Core Knowledge Sequence creates ties between literacy and social studies, and science. Some of the literature used directly ties to social studies being learned. For example, in fourth grade, students learn about the American Revolution, while they read the poems “George Washington”, and “Paul Revere’s Ride, “ or speeches like Patrick Henry’s “Give me liberty or give me death.” They learn about Medieval Europe and read the legends of Saint George and the Dragon, and King Arthur. This weaves learning together for children.

In both science and social studies students learn informational text standards by connecting events, individuals, and pieces of information. They are able to readily integrate information from two texts on the same topic. The Core Knowledge sequence provides opportunity for language arts skills instruction while reading rich literature, and informational texts related to their learning in social studies or science. Examples are fifth graders learning about the civil war and reconstruction, while reading Narrative or the Life of Frederick Douglass, or reading The Gettysburg Address. Students in every grade read science biographies related to science they are learning. For example, fifth graders learn the classification system for living things, and also read biographies of Carl Linneaus, who standardized the classification system.

One of FCA’s strengths is our academic kindergarten. Students in our primary grades demonstrate readiness and show success by being regularly top performing classrooms as shown by scores on the NWEA MAP testing.

## 2. Other Curriculum Areas:

All Kindergarten through fifth grade students receive one hour per week of instruction in art education based on state standards. Our art teacher covers a wide variety of art instruction from basic ideas of color and form, to more complex techniques. Additionally through the Core Knowledge Sequence, art history is tied in to specific periods in history aligned with social studies content students are learning. The inter-weaving of content creates opportunities for our art teacher and classroom teachers to be mutually supportive of student learning across disciplines.

Students in kindergarten through fifth grade also have at least an hour of music each week as well. Students learn basic musical concepts such as rhythm and melody, but also how music sparks the mind, relates to movement, and the rhythm and patterns of poetry and verse. Students have hands-on experience with body percussion and instruments from the beginning. Like visual arts, music is part of the Core Knowledge Sequence. Students learn music history from time periods studied in social studies. Developments in music and theory from the time period are tied to philosophy and important events from those time periods and how music influenced the time period. Like visual arts, the mutually supporting nature of Core Knowledge instruction creates continuity and consistency for students.

All Kindergarten through fifth grade students receive one hour per week of instruction in physical education based on state standards. FCA’s physical education teacher collaborates with classroom teachers to cover health and nutrition standards. We instill in students the importance of activity and health from an early age. PE instruction encourages students to develop lifelong healthy habits outside school. We hold an annual Charger Challenge of sports, which also serves as a fundraiser. We have high participation in national health activities such as “Jump Rope for Heart.”

Primary teachers follow an introductory language and culture program called “Salsa.” This program is recommended for use in grades K-1 by the Natrona County School District. It teaches basic Spanish words and introduces young children to a culture many of them have never experienced.

Our district and school both provide essential funding and supports for technology in the classroom. Teachers make active use of document cameras, Promethean Boards, flipcharts, laptop computers, and iPads. Educational media and support programs are used for reinforcement of instruction. Support practice software such as IXL is provided for struggling students to access and use outside of school via the internet in addition to interventions and supports we provide during school hours. Parents are able to come alongside students and see what they are learning in interventions and provide additional help at home. A portion of our differentiation and enrichment is done through students accessing Khan Academy online

while teachers rotate through working with differentiated instruction groups. Students use laptop computers to access MobyMax, IXL, and Khan Academy. Students learn keyboarding skills and are able to use computers in their writing process. Computers are also used to access the Internet for research purposes when writing reports. Instruction on the use of technology is developed and taught by classroom teachers. Technology is put in the hands of teachers and students to support learning of our core subjects, but is not used in a way that subtracts time and attention from students' time spent reading and writing which is the heart of what we do.

Through a cooperative of Natrona County School District, Casper College, Casper Arts Council, and local arts groups, students are provided with "Artcore" opportunities to be exposed to arts they would not otherwise have an opportunity to see. For example, just last week students were able to see and learn from Polynesian musicians and dancers.

### 3. Instructional Methods and Interventions:

In general, the instructional methods employed at Fort Caspar Academy reflect a "back-to-basics" approach to learning. Direct, explicit instruction is the dominant instructional paradigm. This is grounded in our use of a phonics-driven writing and reading instruction methodology. The Spalding "Writing Road to Reading" method is designed as a comprehensive intervention for students who struggle with language arts. The application of direct instruction of phonics to all students, not just those who struggle with reading and writing, allows our students to learn and understand the mechanics of how to read sooner than peers taught to read with a less-focused approach. Students are able to accelerate through learning to read, becoming proficient readers early. This allows us to immerse students in reading rich literature and informational text earlier. Students and teachers are able to engage in deeper questioning, discussion and writing related to material they read as Common Core State Standards calls for. A variety of engagement strategies promote efficient use of instructional time for our students and staff.

Differentiation of instruction begins with classroom teachers checking for understanding and providing on the spot support. It is also built into a tiered system of support for students who struggle, whether due to a specific learning disability, English language learning, or who just have a more difficult time with language arts. Since the Spalding Method was designed as a comprehensive intervention, not only is it our core practice in language arts instruction, it also provides a basis for intervention. Intervention support comes from an individualized use of the Spalding Method to meet student learning needs through additional time, repetition, or different presentation. Use of the same method of instruction for all students provides a consistency for students that is powerful. Students may receive different support with our system of intervention, but all students use the same powerful, multimodal process to learn. Consistency provides a concrete foundation students and parents can recognize and depend on.

As a school we are in the process of reviewing our multi-tiered response to intervention model. We understand the importance of using a research-based and proven instructional model to address students in our first tier of instruction. We use a cycle of continuous reflection to ensure we are teaching so that a significant portion of our students is successful with classroom instruction. If student data shows the need, we will adjust and reteach as necessary. We have begun to develop a schedule providing time for a flooding approach to tier 2 instruction where specific skill deficits and gaps identified by assessment data are filled. We have an at-risk team that regularly reviews data from all students and has a regular conversation with all students to monitor learning progress. Through this team-based process we address intervention needs before a referral for special education services.

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

"Data Driven Instruction" has become an almost overused buzz phrase. However, at Fort Caspar Academy using data collection and analysis to drive instruction and differentiation is a core part of who we are. Our students are too important to just guess at best practices for instruction or adopt popular educational fads without testing them first. We face the same challenges that other schools face in conducting valuable assessment to give us the data we need for decisions while not negatively impacting instruction time.

The most frequent—and most valuable—assessment of our students is the daily observation by our classroom teachers. Does the student hold the pencil correctly, does the student benefit from frequent attention span refreshers, can the student see the interactive media screens well, does the student still use his/her fingers for math problems and a thousand other data points that let a teacher assess a student's progress, strengths and weaknesses. The time consuming part is the documentation of this data so it can be captured and utilized. This function is often accomplished through our Response to Intervention team where the data for a specific student is analyzed and a strategy for intervention is formulated.

FCA uses unit pre-test, practice test and post-test protocols to aid in development of lesson plans, determine pacing and identify opportunities for re-teaching or tutoring. It is worth mentioning that our classroom assessments are carefully aligned with our curriculum. For example, because we utilize Spalding as the foundation of our ELA curriculum, we use the Morrison-McCall Spelling Scale and the Extended Ayres List to assess spelling skills.

Crucial information is gleaned from national assessments, such as NWEA (3 times per year), Lit First and Lexia. These data sets allow us to be precise in student placement, identifying retention/recall issues, measuring summer regression, measuring relationships to grade-level and progress monitoring.

District/State Benchmarks (three times annually) allow reliable checks to make sure all state standards are being covered during instruction. This tool helps us with curriculum mapping and prevents an instructional topic from “falling in the cracks.”

Valuable specialized assessments are also employed. The Model, Wapt and ACCESS are used in placement and progress monitoring for our wonderful English Language Learners (a growing segment of our student population). As well, the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment is used to screen incoming Kindergarten students for child development and prerequisite skills—again allowing us more customized curriculum content and pacing.

We conduct thorough parent, student and staff surveys at least annually to determine if we are meeting all stakeholder needs. For example, recent survey data allowed us to partner with parents more closely on student dress code and homework load.

At the macro level, our state uses the PAWS (Proficiency Assessments for Wyoming Students) exam. PAWS is administered annually as an educators' accountability measure. However, PAWS provides not only student achievement data, but detailed Equity (how well are we serving our special and diverse students populations) and Growth (are we closing the gaps for lower students while continuing to challenge higher students) measures.

Assessment results are shared in many ways. The school district provides scores to local media to be published, as does the state department of education. The state publishes Fort Caspar Academy scores via the “Wyoming Fusion” website which is available to the public. Additionally, Fort Caspar Academy makes use of data with students. Data notebooks and walls are kept. Students regularly see their data in upper grades and are taught to use data to set individual learning goals. Families are informed about school data trends directly from the principal at PTO meetings. At PTO meetings, the principal goes into detail, using comparative data over a five year span at FCA and comparative data with other schools in the district. We actively look at achievement, student growth, and equity growth for students from subgroups and student who have not demonstrated proficiency in the past. Assessment results are also shared in newsletters. School newsletters are sent home in print and digitally in email sent to all families. The newsletter is also published on the school website. Interim assessment data and classroom assessment data are shared with families via midterm reports, report cards, and at parent teacher conferences.

## **PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS**

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### 1. School Climate/Culture:

At Fort Caspar Academy, building a positive culture and an atmosphere of respect toward all students and families is paramount. We strive to provide a warm, calm, structured, and safe environment that enhances the learning process. Our goal is to instill in all members of our school community a sense of pride and responsibility for self and others.

One way Fort Caspar Academy provides this environment, is through the use of a Positive Behavior interventions and Supports model. Students are engaged at the beginning of the year developing classroom mission and goals. Teachers and students collaboratively consider the importance of providing a safe and orderly classroom environment and develop classroom goals around that idea. Teachers explicitly teach students expectations and what they look like. This is not a once a year occasion. Teachers are constantly and consistently expressing expectations and modeling what following expectations looks like. Clarity of expectations is important. Consistency of expectations across the school is also essential. A clearly defined set of consequences, both positive and negative, is in place. The model operates on the concept of mutual respect between students and staff, common courtesy, friendliness, and cheerfulness.

We also explicitly teach students character education based on the Core Virtues model. A set of 12 commonly held virtues is taught across the school. From morning announcements, to instruction, modeling, and reinforcement woven through academic instruction, students learn to demonstrate caring, respect, gratitude, diligence, honesty, generosity, loyalty, humility, perseverance, responsibility, courage, and compassion. This is also acted out through daily life at Fort Caspar Academy and important philanthropic projects each year. Through our virtues we build a community.

All stakeholders in our school community are given a voice and an avenue for involvement and leadership. Students may be actively involved in student council at all levels and give input on campus life. Parents are involved on many levels from Governing Council, to teaching students in workshops on Discover Days, to academic classes for parents, to classroom volunteerism. Teachers are involved in leadership team, goal teams, and professional learning communities.

The staff has regular staff meetings to insure that everyone is on the same page. During these meetings we hear new ideas, clarify issues, and build rapport. Fort Caspar has a strong, specific educational philosophy and it is important to revisit our mission regularly in order to keep everyone on the same page. With a new principal at Fort Caspar Academy this year, we have dedicated ourselves to openly and deliberately examine our core values and beliefs, to consider who we are as a school and why. There is an emphasis on making sure everyone associated with our school community feels like an important part of the conversation. This process not only recognizes the importance of valuing our school stakeholders, but also the importance of continuity through a change in leadership. Our principal guides the staff through discussions or trainings to keep us abreast of the newest educational news. We have engaged in book studies discussing practices that can keep us fresh. At Fort Caspar Academy we believe in the importance of being a unified staff. We believe in preserving the unique educational setting that is Fort Caspar Academy.

### 2. Engaging Families and Community:

Fort Caspar Academy was established by parents from our community twenty years ago. Ever since our founding, parent involvement has been an essential component to our success. Parents are encouraged and welcomed in our school.

Parents are drawn into our educational community from the beginning. Spalding “Writing Road to Reading” classes are given for parents multiple times a school year. Parents are taught to understand our instructional methodology and enable them to support their child’s education at FCA. Each and every new parent to Fort Caspar Academy is greeted by either the principal or administrative manager. Several group

orientations are given at varying times of the day are offered at the beginning of the school year. As new families move into our school, they are given individual tours of the school and orientation time with a school leader. It is important to us that every family feel welcomed and understand our philosophy and guiding principles. Over 90% of our parents attend parent-teacher conferences.

Fort Caspar Academy (FCA) is guided by a Governing Council of parents. Parents wrote our original school handbook and they revise and approve a new edition annually. Our handbook provides us our guiding philosophy and school procedures and practices. The principal regularly reports to the Governing Council and solicits input on our schools direction throughout the year. Governing Council is a representative body elected from the general body of families each year. Additionally, surveys and solicitation of ideas are collected multiple times a year from the entire school community.

Parents are actively recruited to lead co-curricular clubs after school. Parents help lead Lego Robotics, Spelling Bee, Young Engineers and Scientists, geography club, math club, Student Council, Volleyball, and Glee Club. Parents are also invited to come teach workshops to students in music, art, dance, physical activity, and science for monthly Discover Days. Community members are also recruited to present workshops on Discover Days. Discover Days are essential to our school for parent and community involvement, cultural and academic enrichment for students, and providing important, additional, extended collaboration time for teachers.

We also engage our local community through our philanthropy projects. Each year we hold Charger Challenge, a Saturday afternoon filled with silly sports and goofy games, and a fun run for pledges. The Challenge raises thousands of dollars for a local charity. This year's beneficiary is Jason's Friends, a Wyoming organization to support the financial and emotional needs of families with children going through a battle with cancer. We partner with a local food bank, Joshua's Storehouse to provide food for those in need. FCA children sing and read to retirees in local assisted living homes. We host our congressional representatives to speak to and meet our students. Additionally, we reach out to our larger community across Wyoming. We host boys and girls basketball players from the Wind River Indian Reservation, 100 miles away, to come to FCA and put on a basketball clinic and talk to our students about the importance of staying in school and working hard. We strive to live out our core virtues with our community.

### 3. Professional Development:

Our professional development plan is made each year with input from our staff and through our leadership team based on our reflection as a team on our growth needs to meet our changing school community's needs. Our professional development is decided upon to support our school mission, school philosophy, and instructional objectives.

In the past two years our professional development initiative has been to learn about brain-based instructional methods to support learning. We've learned about how the brain learns new information, and how to attach new learning to previous learning. We've learned about mnemonic devices, use of anchor charts, and using music to set state for learning. We have also set our professional growth focus on implementing our district curriculum and learning outcomes that have been developed to provide clarity and support to teachers around Common Core. We are continually working to align our instruction to these outcomes. Another essential piece of our professional growth has been the work around our school culture and strengthening our school-wide team and PLCs in the face of change. Each year we have reviews and refreshers of Spalding language arts instructional methods to maintain our understanding and consistency, and to maintain our accreditation with Spalding. We have also engaged in two books studies. The first was Carol Dweck's *Mindset* to understand the daily impact of how we as adults frame students' lives and mindsets, and how that ultimately affects their success across all facets of their lives. The second is *Focus: Elevating the Essentials* by Mike Schmoker. This is helping us frame and understand what is important for us in our instruction to ensure students' learning success. From a guaranteed, viable, content-rich curriculum, to essential elements of effective classroom instruction, to authentic literacy instruction, we are learning and reaffirming fundamental elements of teaching and learning. We are striving to understand and

embrace the concept of “less is more.” The ideas contained in Focus strongly correlate to and support the Spalding “Writing Road to Reading.”

Our plan for the coming year is to take each element described in Focus, ensure we all understand each piece, what it looks like, and develop a straightforward plan to ensure these practices are in place consistently across the school. We plan to review and revisit the components of the Core Knowledge Sequence, which provides the backbone of our classical education at FCA. We’ll collaborate, learn, and refresh on how to effectively use informational text and deep, rich, and challenging literature across educational disciplines. We will also continue to review and refresh on the Spalding Method. We plan to engage in more learning about the SIOP method of supporting language learners in our classrooms. These pieces are all very essential for us to connect and work as a school-wide team and maintain consistency with our mission and philosophy. It is important for us to continually look to maintaining a strong, consistent foundation as we have gone through a change in principals and the annual change of one or two new teachers over each of the last few years.

Teachers are encouraged to seek out additional professional learning opportunities as they are made available through our district and the Wyoming Department of Education. We will also make use of our Professional Learning Communities to share expertise and support learning from peers within our school. These opportunities support continued professional growth on best practices to benefit our students and support our school team.

#### 4. School Leadership:

Our school is firmly based on shared leadership model. We are no stronger than the sum of our parts as a school team. Each member of our school community has the right and the responsibility to ensure our school is led in a direction that will lead to student learning success. Each member can and must contribute to the improvement of the whole. We encourage, expect, and facilitate wide participation in the leadership and guidance of Fort Caspar Academy.

The school principal is ultimately responsible for academic leadership and success, and all facets of school administration. Leadership is distributed in a number of ways. Fort Caspar Academy employs an administrative manager who oversees facilities, many administrative duties, and helping the school principal with welcoming and supporting families, and supporting the school behavior interventions and support system.

We have referenced our parent Governing Council and the role it plays in setting, reviewing, and revising our guiding document in the school handbook. The Governing Council also provides input, perspective, and guidance to the school principal on leading the school in a way that will stay true to our founding principles. Student Council plays a role in supporting daily campus life and culture.

Academic leadership is shared by the principal with a staff leadership team, academic goal teams, grade level teams, and the staff body as a whole. The staff leadership team meets at least monthly, if not more, in a three-hour retreat to look at develop proposals for budgets, some within-building staffing allocations, the academic instruction proposals of goal teams, and professional development, and how the school can conform to research-based or proven best practices in instruction, among other academic leadership tasks. All decisions are made in accordance with our school philosophy, mission, and a variety of data on student learning and school culture. Academic goal teams are formed around specific school academic goals. Each year as a staff we look at student data and develop academic SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound) goals centered around a five-year strategic academic goal. Goal teams support implementation of academic goals through research of best practices directly related to an academic goal. For example, our language arts goal team researches best practices related to student achievement of reading, writing, and speaking goals. The team then develops action steps and proposals for review and approval by the leadership team. Often the building leadership team or goal teams will bring proposals directly to the whole school staff team for comment, consensus or vote. Grade level teams are empowered and supported by the principal to collaborate and decide how to carry out planning, data

collection and review, adjustments to instruction, and providing tier 1 and tier 2 instruction and interventions. The principal guides, facilitates, and monitors team progress.

The principal and staff are expected to lead by example. The principal maintains an open-door policy for staff, students, and parents.

## Part VI – INDICATORS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS

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If there is one practice in our school that all stakeholders come to consensus on as the “secret” to our success, it would be the use of direct, whole-group instruction of language arts, using the Spalding Method, followed by appropriate differentiation and intervention. Not only do staff nearly unanimously agree with the power of the Spalding Method, but those who taught at this school and have gone on to other positions in the district, i.e., principal at another school, district level administrator, district ELL coordinator, and instructional facilitator, all identify our methodology for teaching language arts as our most powerful practice. Mike Schmoker, in *Focus*, repeatedly talks about the simple need for students to read and write deeply and constantly. That is what our method allows our students to do.

Teachers, support services teachers, paraprofessionals, are all trained in the method. Parents are offered classes in Spalding Method. When we are able to consistently apply powerful practices across our school, it unifies us in surrounding students with the powerful, fundamental elements of learning language arts.

The Spalding Method, as mentioned in the Instructional Methods section of our application, is a methodology, not a textbook. It was designed to help students with learning disabilities, learn to read and write. With this method, all parts of language arts learning are integrated, interwoven, and mutually supporting. Students are concretely and explicitly taught individual phonemes and phonograms. Students are taught to recognize and correctly pronounce phonograms with greater focus than individual letter sounds. They are more readily able to find phonograms in the words they read and more fluently read words quickly.

It is not just about reading. Before the new principal arrived at Fort Caspar Academy this year, he held the view that in some ways, handwriting and spelling instruction was often superfluous, taught in isolation, without context. Not with Spalding. Spelling plays an integral role in how students analyze words as phonograms tied together. Handwriting plays a role in connecting letters and phonograms through a sound-symbol relationship. Students are able to understand decoding more thoroughly, more quickly.

The Spalding Method is multi-sensory; it is visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. Our use of the method is diagnostic, and we are able to individualize how we use the method with students based on their needs. Our district ELL coordinator advocates using the Spalding Method to teach language learners to read English more quickly and confidently. The power of using our core instruction method as an intervention comes from the fact that we don't take our highest confusion kids, take them aside, and teach them yet another method to learn to read. They are taught the same method to read no matter whom they are. This provides consistency, not confusion. Most children at FCA consistently are able to begin reading by mid-kindergarten, and are fairly proficient readers by mid-first grade. Some students need additional support, but are able to receive that support via a different or more intensive application of the Spalding Method.

Because children are able to learn the keys to language so early, we are able to move into having children read and write more often, and more deeply. Research and Common Core suggests this is an appropriate, best practice for gaining vocabulary, fluency, and ability to comprehend.