

U.S. Department of Education
2017 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Mr David Manahan

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

Official School Name Sierra Expeditionary Learning School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 11603 Donner Pass Road

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

City Truckee State CA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 96161-4953

County Placer

Telephone (530) 582-3701 Fax _____

Web site/URL http://truckeecharterschool.org/ E-mail dmanahan@truckeecharterschool.org

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 Rob Leri E-mail rleri@ttusd.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Tahoe-Truckee Unified School District Tel. (530) 582-2500

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 Chris DeLuna
(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. All nominated public schools must meet the state's performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group and all subgroups, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
3. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2017 in order to meet all eligibility requirements. 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 2011 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: 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, or 2016.
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 has not been identified by the state as "persistently dangerous" within the last two years.
9. 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.
10. 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.
11. 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.
12. 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 (2016-2017) unless otherwise stated.

DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 6 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 2 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 2 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 10 TOTAL

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located:
- Urban or large central city
 - Suburban with characteristics typical of an urban area
 - Suburban
 - Small city or town in a rural area
 - Rural
3. Number of students as of October 1, 2016 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	12	10	22
1	12	10	22
2	12	12	24
3	11	13	24
4	14	10	24
5	13	11	24
6	10	14	24
7	11	13	24
8	13	11	24
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	108	104	212

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 1 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 2 % Asian
 - 0 % Black or African American
 - 21 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 74 % White
 - 2 % 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 2015 – 2016 school year: 3%

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, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	0
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	7
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	7
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2015	212
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.033
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	3

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 19 %
40 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: 32 %
Total number students who qualify: 69
8. Students receiving special education services: 16 %
34 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.

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

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 7
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	3
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects	9
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	6
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a licensed professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	2
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 24:1
12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

Required Information	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012
Daily student attendance	99%	99%	98%	96%	98%
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 2016.

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.

To inspire a diverse group of learners to achieve academic excellence, develop a strong sense of character and community, and preserve each child's natural curiosity and love of learning.

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

SELS has a fixed enrollment system and with more applicants than openings is thus required to hold a public lottery. Applications are allowed from any location, though with priority rankings: 1) in district; 2) out-of-district with district address at enrollment; 3) out-of-district with non-district address at enrollment. Families are encouraged to attend one of several Information Meetings where they receive applications for interested students. Each family is provided a reference number for the lottery. SELS programs and activities are free from discrimination with respect to sex, race, color, religion, national origin, ethnic group, marital or parental status, and physical and mental disability. We ensure equal opportunities for all students in admission and access to enrollment, through the lottery.

Since diversity is a key component of the school, SELS conducts a two-tiered lottery system: one for the “general” population and one for those families who qualify for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). At each lottery, a percentage of openings are reserved for each group. This percentage is tied to the district’s overall breakdown of general and NSLP populations (consistently 60%-40%, respectively). This “double” lottery helps maintain the school’s vision and ensures openings for often under-served populations.

Staff children and siblings receive first priority for openings. Additional openings are designated and the lottery creates a waitlist at each grade level; openings are offered as they arise, and families are able to visit classrooms before making their decisions on enrollment. SELS is always full and generally has approximately 150 students on the waitlist. Each year the waitlist is reset, requiring families to apply for each lottery.

PART III – SUMMARY

Sierra Expeditionary Learning School (SELS) opened in the fall of 2010 as an independent public charter school serving 64 K-5 students. Over the first three years, SELS expanded and now serves 212 students in grades K-8. SELS offers a small school environment dedicated to academic excellence, diversity, and the building of character and community.

Originating from the vision of fourteen founding families, SELS was granted its charter by the Tahoe Truckee Unified School District (TTUSD). These founders believed in educating the whole child, attending to not only academics but also character, physical and emotional well-being, and service to the community. After assessing many different educational models, they decided EL Education (formerly Expeditionary Learning) was the best fit for their vision and for the Truckee community. They also understood the importance of being closely connected to and aligned with the school district. SELS is a model for other charter schools in creating strong district-charter relations. District benefits include: school building facilities, busing, food service, and special education services; staff members participating in shared professional development and leadership groups, collaborating on ideas and curriculum. This relationship has been instrumental to the school's success, allowing for seamless transitions as students enter the district high school.

From the outset, SELS staff recognized the benefits of a partnership with EL Education. As a new school, having the framework and direction provided by EL Education helped focus the creation of programming and the hiring of staff (who, in order to be hired, needed to share our philosophies and vision). EL Education's essential principles aligned well with the founders' ideologies. Concretely, thematic-based expeditions (interdisciplinary curriculum based on science or social studies standards, connected to our community, and incorporating service), character education, fieldwork, and the fostering of a school-wide culture of excellence provided the building blocks upon which the school has thrived, while simultaneously aligning to the values of the Truckee-Tahoe community in which the school serves. The professional expertise and resources provided by EL Education helped make the vision and ideas grounded and accessible.

Designing our programming around EL Education structures has provided flexibility in teaching and learning, allowing for a wide-range of student abilities to be addressed. This flexibility is vital to teachers' differentiation of curricula, assuring students are being met at their level, an important aspect to increasing the performance of under-achievers, while also allowing teachers to better address the needs of high achievers. Teaching is student-focused, hands-on, collaborative, and made relevant through classroom projects, community service, and curriculum-based fieldwork. Numerous student-centered structures and traditions (daily classroom morning meetings, weekly all-school community meetings, Celebrations of Learning, Goal-setting Conferences, among others) foster connections to their learning, each other, and their community.

The collective strength of SELS curriculum, programming, character education, and family/community involvement led to recognition by EL Education. In early 2015 we were asked to become part of a "credentialing" program which highlights high-performing network schools, and were awarded the designation of an EL Education credentialed school in October 2015. Simultaneously, the Principal was nominated for a network leadership award, recognizing the efforts required to achieve the credential designation for a school only five-years-old.

The mission of SELS is to inspire a diverse group of learners to achieve academic excellence while developing a strong sense of character and community. Our goal is to preserve each child's natural curiosity and love of learning.

We work to achieve our mission through a variety of philosophies and programming: 1) Interdisciplinary learning expeditions (explained later), developed from Common Core and California State Standards, promote learning through authentic experiences that encourage critical thinking and social responsibility; 2) Small multi-grade and/or looping classes in elementary school cultivate a safe environment for individual

learning and self-discovery; 3) Self-contained classrooms in middle school establish a closer student-teacher connection and the ability to address inter-disciplinary curriculum and student needs more effectively; 4) High expectations for character and behavior create a school culture exemplified by physical and emotional safety, accountability, compassion, integrity, and respect; 5) Multiple means of assessment, including portfolios and student-led conferences, along with academic and character reports, hold students, teachers, and staff accountable for the highest quality of work; 6) Shared school traditions and celebrations support reflection, personal growth, and a sense of belonging within the school community; 7) Multicultural studies and a foreign language component instill tolerance and broad worldviews while fostering an appreciation for local and global diversity; 8) A diverse school population reflective of our district community promotes intercultural understanding and respect for individual differences and similarities; and 9) Physical fitness, outdoor activities, and visual and performing arts are an integral part of students' daily lives.

Our general demographic makeup includes approximately 32% NSLP eligible, approximately 25% of Latino descent, with 19% English Learner and 16% Special Education identified. These demographics are similar to other district schools, reflecting one of our founding intentions in maintaining a diverse program to help students expand their experiences, and develop empathy and tolerance for others. We regularly celebrate diversity in its many forms, and make sure students understand that our differences are part of our community's greatness.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

By starting in 2010, we already knew the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were coming and thus from the onset designed or purchased all curricula to meet these new standards. As the CCSS were unrolled, we also mapped the main subjects and topics for each grade level to assure we were meeting all standards, and that we were teaching them in a systematic and logical order. The mapping process highlighted areas of differentiation for both higher and lower achievers.

The foundational core of SELS curricula are expeditions, which are in-depth, inter-disciplinary units lasting 4-5 months where students investigate deeply into specific and (ideally) locally-based topics. Expeditions are framed using California Science and Social Studies standards, and are infused throughout with CCSS English Language Arts (ELA) standards (including the three primary papers: narrative, informative, and opinion/argumentative), and when relevant and possible CCSS Mathematics standards. The expedition framework serves as a map to students' learning, helping them anticipate where the topics are heading and what they are required to learn.

Expeditions have a systematic structure to facilitate standards incorporation and lead to the most effective learning. Important components of expeditions include: 1) Guiding questions: the essential questions which frame the learning topics; 2) Case studies: units of study within each expedition to cover various topics and standards; 3) Learning targets: specific goals for students, used at all levels, including the entire expedition, each case study, and more specific topics throughout; 4) Authentic experiences: connecting students with opportunities to use, participate in, and/or see how their learning is embedded in the human and natural communities in which they live (fieldwork), while additionally providing students opportunities to put their learning to use, such as in presentations and hands-on projects; 5) Experts: using community members, both near and far, to enhance the learning experience and further connect the learning to their communities; and 6) Culminating products: end of expedition projects or events which demonstrate learning and are ideally service-based and presented to public audiences.

This example illustrates a 2nd/3rd grade expedition with more details: 1) Title: Fire and Ice - A Close Look into Truckee's History, with the Guiding Question: How did fire and ice shape Truckee over time?; 2) Case Studies: A) Truckee Today; B) Truckee Yesterday; and C) Truckee – Love it or Leave it?; 3) Learning Targets (a couple examples): I can explain how ice harvesting impacted Truckee's development; I can describe Old Town Truckee historic buildings' roles in Truckee history; 4) Authentic experiences: multiple tours of local historical places – downtown Truckee, old Boca Homestead, historical ice harvesting areas; writing connections: Informative – old vs current uses of buildings; Narrative – create historical fiction story of building; Opinion – Is defensible space against fire important?; 5) Experts: local families and residents; Historical Society staff; Downtown Merchants Association; and 6) Culminating products and service: authors/photographers for Truckee history book, overlaying old photos with the same current buildings; interviewed residents and designed anthology booklet for Senior Center; evening tours for the public/tourists of Old Town Truckee, explaining buildings' histories; and created a flyer of 10 best places to visit in Truckee for kids under 10 (printed and donated to Downtown Visitors Center/Chamber of Commerce, and Donner State Park Visitor Center).

Time spent on expeditions is scaffolded up the system. In primary grades, literacy time takes up much of the day: students read, are read to by teachers and parent volunteers, and write on various topics and in various formats. They also use the Daily 5/CAFÉ literacy program which, besides teaching basic literacy concepts, fosters student empowerment and educational ownership through goal setting. Upper elementary uses Daily 5/CAFÉ as well, and also incorporates reading groups, literacy circles, and book clubs. Middle school connects virtually all literacy to their expeditions, particularly focusing on non-fiction literature, all aspects of writing (including scientific papers), and presentations.

Fieldwork and community service are scaffolded as well, and most always connect to expedition curriculum. In K-1, students spend approximately 8-10 days in the field, and 1-2 nights camping. Their service is to the

school community, and includes building playground features (such as balance beams) and developing school traditions (such as Summit Day, when the entire school hikes a nearby peak and participates in various activities on the mountain). As they get older, they work up to 5-7 nights and 15 or so days in the field in upper elementary, and provide service to the local community (interpretive signs, historical tours). In middle school, students are in the field up to 20 days and 8-12 nights. They provide service to the local community (planting trees, children's museum exhibits), and also expand to regional and global efforts (examples: Bay Area food bank/homeless shelter volunteering; 8th graders started their own online business selling succulents to raise funds for water wells in South Sudan, which was connected to their curriculum work reading *A Long Walk to Water*).

Math is run as a separate program for 1.25 hours/day. Elementary students use Bridges while middle school students use College Preparatory Math (CPM). Both programs are Common Core aligned, are real world/problem-based, and collaborative, encouraging discussion and group work. Both staff and students love the math curriculum and, based on state scores, is effective. Both programs are well designed to differentiate for various learners, and have extensive hands-on activities to maintain interest. In 8th grade, we separate the higher achievers, accelerate their pace and move them into 9th grade CPM Integrated I for the second half the year.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

As a school who values educating the whole child, we make sure students have exposure to a variety of non-core curriculum and alternative learning: Spanish, PE, Adventure, Enrichment (art, music, drama), Technology, and Electives.

Spanish: all students receive 1.5 hours of Spanish instruction every week. At the elementary levels, we focus on building vocabulary, connecting to the language and culture, and having fun. In middle school, we run the sections as a Spanish I course with textbooks, assignments, and assessments. Both our instructors are native speakers and bring valuable experiences and excitement to the program. In conjunction with our English Language Development specialist, they also hold school/community events for Dia de los Muertos and Dia del Nino.

Physical Education: all students receive the required 100 minutes/week of PE. They focus on a variety of games and activities, scaffolded to maximize development of both fine and gross motor skills, teamwork, collaboration, and, as they get into middle school, game strategy and vision. We participate in state PE testing and have "challenge days" every other month, where we track students' progress on sets of timed activities and exercises.

Adventure: in addition to our regular PE classes, all students go into the field for various adventure activities. In primary grades students do extensive hiking (one of the expeditions is titled "I Love the Mountains"), and as they age are introduced to camping, nordic skiing, swimming, horseback riding, rock climbing, dog sledding, rafting, and caving. We have mapped out adventure experiences to ensure they are distributed age-appropriately. Camping, for example, starts at 1-2 nights per year in K-1st, and gradually builds to middle school where they will spend 8-12 nights away from school.

Enrichment: all students receive one or two, 45 minute classes per week of art, music, or drama, in rotating five-week blocks. The instruction is facilitated by practicing professionals who have teaching experience, and are thus able to provide students solid introductory foundations in visual and performing arts, and inspiring role models. Since the students return to these classes year after year, the teachers are able to build on previous year's teachings to more fully develop students' understanding and skills. Additionally, when possible, enrichment activities are connected to expeditions. For example, 6th graders studying ancient civilizations put on an Ancient World Summit, aided by instruction from the drama teacher.

Technology: all students have extensive technology instruction, both in the classroom and during enrichment blocks. We try to minimize screen time in the primary grades, but once in 4th grade all students are assigned their own Chromebooks. Instruction includes keyboarding, search techniques (and proper vetting of websites), presentation design, and Google platforms. All upper grade classrooms are equipped

with SMART Boards, and learning pods with TV and Chromecast set ups for small group work.

Electives: on Friday afternoons during winter months, we run an Electives Program in five-week blocks for all students. For this program, all staff and a handful of parent volunteers offer courses or workshops covering everything from hobbies (knitting, photography, cooking) to STEM (robotics, computer coding, building creations) to activities (running, yoga, double-Dutch jump roping). In an effort to build cohesiveness across the school and foster increased relationships, the courses are mixed age and often mix primary students with upper elementary, and upper elementary with middle school students.

SELS staff regularly reviews all curricula areas to assure the programs are meeting student needs and serving our mission to educate the whole child. In addition to the above programming, we have students participating in numerous clubs: Eco-challenge/Green Team; Justice League; TEDx Youth; Lego Robotics; elementary and middle school “rock” bands; elementary music instruction led by local high school students; and a Run for Fun program. We believe, and have received positive feedback from families, that the comprehensiveness of this non-core programming is vital to maintaining student engagement, fostering parent and community connection, and developing a variety of life-long skill sets (such as, communication, critical thinking, fitness, and those related to specific hobbies).

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

A foundational tenet of EL Education is participatory, collaborative, and hands-on/project-based learning. Teachers are therefore trained to facilitate student engagement by using a variety of protocols (methodical, clear, and engaging teaching procedures), such as Fish Bowls, Workshop 2.0, Socratic Seminars, and 5Es Workshops. These methods encourage students to look deeply into subject matter, and to engage in their learning in ways that build student interest and lead to more effective learning. In addition to students learning topical information, the protocols foster skill development, especially collaboration, critical thinking, and communication.

SELS’ active, engaging curriculum and expeditions also allows for natural and effective differentiation. Many assignments are easily adapted to both higher and lower learners, and active/hands-on projects better engage students with learning and attention issues, behavioral problems, and (conversely) high achievers. Assignments allow the “space” for creative additions and/or expansions into aspects of more personal interest, thereby increasing student motivation. With group work, students are able to learn from each other and discover individual strengths. The higher and lower achieving students build tolerance and empathy for those who are different, while demonstrating the increased intellect of collaboration and the building of high level communication skills.

Overall, SELS teaching strategies (in conjunction with other aspects of school programming) have led to high overall academic success. In the most recent state testing (spring 2016, Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium), schoolwide scores for students “at” or “above” CCSS standards were 75% in both ELA and Math. SELS scores are above district scores by 25% in ELA and 60% in Math, and above state scores by 60% in ELA and nearly 100% in Math.

More exciting, however, are the scores for our NSLP students: 60% in both ELA and Math. Comparatively, SELS NSLP students were above district scores by approximately 75% in ELA and 100% in Math, and above state scores by 75% in ELA and 160% in Math. That said, we remain committed to reducing any achievement gaps and continue to regularly assess and evaluate strategies to increase teaching and learning effectiveness.

We believe a significant part of our academic success is our monitoring of student achievement and accompanying intervention programs. School and classroom wide, data is analyzed twice per year for any positive and/or negative patterns; if found, positive patterns are investigated and transferred, negative patterns are addressed and changed. Individually, students are monitored in all subject areas year round, with interventions and/or modifications introduced as needed. For Math, student data is analyzed after every chapter test; students are usually allowed to redo assignments and tests after some additional help. Those who continue to struggle are assigned small group RTI in elementary and homework club (with teacher

support) in middle school. To assess reading, all students are DRAed (Developmental Reading Assessment) multiple times per year. Students at the cusp or below grade-level reading are provided extra reading intervention and assessed every 3 weeks. The program has been highly successful: 85-100% of 2nd-8th graders reading at or above grade level on internal assessments, and 83-95% of 3rd-8th graders at or above grade level on state testing (CAASPP). In writing, students cover all required types (opinion/argument, informative, and narrative) plus scientific papers and authentic formats (letters, book reviews, interpretive signs). Each assignment is tracked and students below standards are provided extra classroom help from support staff.

When students continue to struggle with academic standards, meetings are held among teachers, support staff, counselor (if needed), parents, and administration. These SST (Student Support Team) meetings develop plans to modify learning, schedule intervention, and/or address any other student needs. If warranted, students are assessed for any learning disabilities, and if identified receive help from required specialists (RSP, Psych, Speech, Occupational, etc.).

Throughout our identification and intervention process, parents are kept informed and regular meetings are held. SELS staff spends significant time working with parents on home strategies to help their students, ranging from academic support to behavioral modifications.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

EL Education was formed as a joint effort between Harvard Education and Outward Bound (OB), with an initial inspiration to bring the profound character experiences of OB into the classroom. This foundational aspect to all network schools led SELS to implement a comprehensive character/culture education program; one of the founding tenets of the school was focusing on student character, developing the whole child, and establishing a culture of respect, engagement, and service to community.

SELS' character objective is to help students develop a positive attitude towards self-awareness and control, to better understand what constitutes socially acceptable behavior and how their actions impact others, and to strive towards being active participants in their communities. We address student character and school culture through an extensive variety of effective structures, addressing both 1) social/relational traits (below) and 2) performance traits (explained in Part VI of this application).

We developed a set of character traits to focus our teaching and learning. These traits are based on the acronym SIERRA: Strength – I can stand up for myself and others, and I have confidence and courage; Integrity – I can do the right thing even when no one is watching; Empathy – I can understand others' feelings, abilities, and situations, which helps me better understand why people act or respond as they do; Respect – I can treat people and objects well, and I can listen and create a community that is built on safety and trust; Responsibility – I can fix my own problems, take initiative, and do my best; and Adventure – I can take risks and try new things. These traits are on display in every classroom, are discussed regularly through a multitude of programming, and are highlighted on students' progress reports.

Each day starts with Morning Meetings where students circle up in classrooms, greet each other by name, and go through a series of readings/reflections and activities focusing on some aspect of character and culture. Every other week, the entire school comes together for the same purpose in Community Meetings, organized and facilitated by crews.

For middle school we created a three-year character expedition called "Who Am I?" Students investigate different topics over the three years: 6th grade – Who am I as an individual?; 7th grade – Who am I as a community member?; and 8th grade – Who am I as a global citizen? Each topic has various activities and assignments which foster understanding, growth, and development in that area. Students incorporate their learning into projects, presentations, and service.

Overall feedback from parents, visiting professionals, and community members is consistently positive, commenting on the SELS culture of excellence and grit. Many even express amazement when seeing students so engaged, respectful, well-behaved, and kind.

Staff absolutely love working at SELS. The curricula allows for endless creativity, and the progressive teaching strategies support innovation and excellence. Consistent professional development fosters staff's desire to be on-going learners, and administration treats staff with respect: no micro-managing, support for ideas and off-site learning, decency/friendliness in all interactions, and transparency throughout. Staff turnover is almost nil.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

SELS was developed as a community-based school. The founders were all local families who recognized the power of community collaboration and progressive education. The original Board of Directors established a precedent (which continues to this day) to receive schoolwide community feedback as programming and structures are designed. Their feedback was helpful both for expanding ideas and for buy-in to what became adopted.

Communication is vital to ensuring families have the information needed to participate in their children's

education. SELS sends out weekly schoolwide newsletters, teachers post monthly newsletters and stay in close contact with parents, our website contains a wealth of information, and translation for Spanish speakers is used regularly. Additionally, parents are always welcomed in the classroom, and the school's expectation is that parents will be involved in their children's learning. Our extensive fieldwork is also tied to securing parent drivers and chaperones.

Family-based school events and traditions also help foster these connections. SELS holds many, varied opportunities for families to be an integral part of the school program: Celebrations of Learning – open house evenings led by students displaying/explaining their academic work; Passages – end of year student presentations on learning and growth; Student-led Goal-Setting Conferences – twice per year students and parents outline academic and character goals; Summit Day – all SELS students and many families hike a nearby mountain and participate in character and reflection activities; Gratitude Evening – the entire SELS community comes together and shares an evening of gratitude, modeled after our regular community meetings; Bear Walk-a-Thon – a day of fun and costumes to help raise funds for special classroom projects; Great Skate – an end-of-year celebration of our community, held at a local outdoor roller rink, and includes other district school communities as well.

The final three events listed above are organized by our PTC (parent-teacher crew), which is very active in fostering school-family-community connections.

In addition to SELS extensive family connections, wider community connections are also fostered. Teachers develop long-term collaborative projects and/or service with our local Historical Society, KidZone Museum, State Parks, Merchants Association, Emergency Warming Shelter, Senior Center, and various ecological/watershed agencies. We enlist services from the Family Resource Center, Tahoe Safe Alliance, Tahoe Institute of Natural Sciences, and many others. Most of these connections are educational for our students and provide avenues for community service. Regionally, we have established relationships and yearly visits/service with Bay Area genetics labs, universities (Stanford and UC Davis), and various homeless-serving food banks.

Overall, the variety of family involvement and local/regional connections and service provide students a plethora of skills and community learning difficult to replicate any other way.

3. Professional Development:

Another reason for our association with EL Education is their commitment to Professional Development (PD). When SELS started, we anticipated extensive PD would be vital to our success, and as professional educators we knew its importance to our on-going effectiveness in our mission.

Each school in the EL Education network is assigned a School Designer (SD), a master-level teacher who has transitioned into instructional coaching. We contract 12 days per year for the SD to visit SELS. This process includes developing a yearly Work Plan based on achievement and character data, insights from staff, and current educational research. The Work Plan focuses on highest priority needs which then informs each year's PD, some facilitated by the SD, some conducted by SELS administration, and some at off-site workshops and conferences. Staff meets once per week, with every other week serving as PD. There are also 2-3 full days before and after the calendar school year, and 1-2 full days during the year designated for PD. EL Education also offers excellent online resources (curriculum and project ideas) and networking connections.

Over the years, staff has recognized the value of our extensive PD. Historically, the Work Plan had two focus areas, academic and structural; some of the topics covered included writing, math, and reading in academics, and character programming, Habits of Work (explained in Part VI of this application), and instructional coaching in structural. More recently we shifted the Work Plan to a four year working document with three primary focus areas: mastery of knowledge and skills; high-quality student work; and student character and engagement. This change will increase our focus on these very important categories.

Professionally, the Principal and Assistant Principal participate in a variety of networking and learning

throughout the year: 2-3 day Leadership Institute through EL Education; twice yearly Administration Leadership meetings with our EL Education regional cluster of schools; monthly Leadership meetings with our larger district and all local Administrative leaders, including District executive-level staff; and random meetings and phone conversations with other local Principals. In these PD opportunities, best educational practices are discussed, ideas are shared, and problems analyzed.

As SELS has demonstrated both academic and character/culture effectiveness, we have been recognized and begun to give back to our professional community. In 2014-15, we became a “Credentialed” EL Education school, one of only 19 network schools (of approximately 165) to attain this designation as a high performing program. Staff regularly presents at conferences and in the fall of 2016, SELS hosted an EL Education Site Seminar (as one of only five network schools selected to host). Thirty professionals from around the country participated in this two day PD, learning about SELS character, culture, and community programming and structures. Feedback was so positive, we have been asked to run the same seminar in fall 2017.

4. School Leadership:

From the onset, we knew the importance of building a staff with a shared vision for the program. Thus, the Principal and Assistant Principal have together hired every staff member with the expressed intent of ensuring this collective belief in the school’s primary philosophies and on-going mission. The Principal’s and Assistant Principal’s inherent knowing of the importance of unity is founded in their belief in the power of collaborative leadership. Many professional voices and ideas, with a shared vision, all striving towards the common goal of academic and character excellence in the development of the whole child is foundational to SELS success.

Administration leaders understand the importance of fully supporting teaching staff, and always have an open door for any reason. Staff meets every other week to discuss any immediate issues, to address Work Plan goals, and to analyze achievement data, making adjustments to teaching and/or programming as needed. Monthly, teachers meet as grade-level teams in Professional Learning Communities to dive deeper into topics addressed at staff meetings. Additionally, staff participates in monthly “community building”, SELS version of developing stronger staff relationships and connectivity.

SELS Board of Directors and Principal work closely to create policies aligned with our vision and educational best practices. Parent/community input is valued, and when big topics are addressed the Board and Principal encourage/seek out feedback through direct conversations, surveys, and/or participation at Board meetings. Again, we believe many minds concentrating on ideas and solutions produces more effective and widely accepted programs and structures. For example, a current landscaping project is led by a Principal and parent group, gathering input from all staff, students, and their parents. This group then analyzed the data and helped design the type of campus play areas, features, and landscaping most desired and effective.

The collective sum of SELS leadership philosophies and practices has demonstrated effectiveness with a high achieving program, well-respected character education, and recognition from the EL Education network.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

SELS employs a variety of strategies to facilitate academic success, as outlined throughout this application. One of these strategies not yet discussed, Habits of Work (HOWs), is vital to our success. HOWs are another aspect of our character/culture development program, and use the same acronym (SIERRA) as our character traits: Strength – I can do my best even when challenged; Integrity – I can produce quality work that is my own; Empathy – I can give and take academic suggestions in an honest and thoughtful way; Respect – I can honor crew learning time and others’ ideas; Responsibility – I can be organized, efficient, and prepared in all my work; and Adventure – I can take academic risks.

As students learn how to learn, we use HOWs to guide them into becoming empowered academic scholars. Since they first learn the terms as social-relational, the shift to academic ideas is fluid. HOWs’ complexity is scaffolded up the system: introduced in 2nd grade through direct instruction, role playing, learning targets on assignments, and weekly reflections; this continues through elementary and into middle school where HOWs become more embedded aspects of assignment rubrics, presentations, and regular reflections and goal-setting. In middle school, HOWs are also tracked by teachers and individual students, allowing students to correlate their efforts with their academic success.

Larger assignments always have Habits of Work learning targets to guide students’ academic success and reflect the character traits of the school as they relate to performance (e.g., “I can advocate for myself”, “I can maintain focus in class”, “I can complete quality work on time”). These learning targets, and thus the HOWs, support student learning and college readiness, and aid students in developing study skills, time-management skills, perseverance, self-awareness, initiative, and the ability to seek feedback and assistance. We feel HOWs are so vital to developing the whole child, we highlight them as the first category on students’ bi-annual progress reports. Additionally, instead of rewarding academic honor rolls (like most schools), we recognize students for Habits of Work excellence, called our HOWs100 (in our pursuit of all 2nd-8th graders attaining the distinction). On a 4-point rubric, with 3 as the benchmark, students must attain 4s in 4 of the 6 SIERRA traits; even with this high standard, we average approximately 65% of our students attaining HOWs100.

In an era of information overload, we fully believe the extensive development of skills will serve students throughout their education and even into adulthood. Feedback from students, parents, coaches, and community members corroborates this belief, validating our HOWs program's vital contribution to the overall academic success and culture of excellence found at SELS.