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   [ ] Charter   [ ] Magnet   [ ] Choice

Name of Principal Mrs. Jill M. Mazzalupo
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name Oakdale Elementary School
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 30 Indiana Circle
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Oakdale   State CT   Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 06370-1628

County   New London County

Telephone (860) 859-1800   Fax   (860) 859-2170

Web site/URL
http://www.montvilleschools.org/page.cfm?p=528   E-mail   jmazzalupo@montvilleschools.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*Mr. Brian Levesque   E-mail blevesque@montvilleschools.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Montville School District   Tel.   (860) 848-1228

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. Robert Mitchell
(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   3 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
   (per district designation):   1 Middle/Junior high schools
                                        1 High schools
                                        0 K-12 schools

                                        5 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
   [X] 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	22	18	40
K	23	31	54
1	14	23	37
2	20	18	38
3	24	35	59
4	20	18	38
5	31	24	55
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	154	167	321

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:

<u>1</u> % American Indian or Alaska Native
<u>5</u> % Asian
<u>2</u> % Black or African American
<u>7</u> % Hispanic or Latino
<u>0</u> % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
<u>71</u> % White
<u>14</u> % 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: <u>9</u>%

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 *to* the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	19
(2) Number of students who transferred *from* the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	12
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	31
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2015	345
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.090
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	9

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: <u>2</u> %
   <u>7</u> Total number ELL

   Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):
   <u>Gujarati, Mandarin, Cantonese, Spanish</u>

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: <u>29</u> %
   Total number students who qualify: <u>82</u>

8. Students receiving special education services: <u>14</u> %
   <u>39</u> Total number of students served

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

   <u>4</u> Autism   <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment
   <u>0</u> Deafness   <u>5</u> Other Health Impaired
   <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness   <u>11</u> Specific Learning Disability
   <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance   <u>17</u> Speech or Language Impairment
   <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment   <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury
   <u>0</u> Mental Retardation   <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness
   <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities   <u>2</u> Developmentally Delayed

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 3

10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	Number of Staff
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects	19
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	9
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a licensed professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	15
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	5

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1   17:1

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	97%	97%	96%	96%	96%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

13. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**
Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 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 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.

In a safe and positive environment, students are challenged to achieve their true potential as critical, creative, and collaborative problem solvers.

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

PART III – SUMMARY

Oakdale Elementary School is located in the town of Montville. The Montville Public School System consists of three elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school with two campuses. The district is run by an elected Board of Education with a superintendent and assistant superintendent overseeing the daily administration of the district.

Montville is located in Southeastern Connecticut with a population of approximately 19,500 people. Montville is home to the Mohegan Tribe, which operates The Mohegan Sun Casino. Its history includes a strong reliance on mills and manufacturing firms; some of these mills and firms are still present today. Residents often identify with the different villages within Montville. Oakdale School is located in the village of Oakdale, which consists of a unique blend of blue collar workers, engineers from General Dynamics Electric Boat, scientists from nearby Pfizer, and military personnel from The Naval Submarine Base New London and The U.S. Coast Guard Academy.

Oakdale Elementary School opened in 1964 with renovations and additions completed in 2007. There are 337 students attending Oakdale School in grades Pre-K through Grade 5, with full-day kindergarten offered since the 2012-2013 school year. Oakdale hosts the Montville Integrated Preschool for the district; the program provides developmentally appropriate curriculum for students receiving special education and related services, as well as children without disabilities who serve as role model peers.

Oakdale Elementary School embraces a whole child approach to education. The staff at Oakdale is comprised of a building principal, a part-time special education coordinator, a reading consultant, two part-time math coaches, a school psychologist, and a variety of special education and related service providers. The entire staff works together to embrace a culture where students learn to persevere when faced with any academic or social challenge they face.

Students are supported socially and emotionally by a strong classroom based social-emotional curriculum and a school based Positive Behavior Intervention Support System. Students begin each day with a morning meeting, which includes a greeting, a time for sharing, and mini-lessons to develop social-emotional skills. Throughout the day students are recognized for meeting the four school-wide expectations: Be Respectful, Be Responsible, Be Safe and Build Community. These programs have created an environment where students feel safe and nurtured and are willing to take risks.

Oakdale School staff prides themselves in taking on new initiatives with enthusiasm and hard work. Our staff constantly seeks opportunities for new learning to deliver instruction that is relevant and rigorous and keeps students engaged and excited about learning. As a district and a school, we are committed to our mission: To ensure that all students develop as critical, creative, and collaborative PROBLEM SOLVERS. Everyone works together in a true collaborative spirit to set and maintain high academic expectations for each and every student. Teachers utilize a variety of strategies to help students master the rigorous demands of the Connecticut Core Standards. We adopted Eureka math which required us to rethink how we teach mathematical understanding and number sense. Our staff took this challenge head-on, giving up their summer to attend workshops, planning during PLC meetings and working one-on-one with math coaches to improve teaching strategies. Although our reading scores have always been impressive, the staff continues to challenge students in new and innovative ways. We piloted and adopted an online reading program that provides students with opportunities to read across all content areas. In addition, we are piloting and in the beginning stages of adopting a new reading and writing program that provides opportunities for students to apply reading and writing strategies taught through mini-lessons in authentic ways.

There is a strong focus on using data to inform instruction during PLC meetings, as well as during SRBI meetings in both ELA and math. Oakdale Elementary School has been recognized as a School of Distinction by The Connecticut State Department of Education in one area during the 2014-2015 school year (Highest Performing Subgroup) and in three areas during the 2015-2016 school year (Highest Performing Elementary School, Highest Growth for All Students, and Highest Growth for High Needs Students).

The highly collaborative environment within Oakdale School extends to the community. Staff not only works hard to build strong relationships with students, but the home-to-school connection has proven to be instrumental to our overall success. Oakdale believes that continuous communication and strong partnerships with families is crucial to ensuring that our students are creative and collaborative problem solvers. The school works with a very dedicated PTO board, and a number of organizations and businesses in the community.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. **Core Curriculum:**

All our curricula are unified by a common focus on problem-solving. Our district-wide mission is to ensure students develop as critical, creative, collaborative problem solvers; this mission calls for students to actively engage in cognitively complex tasks which include gathering evidence, using reasoning skills, communicating results, and displaying productive persistence. At all grade levels as students approach any content, teachers design learning experiences requiring students to ask questions and probe for answers through research, develop and execute plans to make decisions, overcome obstacles, and meet needs. By considering evidence and alternate solutions, working both independently and as part of collaborative teams, students develop arguments, evaluate their thinking, and identify errors in reasoning.

Students engage in thematic units of study based upon reading of fiction and nonfiction texts and integration of science and social studies topics. Teachers focus on building deep understanding of concepts and skills through an emphasis on rich discourse with peers to share thought processes as students practice skills. In even the early elementary grades, observations of classrooms show students engaged in powerful conversations while the teacher serves as a facilitator.

Our English Language Arts program employs a balanced focus in five core areas of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The early grades build foundational skills through thoughtful, sequential introduction of phonemes and sound/spelling relationships to unlock the alphabetic code and foster decoding and encoding skills, and the regular reading of decodable texts using the Imagine It program. Oakdale teachers are currently phasing in Readers and Writers Workshops based upon the Columbia Teachers College Units of Study. A great deal of work has been done to align curriculum, instruction, and assessment to the CT Core Standards by pushing students to read complex texts at their instructional levels while building skills in close reading and development of evidence-based responses. Shared building-wide comprehension strategies have been developed, and teachers model lessons that work in PLC groups and at faculty meetings. Reading and writing are integrated as students use exemplar texts to analyze and reproduce the structures and elements of narrative, explanatory, and opinion writing.

Oakdale has an extremely strong Scientific Research-Based Intervention program to ensure all students are on-track to develop as readers. Students meet every day in small enrichment or intervention groups to receive reading instruction directly targeted to their needs. They closely follow a district-wide flow chart for implementation of tier 1, 2, and 3 instruction based upon assessment results and identified need.

Three years ago, Oakdale transitioned to the Eureka math program which uses concrete models to build true understanding of numbers and operations before moving to pictorial and finally abstract reasoning and algorithms. This program has helped students develop much stronger number sense and the ability to select and strategically apply models to solve problems. Students are routinely engaged in explaining their reasoning and evaluating why and how specific strategies and problem-solving steps were selected.

While reading of nonfiction is used to build content knowledge in science and social studies, students also actively engage in applying that knowledge through experimentation and other problem-solving activities. Social studies units focus on civic learning by exploration of the history and organization of the school and town communities and the need to follow rules for safe and respectful engagement in these communities, the comparison of our local community to others in the state, nation, and world, and ways people make a difference in their communities.

Our science program is based upon state standards and consists of content-specific units in life, earth, and physical science in every grade. Units includes kits of materials for hands-on inquiry-based learning focused on building a true understanding rather than on memorizing terms and concepts. The school began to transition to Next Generation Science Standards last summer and will phase in new units over the next several years. The current focus is on adding engineering practices and utilizing the "5 E" model of instruction in which students learn concepts through a sequential process of Engaging, Exploring,

Explaining, Extending/Elaborating, and Evaluating

All students participate in a social and emotional learning curriculum using a classroom meeting process to introduce appropriate ways to communicate needs, manage stress and conflict, and contribute to a positive classroom community.

Oakdale is home to the district's one preschool program. This program has been built around the NAEYC research on the relationship between play and early literacy. Students attending include identified special needs students and their general education peers. Units of instruction are theme-based and focus on using play to develop language, numeracy, and social skills. The curriculum stresses phonemic awareness, listening comprehension through read-alouds, language development, and building literacy through play. Strategies used align to the elementary core programs in Imagine It and Eureka and all pre-school teachers have been trained in these programs to ensure their students are ready for the transition to kindergarten. Pre- and post-Brigance screens are utilized as indicators of impact of program on student success. This popular program regularly has a waiting list of general education peers.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Oakdale's students are actively engaged in lessons which promote healthy lifestyles, STEM skills, creativity, and the arts. Students in kindergarten through fifth grade participate in both music and art for one 45 minute session each week; specialists work with classroom teachers to add additional classes on a rotating basis. Preschool classes also meet on a weekly basis for a 20 minute session. The curriculum for the arts is aligned with the Connecticut Arts Curriculum Framework; students are provided with opportunities to "create, perform, and respond with understanding of all the arts, including dance, music, theatre, and the visual arts." Their development as choral and instrumental musicians is obvious at concerts. Due to a focus on quality and the development of skills in areas such as rhythm and tone, rather than loudness or participation, students exhibit true musicality. They have the option of participating in an afterschool guitar club, annually perform with the middle school, and can audition to play in the district's honor band. Movement and dance is integrated into lessons and classes often perform for each other. One of the highlights of the year is the annual talent show, which showcases a variety of individual and group acts. Oakdale students' art work is framed and on display throughout the school and in the district's central offices. Students express well-placed pride in their work, and it is regularly entered in art contests, displayed at the community Mystic Art Center, and recognized by the Connecticut Association of Schools arts awards program.

The physical education, health, and nutrition program is designed to model and promote healthy life styles. Age-appropriate activities are used to build hand-eye coordination, flexibility, physical strength and endurance and cardiovascular fitness. The school's value for fitness extends beyond the weekly physical education class as students are offered extra class sessions and participate in the American Heart Association challenges. Physical activity is routinely integrated into the classroom. Activities, such as the Fun Run, sponsored by the Parent Teacher Organization often include fitness and health. The school nurse and the district's school lunch coordinator visit classrooms to support instruction provided in health and nutrition. In keeping with the district Wellness Policy, parents are engaged as partners in development of students' healthy lifestyles.

The special area teachers at Oakdale (art, music, physical education, and library/media) work collaboratively to provide an enrichment program which integrates the arts, research, and physical activity to design project-based units. A recent problem-solving project was the design and creation of a nature walk that extends around the perimeter of the school's property. This project was so successful that it was presented at a Board of Education meeting. A physical education enrichment lesson had fourth and fifth grade students design activities which would elevate students' heart rates. They then implemented these activities with third grade students. In another unit students designed and built musical instruments.

Teachers in music, art, PE, and library media meet across the three elementary schools as a professional learning community to share strategies and curriculum. They also meet vertically with secondary elective area teachers and are part of regional professional learning groups from eighteen area districts.

Oakdale does not have a stand-alone technology class, however the use of technology to support learning is evident throughout the school. Students are constantly engaged on class sets of computers to support learning through research, writing, reading, and presentation. The district has purchased several curriculum-based programs to build skills such as myON (a source of thousands of leveled fiction and non-fiction texts which allows students to use online tools to mark text and create electronic journals) and ZEARN (a program directly aligned to the models utilized in Eureka math). Teachers also use a wide variety of free tools such as Newsela, GAFE, and Microsoft Tools. Computers are incorporated into instruction as powerful learning tools, and many teachers are moving toward paperless classrooms. This move is based solely upon teacher initiative; teachers have been encouraged to bring new ideas forward and the district has worked to support their needs for hardware and software. Every grade level has access to a cart of computers, with goal of 1:1 environment in near future. Recently Oakdale's PTO purchased a cart of 25 Chromebooks to assist in making this goal a reality.

A separate curriculum has been developed by the district school psychologists and social worker to promote social and emotional learning. This curriculum is taught by all classroom teachers through morning meetings with check-in activities, a focus on mindfulness, and a daily yoga minute. Students participate in activities designed to build perspective-taking, empathy, self-awareness, perseverance, positive thinking, support of one another through challenges, and positive self-talk.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

Oakdale teachers' instructional approach is based upon Marzano's research into "high yield" strategies. Since teachers' skills are an important factor in student growth, teachers' growth is a priority. Teachers belong to communities of learners who continuously seek opportunities for improvement. Common expectations for lesson design require introduction of new learning, opportunities for practicing and deepening knowledge and skills, and use of that learning for cognitively complex tasks. Consistent, explicit instruction in important strategies is used across grade levels, and all teachers are trained in the use of these strategies. Through self-assessment and review of student learning results, teachers select improvement goals and use administrator and peer feedback to monitor growth. Integral to Oakdale's success is its expectation for, and promotion of, continual growth for all community members – students and staff.

There is a remarkable level of collaboration about instruction and assessment among teachers at each grade level. Daily preparatory periods are used to discuss strategies, share successes and brainstorm next steps for improvement. Grade level teams of teachers take shared ownership for the learning of all students, and often classes are combined or regrouped to promote learning. In fact, when one teacher on a team is absent, the other teachers ask if they can combine classes rather than bring in a substitute teacher. This collegial spirit illustrates the staff's belief in shared responsibility for student growth.

Teachers use their reading program unit topics as the basis for thematic instruction, and recently fifth grade teachers have implemented problem-based learning experiences. Based on a reading unit, the three fifth grade classes developed a science fair unit. Each student identified a problem, performed experiments to solve it and displayed their work for the other grades.

Smarter Balanced Assessments and interim assessments, science CMT, STAR, DIBELS, and Otis Lennon (for grade 3 students) make up the school's formal benchmark assessment program. When appropriate these assessments are followed by specific probes to identify areas for intervention. The data team meets every six weeks to review student data in math, reading and behavior and discuss progress and appropriate supports. Tier 2 and 3 SRBI reading programs focus on needs identified through targeted assessments in phonological awareness, decoding, sight words, vocabulary, language and reading comprehension. Students who would benefit from additional support are offered the opportunity to participate in an afterschool program which extends the day by 2.5 hours twice a week. Time is provided for instruction in reading and math, assistance in completion of homework, and a physical activity.

Common classroom assessments are used across a grade level to measure progress on content standards. Standards-based report cards have been aligned to learning scales which specify summative assessments to measure mastery of each standard. The learning scales list the vertical learning progressions which should

be followed to achieve the standard and the formative assessments which teachers and students use to track progress toward mastery. Each standard on the report card has a learning scale and the learning progression specifies the order and pacing of instruction for each trimester. Learning scales are also a valuable tool to inform parents of their children's progress and outline next steps for instruction. The use of formative assessment tools enables children to identify areas for continued work.

Individualized, technology-based support is used during the school day and in the after school programs. Programs like ZEARN, myON, ReadWorks, and Newsela are frequently utilized, and almost all classrooms now have class sets of iPads, Chromebooks or laptops to support instruction throughout the day.

Because of the strategies outlined above, Oakdale's achievement gaps between all students and high needs students on the Smarter Balanced Assessments are well below state averages. Most notable is the lack of a gap when comparing the percent of students who achieved their individual growth targets on SBA. The school's largest achievement gap is in science and current efforts to close this 10 percentage point gap between all students and high needs students include our problem-solving initiative and the implementation of the "5 E model" for lesson design. A focus on phenomenon-based formative assessment will be used to engage students and to measure pre-conceptions and misconceptions at the start of each unit as we transition to Next Generation Science Standards.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

The positive environment at Oakdale Elementary School is due to the hard work and dedication of the staff who believe in teamwork and never shy away from a challenge. Above all, the staff feels valued, appreciated, and heard. In Staff Climate Assessments, staff members report that the culture and emotional climate of the school is positive and supportive. We often refer to ourselves as the Oakdale Family, and like a family we celebrate personal and professional achievements, as well as support each other at difficult times. A Glad and Sad Committee plans events such as luncheons and after school activities. We celebrate everything from weddings or the birth of children to the completion of new teacher training programs, earning a new degree, and having success with students. The achievements of individuals, groups of staff members, or the entire school are celebrated at the building level and district level.

Students come to school each day in a place where they can feel safe and successful. Every day, the staff works tirelessly to encourage positive behaviors and promote individual student success. Oakdale is a PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention Supports) school with a main focus of encouraging students to be responsible, respectful, and safe community members. The entire staff, including, monitors, bus drivers, and support staff all actively participate by handing out "Tiger Paws" (our school mascot is a tiger) when students exemplify positive behaviors.

This program, along with a unified belief that all students can achieve, supports students' academic and social-emotional growth. Students leave Oakdale School ready to take on any challenge. Our overarching goal as a community of learners is to provide opportunities for students to problem solve across the all content areas at all grade levels. To achieve these rigorous demands, students are required to gather evidence, reason, communicate, and persevere. They enter middle school with a "no quit" attitude, the ability to make responsible choices, and the empathy to accept all classmates with all of their differences.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Each year families are welcomed back for the new school year with a letter from the principal and an invitation to attend a Welcome Back picnic. This picnic is sponsored by the PTO, which is the heart of Oakdale School. Once the school year begins families are invited back again for Open House to visit classrooms and meet with a variety of community agencies, such as local sports teams, the youth service bureau, and scout organizations.

The PTO works closely with the staff to plan activities throughout the year to engage families and the community at large. The major fundraising event for the PTO is a fun run held during the fall with the intent of not just raising money, but also gathering the community for a fun fitness related event. The PTO uses these funds to provide in-house field trips related to the curriculum, such as visits from museums, the aquarium, and the historical society. They also work closely with the principal to bring in assemblies on topics related to science, history, and culture. Family fun nights include a winter wonderland craft night, BINGO night, cozy book night, and an ice cream social/basket raffle. We also work closely with local politicians and business owners, who are always invited to school events. Each year, over 20 people from around the community participate in Montville Loves to Read Day; readers share their love of reading and discuss the importance of reading to their life.

There is a strong emphasis placed on the school to home connection. Progress is reported regularly to parents via newsletters, emails, and phone calls. Many teachers have been using a private texting subscription called REMIND, which families have reported as being a quick and easy way to receive information. The principal sends out a weekly electronic newsletter called The Paw Print. Local community agencies are welcome to share information; fliers are often sent home as attachments with the newsletter and this information is posted on the school website. Families are invited to parent teacher conferences in the fall at the close of the first trimester and optional conferences are offered in the spring.

Many volunteers assist throughout the day in a variety of capacities. At the end of each year, families are invited to complete surveys about what they feel has been successful and areas that may need improvement.

3. Professional Development:

When teachers succeed, students succeed. Research has proven that no school-level factor matters more to students' success than high-quality teachers. To support our teachers, we clearly define excellent practice and results and provide time and support to increase teacher's skills and knowledge. These professional development opportunities enhance practice, give accurate, useful information about teachers' strengths and development areas; and provide recognition of success and growth. The purpose of the district's professional learning model is to help each teacher strengthen his/her practice to improve student learning and ensure positive outcomes for every student. It also aids to fairly and accurately evaluate teacher performance.

This plan hinges on professional conversation between and among teachers. It calls for the frequent and regular use of professional learning communities, peer observations, and other collaborative dialogue among colleagues that focus on what students are learning and what teachers and their administrators can do to support teaching and learning. Professional learning is combined with peer coaching and feedback to improve practice. Through the PLC group structure, professional learning is sustained, authentic, and job-embedded. It driven by student, educator, and school data and measured by evidence of impact on practice and student growth.

Our professional learning system works because all educators have committed to continuously analyze and refine practice; they believe in their responsibility to take action to continually improve performance and their collective responsibility to promote student growth. All Oakdale educators are engaged as members of a learning community to build and cultivate collective responsibility, continuous improvement, and shared leadership toward effective professional learning experiences.

In addition to the PLC structure, team and faculty meetings are used to share successful strategies and districtwide full and half days are set aside for focused work on specific topics by grade level or school. The building leadership team helps to identify these topics based upon faculty input. Our specialists (non-core teachers, school psychologist, social worker, speech and language pathologist, etc.) have the opportunity twice a year to work with colleagues from 18 area districts to plan and participate in professional learning directly aligned to their individual needs. The agendas for these full-day meetings are set by the teachers themselves.

4. School Leadership:

Leadership at Oakdale School involves many individuals and groups. The staff works as a unified team to address all areas of need by participating in school and district-wide committees. The principal has built strong relationships with and among staff. By empowering people to realize their strengths, many staff members hold leadership roles. Thirty percent of staff members have been trained as mentors; these teachers work with student teachers and beginning teachers in their first two years. Four teachers have advanced their education by earning a leadership certificate. These teachers, along with numerous other staff members, have taken on leadership roles and tasks with support and guidance of the principal.

A number of teams meet monthly to implement and monitor district-wide and school-wide goals. These goals are primarily a product of the School Leadership Team. This team analyzes district and school data to develop school goals. Other teams operate as sub-committees under the umbrella of the School Leadership Team.

The School Climate and Security Team, led by the principal, focuses on maintaining Oakdale's safety. The School Security and Safety plan is reviewed and revised regularly to address state mandates and district and school protocols. Staff members also serve on the district Wellness Committee, which guides the efforts to establish an environment that promotes students' health, well-being, and ability to learn.

The PBIS team, headed by the school psychologist, has created a well-run, sustained positive behavior program for students. Due to a recent re-design of the PBIS program, office referrals have dramatically decreased. With the support of this team, teachers have developed stronger relationships with students and have taken more ownership for student behavior.

Student achievement is monitored by several different teams in the building. Grade level teams work with a variety of staff members analyzing data and planning instruction. The reading consultant meets with the teams to review benchmark data, as well as the students' daily performance in reading workshop groups and the classroom setting. Math coaches also meet with grade levels to discuss instructional strategies and review data related to students' performance. These teams work collaboratively with the special education team, which is led by the special services coordinator and school psychologist.

Through the use of this team structure, leadership is distributed to shareholders. Using the principal as a guide and advisor, staff members are empowered to take responsibility and initiative.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

About ten years ago, all of the teachers in Montville read Richard DuFour's book Whatever It Takes: How Professional Learning Communities Respond When Kids Don't Learn. The key to Oakdale's success is the way in which its teachers have embraced this philosophy. They truly seek to do "whatever it takes" every day for every child. Our belief that every child can learn to high levels and that every child must grow is at the foundation of our community, and it is just this belief that resulted in Smarter Balanced results indicating that 92% of students met their growth targets in reading and 98% met mathematics targets. A culture of "no excuses" and a willingness to own student results leads teachers to volunteer to pilot new initiatives, offer to provide extra after school sessions, and ask their principal to set higher and higher school growth goals every year. Teachers lead this charge rather than accepting a directive from the administration.

Our teachers are actively involved in curriculum revision, review of new programs for adoption, development of standards-based report cards and related assessments and learning scales. They embrace the PLC process and learn from one another through peer observations. Great teaching is hard work and our teachers are willing to work hard. The role of the teacher in the classroom has changed dramatically over the past decade through the introduction of technology and the availability of research data defining effective instruction. Rather than resisting these changes, Oakdale's staff has actively embraced them. Accountability for assessment results, new evaluation and observation standards, individual responsibility for professional learning…. the expectations of teachers are also changing rapidly. The fact that all staff members at Oakdale ask, "How can we make this work?" rather than debate reasons why it can't or won't work is critical to Oakdale's continued growth.