

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 Ms. Elizabeth Whisnant

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

Official School Name Horace Mann Elementary School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 4430 Newark Street, N.W.

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

City Washington State DC Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 20016-2737

County District Of Columbia

Telephone (202) 282-0126 Fax (202) 282-0128

Web site/URL http://www.horacemandc.org E-mail elizabeth.whisnant@dc.gov

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. Antwan Wilson E-mail antwan.wilson@dc.gov
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name District Of Columbia Public School District Tel. (202) 442-5885

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. John-Paul Hayworth
(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):
- 76 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 17 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 21 High schools
 - 2 K-12 schools
- 116 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	20	20	40
K	31	32	63
1	31	38	69
2	31	31	62
3	34	18	52
4	22	32	54
5	18	18	36
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	187	189	376

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 6 % Asian
 - 11 % Black or African American
 - 12 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 60 % White
 - 11 % 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: 8%

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

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	13
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	16
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	29
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2015	379
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.077
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	8

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

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):
Tigrinya, Russian, Polish, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Swedish, Korean, Czech, Romanian, Hungarian, Amharic, Vietnamese, Italian, Japanese, German, Arabic, Danish, Turkish, Turkmen

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 6%
Total number students who qualify: 22
8. Students receiving special education services: 5%
20 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
- 0 Deaf-Blindness
- 1 Emotional Disturbance
- 0 Hearing Impairment
- 0 Mental Retardation
- 6 Multiple Disabilities
- 0 Orthopedic Impairment
- 6 Other Health Impaired
- 6 Specific Learning Disability
- 2 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: 12
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	Number of Staff
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects	17
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.	9
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	3

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 22:1
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	96%	97%	97%	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

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award. 2011

15. In a couple of sentences, provide the school's mission or vision statement.

At Mann, we know that quality teaching and enthusiastic learning come from the intersection of thoughtful, collaboratively minded educators with inquisitive and eager young students. We have both! Learning at Mann is purposeful, strategy-based, and joyful, and takes places both within and beyond our walls.

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

Horace Mann ES is a public elementary school in northwest Washington DC serving families from the neighboring communities of Spring Valley and Wesley Heights, as well as families who travel across the city to our door. Founded in 1933 and still situated on its original site, the school has a history of high performance, international connection (students represent 44 countries), and community presence.

We embrace our rich history. Fifth graders, for example, engage in an annual timeline project researching the school's past, interviewing former students, parents, teachers, and principals. Their storytelling partners offer firsthand insight into 80 years of the school's history and development, from its origin as a new institution on a former farm site to its modernized version at the center of its northwest DC neighborhood.

We take our roots in progressive education seriously. Responsive Classroom practices form the basis of a socio-emotional curriculum. More recently the school has been at the vanguard of the mindfulness and sustainability movements in education. For decades, Mann has opened its doors to DC's university partners, serving as a professional learning site for pre-service teachers. We connect with other schools in our district as a founding member of the District of Columbia Collaborative for Change (DC3). This group seeks to share best practices and professional development to advance outcomes for students across the city.

At Mann we value our traditions as a way of being known and included. This can be seen in our Centaur Celebration Days which invite choice-based, multi-age learning experiences, and in milestone celebrations such as our Fall "Banner Celebration", where classes announce their thoughtfully chosen names for themselves and offer an intention for their contribution to our community ("We are the Helpful Honeybees and we pledge to help our classmates and community each and every day!"). Each 5th grade student makes a mosaic tile that forms a beautiful - and lasting - part of our building. Our alumni believe in the phrase "once a Centaur, always a Centaur." Many return to volunteer, send their children here, or even join our staff!

We place self-reflection and awareness at the heart of learning. We believe there is power in allowing students time to think and solidify their learning. We build on this individual reflection through a strong culture of conversation between children. Beyond simple "turn and talks", we incorporate peer evaluation and critique, emphasizing the value of learning from one's peers as opposed to solely from the teacher. Students are encouraged to engage with each other's ideas respectfully and focus on deepening each other's learning.

Communal reflection allows us to foster collaborative classrooms where partner and small group work is the focus. We leverage our talented teaching staff to reduce group size and encourage a multiplicity of groupings to best support our learners. When you walk through our building you will see readers grouped in nooks in the hallways, mathematicians collaboratively solving inquiry problems, artists independently choosing the focus and materials for their learning, and scientists engaged in solution making. We value purposeful learning because it places our students at the heart of our school.

Utilizing inquiry and workshop models and by developing a culture where the process is valued as much as the product, we cultivate students who are problem solvers and deep thinkers. In our math classes we revel in failure as a way to learn. Student choice - of topic, book, and avenue for demonstrating understanding - is valued and supported.

We also encourage and support our learning community by leveraging talented teachers to provide students with specific supports. Our exemplary RTI process identifies and develops hand-crafted plans for learners created with input from all who know the child, not just the current grade teacher. With twenty languages spoken and a multitude of world cultures represented, our commitment to personalizing learning to meet student need is strong. We meet weekly to tell Learning Stories about our children in our quest to know them well. Classroom teachers identify themselves as members of a team responsible for the educational progress of their students. Finally, we support our learners by fostering a strong adult community. Our teachers are collaborative and engaged. They are open to feedback and willing to support one another. We embrace the learning we expect our students to do; this reinforces the assertion that our school is a place

where challenging and engaging learning happens for all. We do this by having regular faculty meetings, strong grade level and cross grade planning sessions, and encouraging participation in high quality professional development such as with Harvard's Project Zero. The school has made a multi-year investment in building our capacity to make thinking visible.

A multi-year recipient of the National Blue Ribbon Award, our school regularly serves as a learning partner to local and national educators. We have connected with other National Blue Ribbon Schools to share key practices, last year hosting three new National Blue Ribbon recipients for site visits. These connections to others schools of strong practice have allowed us to help support our DC3 cohort of schools and others in the District with growing expertise and resource sharing.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

A growth mindset is fostered early to support grit, perseverance, and flexible thinking in students when grappling with challenging tasks. The District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) has adopted the Common Core State Standards to guide our work in reading, writing, and math. Horace Mann has taken advantage of the latitude offered within the Standards to create a core curriculum that is dedicated to project-based, multi-modal learning. The creativity of our faculty is reflected in novel approaches to civic learning in all subjects. Intentional, rigorous live action role play activities offer space for reflection and empathy, giving depth and feeling to studies of history and geography.

Math at Horace Mann uses a responsive, multi-faceted approach to reach students of all abilities. Curriculum is derived from a combination of Eureka Math and hands-on exploratory student-centered learning from programs such as Cathy Fosnot’s Investigation series. Math congresses offer students an avenue to learn from one another and promote dialogue between students about their strategies for approaching and solving problems. The teacher is not the only source of knowledge at our school!

Mann prides itself on using a Balanced Literacy approach for English Language Arts, which provides students with skill-based, differentiated instruction. Learning comes from a variety of “just-right” texts that are cross-disciplinary and are introduced through a combination of Readers and Writers Workshop, Close Reading, Shared Reading, Readers Theater, and both student- and teacher-led Guided Reading/Book Clubs. Emphasis is placed on meaningful engagement for students by ensuring the purpose of the reading or writing is grounded in context for students. First graders spend weeks researching various topics to become school experts, wearing stickers across the day to encourage the community to inquire about their substantive expertise. Knowing the research documenting the importance of reading proficiency by Grade 3, we set that as an annual goal. Our reading intervention teacher works only with Grade 1 and 2 readers to marshal our focused effort to this end.

Social studies at our school focuses on learning from a variety of primary sources such as songs, speeches, photos, and letters. These diverse texts allow students to engage with history free from the biases inherent in secondary sources such as textbooks; additionally, these media allow students of all learning styles to connect with the content. Student learning is deepened via a regular commitment to intra-class debate, bringing forward the many points of view that have shaped our country and world while strengthening students’ capacity for empathy and historical thinking. The use of daily writing across the day creates opportunities for students to respond, through writing, to themes observed through their studies such as expressing activism through written essays in 4th grade.

Horace Mann’s science curriculum is designed to develop students’ capacity for scientific, data-based thinking and problem solving. The Next Generation Science Standards are used as a general guideline for science studies; the day-to-day teaching and learning in our science program introduces students to some of the many open questions of the natural world. An emphasis is placed on learning about the impact that human activity has on the environment, particularly the Chesapeake Bay watershed, in an effort to groom students for a lifetime of thoughtful environmental stewardship.

Our Pre-K classrooms embrace a Reggio Emilia philosophy of learning. We believe that young children express an innate desire to explore the world around them and to pose questions about their role within it. Student choice and curiosity drive our dynamic, emergent curriculum and a strong emphasis is placed on synergistic community building. Early evidence of student reflection is visible through documentation of student thinking and exploration; children are surrounded by images of themselves and their learning.

Horace Mann educators intentionally foster a focus on 21st century thinking and learning. This lives out as students contribute their knowledge and problem-solving skills to the growing needs of the future. Critical thinking and peer review are not only encouraged but explicitly modeled and practiced. Students participate in critique, and develop and execute conceptual models, supporting the growth of abstract thought while

simultaneously doing some of the same science work that adult scientists, mathematicians, historians, and authors do. The results of this thinking are evident in student opinion pieces on improving the community and broader world as early as Kindergarten.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Related Arts at Horace Mann Elementary School encompasses Visual Arts, Performing Arts, Physical Education, Health and Nutrition, Library/Media, World Languages, and Gardening/Harvest. The related arts are instrumental in allowing students to discover parts of their identity that don't traditionally reveal themselves in the classroom.

With intention, the library sits at the heart of our newly renovated building. It is abuzz daily with classes, clubs and challenges. Each day in library, learners are greeted in a different language to support our community's commitment to global citizenship. You can find children sitting on the "listening steps" engaged in a read-aloud, carefully chosen by our librarian to connect with and expand classroom content. Our librarian ensures students develop a view of themselves as authors by organizing author visits and taking students to local bookstores. A technology cart with a classroom set of iPads supports student research and digital literacy skills. The library also serves as a warm meeting place within our community where parents feel welcome before and after school and volunteer their time on a weekly basis to re-shelve our inventory of over 30,000 books.

Our commitment to a choice-based Visual Art education values both independence and collaboration within the creative process. The visual arts curriculum is rooted in the fundamentals of elements of design, explores current concepts, addresses school-wide themes and supports classroom content. A recent content connection illustrated our environmental work in Chesapeake Bay preservation. Technology is incorporated when students publish artwork and offer an artist statement in an online gallery. The studio classroom environment supports student risk-taking, accepting peer assessment and celebrating each student's original work of art. The visual arts program has been recognized by three universities as a model for pre-service teachers to practice art education.

We have chosen to embrace Performing Arts as a part of our commitment to ensuring that our students "have a voice". Articulation, projection, inflection based on meaning, timing, storytelling and movement are skills we grow. Early grade musicals are community-themed productions; the upper grade musical is historically based, with 3rd and 4th graders becoming the supporting chorus to the 5th grade stars. Our musicals are a school-wide effort, from program design and tickets (literacy with an audience), scenery (visual art production), choreography (physical movement) and content-driven themes from science and history curricula. Mann's relationship with American University offers the Greenberg Theater as befits a polished, professional performance!

The Physical Education department works to bring lifetime fitness to everyone in our community. A broad array of sports, skills and skill levels are embraced, making it possible for everyone to participate. On average, students have three PE classes per week, demonstrating the school's significant commitment to an active and cooperative experience. iPads are used to record and promote student self-assessment of performance, enhancing learning and skills improvement. PE for our youngest students (PreK/K) is taught in half-groups to optimize safety, teaching impact, and student engagement. Fitness activities extend beyond PE classes and into organized activities before and after school (Girls on the Run, soccer) and during recess through our Marathon Club for students and teachers where individuals work towards completing a marathon over time while running laps around the track. This supports our commitment to incorporating physical activity into the day to promote a healthy lifestyle, and allows small and tall to learn and play together.

Mann's proximity to embassies brings families from all over the world. International languages are heard throughout our building as families gather at the beginning and end of each day. Spanish is taught in early childhood classrooms twice a week and other languages are offered as after school enrichment. Students understand that language acquisition is not only about vocabulary and content, but also about culture that connects us to all people.

The unique gardening and harvest program represent a significant investment into the development of environmental stewardship among our students. Initiatives such as our year-round Grow Towers allow students to look closely at the daily growth of vegetables while also providing a regular influx of fresh, healthy food to augment school lunches (seed to table). Outdoor gardening spaces provide a rich context for scientific and environmental learning; furthermore, each class is allowed a special plot in which student-selected vegetables and herbs may be planted and grown. We retain a dedicated gardening staff along with several volunteers who work together to sustain our gardens as integrated learning environments.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

It is our aim that students at Horace Mann elementary act as the catalyst for their own learning and that is why our assessment practices ensure each learner is known and their individual abilities are valued and nurtured. Because we recognize that learning is multidimensional, our assessment mirrors that belief. For example, cross-disciplinary instructional teams bring together a diverse range of perspectives to analyze multiple forms of student data before defining immediate class-based intervention practices ranging from simple environmental changes to changes in how material is either presented or knowledge is demonstrated by students. This collaborative team of professionals represents mental health, special education, language acquisition and development, developmental specialists, families and classroom teachers. We work to examine student strengths and relative opportunities for growth across the school day and from the perspective of multiple adults who support the student.

While our approach recognizes the whole child through the use of both anecdotal and formative assessment data, our interventions reflect targeted supports to address specific student needs. As a result, the school boasts an achievement gap of less than 10 percent.

Teachers are committed to deep reflection on student understanding. Using established protocols, teachers across the school meet to question and explore student learning and determine next steps. Grade level meetings include review of student work samples and grade level expectations to determine next steps for classroom instruction as well as changes in how teachers collaborate across classrooms to meet the needs of students through dynamic small groups or through additional exposure to foundational concepts. Teachers also confer with students one-on-one to assess their level, allowing them to provide targeted feedback based on individual needs. In addition to formative assessment through checklists and observations, teachers collect regular benchmark data about students at key points in the school year. Ongoing reflection and note taking during lesson facilitation allows teachers to examine student progress multidimensionally and develop student goals reflective of progress towards content understanding and process internalization during problem solving.

As a school, we embrace the challenge of furthering greater autonomy among all students by incorporating self-reflection and evaluation across every grade. For example, in Kindergarten, children reflect on goals established at the beginning of a lesson and evaluate in what ways they were successful. In First grade, students reflect on the practices that support their growing endurance as readers and writers. In grades 3-5, students become owners of their growth through self-reflection and goal setting such as noticing strengths and weaknesses in two writing samples or referring to checklists during problem-solving to examine math practices that contribute to higher achievement and success.

In addition, a robust Response to Intervention (RTI) process allows experts around the school to put the best research into practice to help learners reach their goals. The RTI team serves as a forum for reflection on adaption to our practice in order to meet student needs. Teachers differentiate for students at the Tier 1 level and, based on the data they collect, may choose to call on the RTI team to collaborate on possibilities for Tier 2 and Tier 3 support. In addition, the RTI team monitors grade-level benchmarks and report card data to reach out to teachers about students who may need support beyond the Tier 1 level. Open communication and collaboration between teachers is the key to Horace Mann's success in meeting all students' needs. In RTI meetings, participants discuss quantitative and qualitative data brought forth by teachers and work together to discuss goals and choose the best intervention to meet those goals. While we are careful to match students who need additional support with experts, we also utilize community partnerships, such as

education interns from American University, to give students as much support as possible. A result of its positive impact, 100% of classroom teachers will have engaged the RTI team for support during SY 16-17.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

We believe people thrive in environments where they are known as individuals; where their thinking is celebrated and expanded; and where they are cared for. On this foundation, Mann stands as a responsive community to the diverse cultural, linguistic and learning needs of all members, both small and tall.

At Horace Mann, students strive to master content while also growing an understanding of themselves as learners. Student engagement in designing their own learning includes examining and reflecting on their work, and that of peers, to recognize the many pathways there are to learning. Young mathematicians break out into small autonomous groups to solve problems. They report back to the class through a shared congress and post their solutions in a shared space for passersby to explore. Student connectedness with one another is also evident in the relationships developed through buddy classrooms, bringing together two classes across grades to connect through art projects, reading support or open play. These connections help students establish a sense of self within the community and make visible the continuum of learning across the years.

Students are embraced holistically in the community. The drive to know children and demonstrate care for their well-being is visible through the intentional collaboration among adults. We strive to affirm the individuality of each child while still helping them to recognize their value as a member of the community. A commitment to the community is reflected as students participate in and contribute to daily morning meetings, develop classroom agreements or norms to guide their conduct, and engage in peer problem solving when conflicts arise. All of the work we do serves to bind us together. A common repertoire of songs, support for recycling and food share efforts, gardening that yields both produce and beauty are exemplars. Students see the impact of their actions across our school and community.

The culture of care extends to Mann adults. There is an experimental spirit - we try, fail, and work to improve what we do and how we do it. The use of a visitation chart among grades 1 and 2 is one way teachers open their classroom doors to colleagues for feedback, sharing of ideas, or just to help colleagues think through challenges in their own classrooms. The collegiality among staff and inclusive professional development that deepens teachers' understanding of themselves as thinkers and learners allows none to feel they have to navigate their teaching, growth or challenges alone.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Centaurus understand that sometimes the most powerful learning experiences occur beyond the realm of daily curriculum. We are a school where reciprocal relationships with families and the community are valued and where the greater community contributes to our learning. These beliefs drive the success we see in family engagement and through community partnerships that support student learning.

Families have ready access to both people and program. Community drop-off and pick-up affords daily in person contact with our school team of adults: teachers, partner teachers, content specialists, administrators. We begin and end the week with special gatherings (Greet the Week; All School Morning Meeting) - two opportunities for parents to witness what the school prioritizes: celebration, problem-solving, transparent communication. A weekly "all in" principal-to-community email conveys detailed news of projects, programs, and even problems that require solution. Teachers use a variety of tools (newsletters, blogs, photo essays of student learning) to inform parents and establish knowing connection to the community and content of the classroom. Parents frequently visit classrooms for academic celebrations, as mystery readers, and to support events such as baking apple pies after a trip to the farm.

Relationships between teachers and parents extend beyond the school walls; we gather for shared learning and fun such as a much-anticipated parent vs. teacher annual soccer game. As many as six teachers have elected to be trained in home visits as a structure for deepening the bonds of understanding between school and home. Opportunities for families to build relationships with one another include our back to school

picnic, class parties, family pot luck meals throughout the year, identity workshops, weekly mindfulness sessions, parent talks series, and a kick off to the end of the year with a glorious Summer Bash. We're "all in" and as a result, our families feel a strong investment and identity as learning members of the community. They demonstrate it by their presence, feedback, and financial support.

All partnerships with community organizations and groups serve as a pathway to learning. Local artists and activists share their music, poems, or sustainable projects with us throughout the year. Upper grade students often participate in an Embassy Adoption program, and all Centaurs have multiple opportunities to visit museums, theaters, national landmarks and local parks which curates a sense of curiosity and pride about their local community. Our relationship with Grand Oaks Retirement Home includes intergenerational lunch hours between residents and our prekindergarten students and a Fifth grade storytelling unit.

3. Professional Development:

While we nurture the personal and academic growth of our small Centaurs, the Mann community also places great value on the personal and professional growth of every adult Centaur by taking advantage of learning opportunities outside and inside of school.

Mann has an eight-year history with of a group of schools called the DC Collaborative for Change (DC3). A pillar of this cohort of nine schools is a commitment to choice-based, collaborative professional development. On District PD days, Mann teachers join with teachers from DC3 schools for content-based study and a menu of workshops created and facilitated by fellow teachers and coaches. Some offerings in the past have been Making Thinking Visible in Mathematics, Text-based Debates, Mindfulness for Teachers.

Mann teachers also participate in an inter-school lab site program designed by the DC3. Teachers improve their practice by visiting other classrooms and reflecting on ways to modify their approach when back with their own students. A half-day lab site typically involves class visits, new learning, planning time, and a "try it on" opportunity with students. Mann teachers have been both hosts and visitors in this program.

Mann is proud of its Reggio-Emilia pre-kindergarten program and has always been part of a district cohort of schools that are committed to the study of this student-centered approach. An outside consultant leads a weekly meeting for our teachers on campus, growing skills in documentation and emergent teaching.

Mann teachers are enthusiastic learners. Whether an informal invite into a close reading lesson that resulted from lunch table conversation or a group excursion to a lecture on equity in education, we constantly encourage one another to reflect and grow. A school-based instructional coach leads individual and small group coaching cycles in which we reflect and set goals to improve practice. This year, the district has implemented the Learning Together to Advance our Practice (LEAP) initiative, which centers on teachers meeting in mixed grade-level content teams. Mann has used this time to discuss common texts such as Mathematical Mindsets, share the successes and challenges of our practice, and create vertical alignment documents in an effort to be more responsive to students and purposeful in planning. This year, we also committed to study how we recognize and embrace race, equity and identity of students, teachers and families at Mann. Mann faculty have participated in courses offered by outside resources in a variety of topics: The Responsive Classroom, Harvard's Project Zero, Columbia University Teachers' College, New Perspectives Contexts for Learning Mathematics, Mindfulness Fundamentals and Teaching Tolerance. We love to learn together!

4. School Leadership:

The Mann learning community has been well served by the stability of its team members. The principal, now in her 12th year, followed a principal who served nearly two decades. The instructional coach, also twelve years in service, started as a Mann classroom teacher. There has even been staying power in our parent leadership, with volunteers intentionally serving in multi-year roles to achieve consistency of message and mission. Among the faculty and facilities team, nearly one-half have walked across the school threshold for ten years or more.

This longevity of team has been the source of innovation, not stagnancy, in our instructional practice. A deep level of trust persists between roles (principal:teacher; principal:coach; coach:teacher; parent:teacher) so that individuals feel empowered to enact the good ideas generated by and within their practice. A set of enduring educational values provides the broad guidance necessary to ensure strong coherence - and strong agency. Under the leadership of the principal, these educational values - connection and collaboration, sustainability and stewardship, choice and invention - became physically manifested in our facilities modernization and expansion. Our building sings!

Site-based budgeting has allowed the school community to create a lean administration and a robust teaching force - and one that values their stake in decision-making. The principal views her role in guiding the selection, preparation, and retention of this teaching force as her most significant and essential role. She understands - and actively promotes - the impact each individual, regardless of role, can yield on student outcomes. Strategic decisions are made to optimize each team member's potential. Examples include shifts in grade assignment as a tool for developing highly effective teams and choice in the identification of professional learning goals and investments. A learning climate for adults and students where purpose, relevance and personalization live large results.

The principal recently established a new structure to realize our vision of being a community in which all learners - tall and small - thrive. All school adults select one of three Thrive! Teams that act as stewards of our Cultures of Knowing, Thinking, and Caring - three commitments we believe are responsible for enabling learning without limit. Shared reading, visitation, and documentation of expected demonstrations are the work of these autonomous but interconnected learning teams. This year, a new Assistant Principal has led a yearlong curriculum exploring identity, race, and equity, enabling new awareness of self and others and a place of learning that honors both.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Many years ago our principal gave each teacher a bookmark with the quote, “School should be the best party in town!” and we do our best to make that our reality. Horace Mann is full of JOY. Visitors to our hallways find groups of students sprawled out holding book clubs, playing math games, caring for the plants in grow-towers, and posting handmade signs to raise awareness for causes of individual or global importance. When we renovated our building two years ago, our new space was designed with this openness and collaboration in mind. Mann has a magical blend of rigor and play, community, and celebration of individuality.

With just two principals in the past 28 years and strong teacher retention, our knowledge of our students is held within people, not file folders. Teachers know each other well and work together to support students, collaborating across grade levels to gain a complete understanding of a child’s learning profile over time. Teachers share responsibility for all students. Collaboration and vertical communication are part of every day. We build on past work but try new things. Recent new learning includes Roots of Empathy, which supports emotional literacy; mindfulness as a tool for social-emotional development; blended learning; LARPing (live action role play); exploratory and experiential learning; and a constructivist approach to mathematics. Teachers agree that there is comfort and confidence in not having to conform to a single approach to teaching here at Mann; rather, adults are encouraged to be their most authentic selves in the classroom. With this mindset comes an unwavering energy to nurture and challenge students each and every day.

Success at Mann can also be attributed to the cultivation of partnerships that connect us to our local community. Students are directly involved with real world learning experiences. Each year fifth graders make visits to Grand Oaks Assisted Living Residence to interact with the seniors who call it home. Students interview the residents, using the information gathered to create artwork which they then present as a gift.

We partner with Friendship Place, a local non-profit dedicated to ending homelessness, with annual fundraising events such as our “Walk to End Homelessness”, a holiday food and clothing drive, and a daily Food Rescue program which donates excess food to a neighboring shelter. Developing socially conscious, caring, and considerate citizens is a priority at Mann. We believe this kind of lively learning is an essential enabler. Students see purpose and intention for learning goals and readily commitment themselves to their fulfillment.