

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

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Mr. Eric Boyle

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

Official School Name Stilwell Junior High School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 1601 Vine Street

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

City West Des Moines State IA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 50265-4322

County Polk County

Telephone (515) 633-6000 Fax (515) 633-6099

Web site/URL http://www.wdmcs.org/schools/stilwell/ E-mail boylee@wdmcs.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. Lisa Remy E-mail remyl@wdmcs.org  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name West Des Moines Comm School District Tel. (515) 633-5000

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

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

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

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

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

## **Part I – Eligibility Certification**

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

1. The school configuration includes one or more of grades K-12. (Schools on the same campus with one principal, even a K-12 school, must apply as an entire school.)
2. 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

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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):
- 8 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 2 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 3 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 13 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	0	0	0
1	0	0	0
2	0	0	0
3	0	0	0
4	0	0	0
5	0	0	0
6	0	0	0
7	171	167	338
8	181	184	365
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	352	351	703

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 1 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 6 % Asian
  - 5 % Black or African American
  - 10 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 74 % White
  - 4 % Two or more races
  - 100 % Total**

(Only these seven standard categories should be used to report the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.)

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2015 – 2016 school year: 6%

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

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	30
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> 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)]	42
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2015	725
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.058
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	6

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 5 %  
37 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):  
Albanian, Arabic, Bosnian, Chinese, Creoles and pidgins, Dinka, Ewe, Gujarati, Hindi, Japanese, Korean, Kurdish, Lao, Nepali, Niger-Kordofanian, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Swahili, Tamil, Telugu, Thai, Twi, Urdu

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 20 %  
Total number students who qualify: 138
8. Students receiving special education services: 9 %  
64 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
- 1 Deafness
- 0 Deaf-Blindness
- 6 Emotional Disturbance
- 1 Hearing Impairment
- 11 Mental Retardation
- 1 Multiple Disabilities
- 1 Orthopedic Impairment
- 1 Other Health Impaired
- 39 Specific Learning Disability
- 6 Speech or Language Impairment
- 1 Traumatic Brain Injury
- 1 Visual Impairment Including Blindness
- 0 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:

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects	45
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	16
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a licensed professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	13
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	4

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 15:1
12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

<b>Required Information</b>	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012
Daily student attendance	96%	96%	96%	96%	96%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

13. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**  
Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2016.

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

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.  
Yes    No X  
If yes, select the year in which your school received the award.
15. In a couple of sentences, provide the school's mission or vision statement.  
The WDMCS will be a caring community of learners that knows and lifts every child. We will inspire joy in learning. Our schools will excel at preparing each student for his or her life journey.
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**

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Stilwell Junior High opened in the fall of 1960 and was named after the President of the West Des Moines Board of Education, Mr. Elbert Stilwell. The original building was about one-fourth the size of Stilwell's current design. Throughout its history, Stilwell has housed 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th graders; currently, Stilwell houses half of the district's 7th and 8th grade population, with Indian Hills Junior High home to the other half. Stilwell is well-known for the longevity of its staff. Three of the original teachers from 1967 stayed for 37 years, retiring in 1997. Stilwell has been known to be the home for teachers for decades.

One of the greatest traditions of Stilwell Junior High is our Three Cornerstones. Developed by Principal Tim Miller, the Three Cornerstones are: Do Your Best; Do the Right Thing; and Treat Others the Way You Want to Be Treated. These Three Cornerstones take the place of classroom rules. It is a deep belief at Stilwell that adherence to these principal beliefs far surpass any "rule" that we could give students regarding their daily interactions in the classroom.

Another tradition is our quarterly recognition assembly. We take time at the end of each quarter to recognize our many areas of student achievement. Teachers, coaches, and sponsors take the stage to call attention to a variety of areas; athletes, volunteers, award-winners, musicians, actors, and others all feel the spotlight as they stand in front of their peers and speak about their accomplishments. Stilwell's Recognition Assemblies showcase the variety of avenues that students feel success at our school.

Our "Tiger Time" curriculum aims to educate students in areas beyond traditional content as well. Through a rotation of activities, students experience a diversity of experiences that push their learning. "T" days are for Team Time; students work together to collaborate through games, team-building activities, challenges, etc. "I" days are for work with Integrity; students explore how their choices impact their future. Role-playing scenarios, videos, and other instructional methods are used to help students build their character and understand the impact of their decisions. "G" days are for Games; students work together in a competitive, year-long quest to be the winner. G days take the typical Physical Education course and allow students a new and different environment for exploring activities that may be outside their typical comfort-zone. "E" days are to practice Empathy; our counselors have developed a grade-specific, school-wide curriculum that asks students to think about how their choices impact those around them. E days are our primary avenue for our anti-bullying/pro-friend campaign. "R" days promote Reading; by encouraging reading outside of the typical English Language Arts class, students are better able to see reading as a life skill instead of a school skill. Students hear book talks, visit the Media Center, and engage in reading activities that help create a culture of lifelong readers amongst student and staff. "S" days emphasize Study Skills; whether we are preparing for statewide assessments, setting quarterly goals, or organizing planners, S days provide students with the opportunity to think about how to manage their learning on a long-term basis and plan for how to better equip themselves for future success.

Several year ago, a unique program began at Stilwell to help students better manage their homework after school. After the Bell is an optional program, sponsored by teachers, that invites all students to work from 2:45 - 4:00 on any school-related work. Students come when they need, for as long as they need. There are snacks, technology, and learning supports provided. Students are given a friendly, low-stress environment to complete their homework while socializing with peers and developing better study habits. Over the course of a school year, at least one-quarter of Stilwell students attend After the Bell.

Each year, all students at Stilwell attend a minimum of one field trip. For a long time, school administration has understood the positive impact of community-related learning. Field trips provide students with background information, cultural proficiency, and a community perspective that cannot be gained in a classroom alone. Ranging from local places of worship, to performing arts experiences, to nature exhibits, to museums, to athletic venues, teachers have worked to provide curriculum-related opportunities for students that show them the true nature of learning as it extends beyond the classroom.

Stilwell Junior High prides itself on educating the whole-child. We feel strongly that arts, athletics, culture, extracurriculars, and other opportunities advance our students' learning in ways that cannot always be measured by tests or assessments. However, the attitudes and enthusiasm that our students, staff, and all stakeholders display when talking about their memories of our school provide evidence that Stilwell is truly a great place to learn.

## **PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

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### **1. Core Curriculum:**

At Stilwell Junior High, teachers/facilitators aim to develop proficiency in all core standards. English/language arts, mathematics, and social studies all hold learners accountable for proficiency on all course standards outlined in the Iowa Core. For English/language arts, both seventh and eighth grade curriculum highlights independent reading, thematic novel units covering a variety of genres, literary analysis, narrative writing, expository writing, and speaking and listening. Math concepts at Stilwell fall under six domains: ratios and proportional relationships, the number system, expressions and equations, functions, geometry, and statistics and probability. Social studies students explore cause and effect, research, summarization, argument construction, and analysis, but the content varies by grade level. Seventh grade students learn about world history from the beginning of civilization through the Russian Revolution, while eighth grade students learn about United States history up to the Civil War.

While English/language arts, math, and social studies curriculum stems from the Iowa Core, Stilwell science teachers/facilitators develop learners' proficiency in the Next Generation Science Standards. Both seventh and eighth grades examine Newton's Laws and energy, heredity, and the engineering design process. Specific to the seventh grade level, curriculum focuses on motion and stability, the Earth's place in the Universe, structures and processes of molecules and organisms, ecosystems, and alcohol and tobacco. Eighth grade curriculum centers around weather, climate, and climate change; evolution from Darwin's theory through modern genetics; and human growth and development.

Each grade-level department has collaboratively unpacked their curricular standards and developed common learning targets to guide instructional decision-making. Highly functioning PLCs are in the process of developing common formative and summative assessments and analyzing that data to determine what next steps might occur in the classroom. PLCs discuss what instructional choices might best support student achievement for those still developing towards proficiency, as well as what instructional choices might best extend the learning for those already proficient in core course standards; tier II and tier III interventions are utilized to ensure all students learn at high levels. Additionally, all Stilwell teachers/facilitators--core, elective, and supplemental alike--strive to develop college and career readiness by incorporating 21st Century Skills standards from the Iowa Core into the classroom as well.

One unique instructional approach offered at Stilwell Junior High is the Project-Based and Problem-Based Learning (PBL) Pathway. It is a school within a school model offered by one seventh grade and one eighth grade interdisciplinary team. Students in the PBL Pathway are enrolled in Problem-Based or Project-Based Learning courses for math, science, and Humanities, which is a block class combining social studies and English/language arts. These students still take non-PBL classes for their non-core coursework. This year, 201 students participated in the PBL Pathway. Students, with their parents, must apply to participate, and all types of learners are welcomed in the program. Those who choose this model seek learning opportunities that incorporate authentic application, consistent collaboration with peers, and partnering with people outside of the school walls.

The PBL pathway provides an experiential, hands-on, student-directed learning experience in which learners develop proficiency on course standards as they engage in authentic, real-world projects or problems. Facilitators plan projects with community partners and experts in the field, heightening authenticity and value beyond school. Through project/problem-based learning, facilitators support learners through collaborative tasks rooted in inquiry, investigation, and problem-solving. While navigating project pathways, learners not only engage in deep, higher-order thinking, they constantly apply their learning in new, innovative, and engaging ways. Furthermore, project products are always shared with an audience beyond the classroom. The advancement of skills, such as reflection, critical thinking, effective communication, and collaboration (amongst others) aims to provide learners a competitive edge in the 21st century workforce.

Stillwell also offers a "traditional" pathway; however, despite the label "traditional", teachers in this pathway still innovatively design engaging learning opportunities in an effort to develop proficiency both in

course standards as well as to develop the most in-demand career competencies of the 21st century. Students frequently work in collaborative groups, engage in higher-order-thinking activities and analysis, produce authentic projects, and present to authentic audiences.

One example science project conducted this year includes developing proficiency on NGSS engineering standards by developing an automatic satellite launching experimental device (SLED) in conjunction with support from local retired astronauts and a mentor from NASA to actually be tested at NASA's Microgravity University in Houston, Texas. Humanities (an interdisciplinary blend of English/language arts and social studies) learners in the PBL pathway are presently developing digitized hip hop adaptations of Shakespearean plays and sonnets in conjunction with the Q Brothers' Jackson Doran--Creative Associate and Director of Education to be posted online as an entertaining, engaging, accessible supplemental support in developing an understanding of Shakespeare and the Elizabethan era by students of different age ranges nationwide. This project taps into reading, writing, speaking, and listening ELA standards as well as multiple social studies standards. An example problem math learners explored was whether or not our junior high was "to code," specifically developing proficiency in regards to slope.

In both the "PBL/PrBL" pathway and "traditional" pathway, learners utilize technology on a daily basis. Engaging, innovative lessons develop proficiency towards the day's learning target(s) (directly tied to standards) via means such as Kahoot!, Socrative, Nearpod, and Today's Meet, amongst others. Learners collaborate using Google Docs and Presentations. Learners engage in goal setting, and they reflect on their progress towards set goals and towards accomplishment of course learning targets/standards. Teachers/facilitators and building leadership strive to develop relationships with each learner as well as a strong, accepting learning community in their classrooms. Stilwell is collectively committed to nurturing the personal growth of each and every learner who enters our doors; we all view the students as "our" kids, and we all want success for them in all aspects of their lives.

## **2. Other Curriculum Areas:**

Stilwell Junior High School offers a multitude of courses outside of the core curriculum for both seventh and eighth graders. Some classes are required for all students, such as physical education, while other courses are electives and are not required for grade promotion.

All seventh graders are required to take Financial Literacy, Art, Engineering Technology, and Family and Consumer Sciences. These classes occur every day for nine weeks, or one quarter of the school year. Students learn the basics of finances, art appreciation, industrial technology, cooking, and sewing, which are basic life skills. In addition, all seventh graders participate in physical education, which meets every other day for the entire school year and promotes physical wellness.

The only required other curriculum area for eighth graders is physical education. Like seventh grade, eighth grade physical education meets every other day for the entire school year and promotes physical wellness. When students reach eighth grade, they have numerous opportunities for elective classes. Most electives meet every day for an entire semester, and students are encouraged to take at least two electives over the course of the year. This year, 55 students took Art, 144 participated in Foods, 35 took Sewing, 120 were in Exploring Engineering Technology, 65 were in Gateway to Technology, 132 took Drama, and forty-two participated in Communications Media. These classes provide essential life or students; students who participate in these courses gain the ability to draw, cook, sew, use tools, and give public speeches or performances. Additionally, eighth graders who participate in these classes gain valuable 21st century skills, such as thinking creatively and becoming self-directed learners.

Stilwell also offers a variety of performing art classes. Seventh and eighth grade chorus is an elective that meets every other day, with 200 seventh graders and 116 eighth graders enrolled in the course. Band is another performing arts elective offered every other day, with 63 seventh and 57 eighth grade participants. The final performing arts class offered every other day at Stilwell is orchestra, where 120 students participate. Performing arts give students opportunities to participate in public performances, learn performance etiquette, and develop an appreciation of music.

Stilwell offers Spanish at both the seventh and eighth grade levels. Seventh grade Spanish meets every other day over the course of the year, and 195 students participate. Eighth grade Spanish is the equivalent to Spanish I at this high school, and students earn high school credit for successfully completing the class. It meets every day, and 161 students are enrolled this year. Their mission in both seventh and eighth grades is for students to develop 21st century skills to interact with cultural understanding and appreciate cultural differences.

Stilwell provides a variety of courses that give students opportunities to expand their learning beyond the traditional core curriculum. Students learn real-world skills and expand their repertoire as they prepare to move into high school and their eventual careers.

### **3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:**

Stilwell Junior High is a high-performing school that makes every effort to maintain that status, while continuously looking for ways to introduce innovative instruction, close the achievement gap, and use data to improve student learning. Project-Based Learning (PBL), Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), collaboration between special and general education staff, and Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS) initiatives allow the school to reach a wide-variety of student learners and promote high levels of student achievement across multiple disciplines.

As a part of the New Tech Network, one-third of our school operates in a PBL format. Through professional development and collaboration with administration and teacher leaders, teacher-facilitators have implemented this program to a high degree of success in only two years. Learners engage in authentic, community-based projects that emphasize 21st century skills as well as traditional content-knowledge, written, and oral communication. Students enrolled in the New Tech model are encouraged to make their learning personalized through protocols that put decision-making and collaboration at the forefront of their education. Additionally, students work with community organizations, businesses, and leaders to establish a high-level of authenticity for their work. The outcome is engaged learners at all levels who take ownership over their education and pride in its outcome.

The New Tech teams are not the only ones at Stilwell Junior High using Project-Based Learning. Through observations, collaboration, and professional development, many teachers are using the tenets of PBL to revolutionize their classrooms and increase student engagement. Throughout the building, students can be seen working in groups or teams to learn from each other, work together, and improve their communication skills.

Additionally, our Professional Learning Communities have allowed for a more collaborative approach to student achievement. By implementing a six-day rotation, our PLCs have the opportunity to meet on a regular basis inside the school day. This has allowed for a greater emphasis on common formative assessments and sharing data to look at student growth; also it has provided unique opportunities for staff to work together to support student learning. One example is the English/Language Arts (ELA) department: after a recent assessment, 8th grade ELA teachers co-facilitated a series of rotations to support student learning at different levels. Teachers grouped students based on levels of understanding; one teacher worked with students on enrichment activities, while another teacher worked with students on remediation activities. The result was that all students were able to expand their level of knowledge on the standard, and teachers were better able to focus their instructional time.

Improving student learning at Stilwell is not limited to the general education classrooms. A transformative approach to working with special education students is currently underway in our building. Instead of teaching traditional “study skills,” special education staff collaborates with regular education staff to meet learners where they are with a variety of resource classes. Based on the IEP students’ goal areas, they are assigned a reading, writing, or math resource class. In those classes, students are given skills and support to help them make gains in areas of deficiency. It is a common occurrence for students to be moved in and out of classes and levels based on their assessment performance. This type of specialized special education allows teachers to better identify areas of growth, seek guidance from highly qualified classroom teachers, and support student learning at all levels.

Stilwell has focused on differentiated instruction for many years and is constantly striving to do more. This year, we have begun work on MTSS. In an effort to be intentional and ensure high-quality learning for all students, we have focused on the area of writing across the curriculum. Our school leadership team felt that after many years of emphasis on reading comprehension, we were ready to move towards writing interventions. We began by implementing broad-scale universal screener which requires teachers of all subject areas to assess written communication in student learning. A committee worked collaboratively to create a prompt, rubric, and guidelines for scoring which would assess all students on three areas: idea development, organization, and conventions. We assessed the students with two screeners and used those results to conduct interventions and extensions during advisory time. Our work with MTSS in the area of writing will guide our work with creating a permanent intervention/extension time for all subject areas in the 2017-2018 school year.

Overall, Stilwell Junior High is an excellent environment for all learners to progress and make strides toward greater academic achievement. Efficient and effective structures and collaborative approaches are benefiting students in a variety of areas. We work diligently on a daily basis to achieve our goal of high expectations for all students across all areas student learning.

## PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

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### **1. School Climate/Culture:**

Stilwell’s culture and “the way we do business” center around our Four Pillars: Positive Relationship and Learning Environment, Collaboration, Growth Mindset, and High Expectations. These Four Pillars are what guide our actions and decisions throughout the school year. To better understand each pillar, it is best to break down what they mean to our staff and students.

Foremost, we believe that students don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care. That is why we have Positive Relationships and Learning Environment as one of our pillars. Our focus with this pillar is to accept, respect, and care for all members of the Stilwell Community while maintaining positive attitudes. We seek to share a fun and safe learning environment.

None of us achieve success without help from our colleagues or peers, which feeds into our next pillar: Collaboration. The focus for our collaboration is that it is student focused, outcome-based, and involves necessary stakeholders to achieve goals. To do this, we have created an encouraging environment that is efficient and generates solutions. We believe in shared decision-making and have leadership opportunities for staff to be involved in the direction of our school. We have a Building Leadership Team that spends their time leading professional development and setting goals for the staff. Our School Improvement Team spends time focused on culture and day-to-day operations of the school.

We understand that in order to learn, one might struggle or “fail forward.” We believe that having a Growth Mindset is imperative to success. To establish a growth mindset, we will learn from our mistakes (fail forward), seek support from others, and take the time to reflect and revise to make the best decisions for our students.

Finally, we have the High Expectations for ourselves and our students. We implement programs, policies, and practices that convey the expectations of high-level achievement and success for all.

Stilwell has three cornerstones that drive our daily interactions and actions. These cornerstones are “do your best,” “do the right thing,” and “treat others with respect.” These expectations follow all Stilwellians throughout the classrooms, hallways, and community. We believe that if students aspire to these three cornerstones, they will find success in any endeavor they pursue. We believe if students show up every day and do their best, great things will happen. Our staff encourages them to give 100 percent of what they have each day. Secondly, do the right thing: we talk about those moments when there is a fork in the road and a tough decision. The pause should be a reminder to do the right thing. We recognize our students by giving Do-Right Tickets when caught doing something positive. Finally, treating others with respect is our major philosophy. We have a student club that embodies kindness and acceptance. Youth Empowering Students (YES) spreads kindness and positivity throughout the building through a variety of activities, such as, “mix it” up lunches, inspirational quotes painted around the building, and decorating our cafeteria with positivity.

We believe that our pillars are the culture we aspire to, and the cornerstones are our daily goals to achieve it.

### **2. Engaging Families and Community:**

Engaging, interacting with, and integrating the greater West Des Moines community and students’ families has become a foundation of the learning and growing environment at Stilwell Junior High. The variety of programs that we engage in range from those that attempt to involve outside voices in planning and advisory, to monitoring and addressing student learning, as well as recognizing and celebrating student achievement and real-world connection.

One of the primary vehicles for this connection is the school’s Parent Advisory Committee (PAC). Meeting

once per month, the PAC invites all parents and guardians of students to discuss school culture, student learning, and family concerns and needs. This has provided one of the most consistent, informal, and effective ways for parents to feel informed and a part of the school decision-making process.

This synergistic decision-making process is also particularly evident when it comes to supporting those students with identified needs for support. Our collaborative 504 and Special Education transition meetings utilize parent involvement and feedback throughout, in order to not only fully inform parents of their rights, choices, and collective goals, but also to include them in identifying and implementing the necessary supports.

A more informal and celebratory approach in which we engage our community is the End of Year Awards and Recognition Assembly. By welcoming community organizations and businesses, not only as audience members but also as direct supporters and sponsors of recognition goals, student achievement is identified and celebrated in realms ranging from academic, to community service, to extra-curricular, and performing arts.

An additional highly effective manner in which we have collaborated with outside organizations is through the recent implementation of our school-within-a-school Project-Based Learning teams in the New Tech Network. As a cornerstone of each academic project/unit, community professionals are integrated directly into the classroom as informative sources, for provision of direct feedback, and as audience and panel members for student-led project culminating events. This program has led to connections with organizations such as workforce development centers, local universities and chambers of commerce, alternative energy companies, non-profit scholarship foundations, veteran organizations, and many others.

At the district level, we have enacted multiple full-time Teacher Leader positions entitled the Learning Supports and Family Engagement Coordinators. These staff provide direct in-school support to families in collaboration with our front-line staff to provide information and support to families regarding mental health resources and working with families on attendance issues.

In all, Stilwell strives to be a school with strong community connections that engages multiple stakeholders in our students' education.

### **3. Professional Development:**

Stilwell's professional development approach derives from our school improvement plan and the Strategic Plan of West Des Moines Community School District. The district's strategic plan and school improvement plan are created in response to our district goals of closing the gap between present practices and improving student achievement through effective and instructional and assessment practices. All professional development aligns with goals from the strategic plan and school improvement plan.

Professional development at the building level is guided by our Building Leadership Team (BLT). The BLT is comprised of four teachers, two instructional coaches, and the building principal. It is the responsibility of the BLT to identify the needs and plan professional development at Stilwell. The BLT decision-making process for professional development is determined through alignment with strategic and school improvement plans, student assessment results, and staff needs.

Stilwell's main focus for this year is improving student writing. Our BLT decided to focus on writing based on Iowa Assessment results in written expression, vocabulary, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. We started the school year with asking every student to write a one-paragraph response to a prompt for baseline data. From there, we provided professional development on scoring student paragraphs and implementing writing across the curriculum. Teachers, with support provided from BLT members and other volunteers, were then required to implement at least one writing activity in their classes during the course of the first semester. In February, students answered another writing prompt and results were scored and recorded. Moving forward, we are asking classroom teachers to use the results from the writing prompts and classroom writing samples to provide reteaching and/or extension opportunities for students. We plan to look at these results, in combination with this year's Iowa Assessments data, to determine the success of

our goal and next steps.

Other professional development opportunities are generally differentiated to meet the diverse needs of the staff. For example, Project and Problem-Based Learning facilitators in the New Tech Network program receive professional development in the areas of project planning, conducting workshops, and utilizing rubrics to facilitate learning. Simultaneously, our non-New Tech Network teachers receive support in the Professional Learning Community (PLC) process and learning how to better meet the needs of our at-risk learners and English Learners (ELs). We also use Teacher Quality funding to offer optional learning opportunities for improving student achievement. Teachers have taken advantage of these funds to learn more about Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS), implement effective grading practices, and more. These various forms of professional development align with the school improvement plan and the district's strategic plan.

#### **4. School Leadership:**

The leadership philosophy at Stilwell Junior High is that all students can learn, and we will do whatever it takes to help them realize their potential. We have made Professional Learning Communities a priority in our building and district. We have rearranged our schedule to make collaboration by department a protected time, so each department can answer the following four questions: What do we want all students to know? How will we know they have learned it? What will we do if they already know it? What will we do if they don't learn it? Our staff is working very hard to become clear about what we want all students to know and develop common formative assessments to assess if they have learned. We are in the process of developing a system wide response for those students who are not learning or already get it.

Our district was recently awarded a Teacher Leader grant to have a Building Leadership Team (BLT) and Instructional Coaches in each building throughout the district. BLT members meet weekly to discuss, plan, and reflect on current practice, professional development, and needs of the staff at Stilwell. BLT uses Iowa Assessments data as a source to measure student achievement. The group analyzes the data and celebrates the successes of the staff; for example: we scored in the top ten percent on the Iowa report card two years in a row. They also look at areas of concern and problem-solve actions steps to get those numbers trending in the right direction. An example of the BLT problem solving is the School Improvement Plan they developed and shared with staff at the end of last year, so staff had the summer to start to prepare for the school year ahead.

Our Instructional Coaches that are a part of the Teacher Leader grant work to help teachers who want to expand their skills or need help with an instructional strategy. Our Instructional Coaches are a part of our BLT and are very in tune to the need and supports necessary to improve student achievement. The Instructional Coaches and principal meet weekly to talk about the strategies being addressed, PLC progress being made, and professional development needs.

Finally, we have just created an early warning system to identify students who are at risk using behavior, grades, and attendance as our data sources. The principal, assistant principal, and counselors use this data to identify students that are in need of extra supports and start communicating early with families to problem solve issues.

The school leadership at Stilwell works collaboratively and proactively to engage, enthuse, and enable all stakeholders in the overall achievement of our students.

## **Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

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Stilwell has recently had a shift in mindset from “me” to “we.” Our staff members do not view the students as “my students,” instead we think of them as “our students.” This mindset has truly helped all of our students achieve academic success. The most successful strategy employed at Stilwell to improve our practice has been an increased emphasis on Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Teachers and facilitators have a PLC that meets regularly to answer the four guiding questions: What do we expect our students to learn? How will we know they are learning? How will we respond when they don’t learn? How will respond if they already know it?

We began our work with PLCs during the 2014-2015 school year. At that point, we focused on learning targets, common assessments, and interventions. However, we soon realized that a more systematic approach was required to truly make a difference in student achievement. Merely “going through the motions” would not be adequate. In 2015-2016, we implemented a more regular schedule (twice a year as a district; once a month as a school). This regularity improved our practice, but again, the irregularity of meetings provided a challenge: How do we accurately assess our own practice and student learning on such an infrequent basis?

In the current school year, we implemented a drastic change. Staff, counselors, and administration worked together to create a unique “6-day” rotation. As a middle school, our interdisciplinary team time is still important, and this schedule has allowed staff to meet with both teams and PLCs on each 6-day rotation.

Through regularly scheduled meeting times, content-area teachers have made much progress on the fundamentals of a PLC: each department has unpacked and analyzed standards for key aspects of student learning; each department has created common formative assessments to gauge student learning on specific standards; and each department has looked toward interventions for those who a) already know the content and b) are struggling to learn the content.

Our emphasis on PLCs has provided a more focused goal on student learning than in previous years. Prior, we did what was best for students based on our hearts and instincts; this achieved much. Now, we do what is best for students based on our hearts, instincts, and data; this will achieve more.

The results have motivated both students and staff towards higher levels of engagement and achievement. The ability to share research, best-practice, interventions, and extensions has pushed staff to truly consider what we are teaching, how we are teaching it, and what to do with our students’ learning. The collaboration has shown students that we are a team of educators who work together to provide the best possible outcome-based structure for student learning while focusing on individual needs, assessment data, and overall student achievement.