

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

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Mr. Ed C Johnson

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

Official School Name Whittier Elementary School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 1306 West Salem Avenue

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

City Indianola State IA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 50125-2176

County Warren County

Telephone (515) 961-9570 Fax (515) 961-9575

Web site/URL http://www.indianola.k12.ia.us/ E-mail ed.johnson@indianola.k12.ia.us

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. Art Sathoff E-mail art.sathoff@indianola.k12.ia.us
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Indianola Community School District Tel. (515) 961-9500

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. Darrin Johnson
(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):
- 4 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 1 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 6 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	75	71	146
K	18	24	42
1	26	25	51
2	27	21	48
3	27	24	51
4	23	32	55
5	24	29	53
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	220	226	446

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 1 % Asian
 - 1 % Black or African American
 - 2 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 95 % White
 - 1 % 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: 11%

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	36
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	8
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	44
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2015	416
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.106
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	11

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 1 %
2 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):

Ukrainian, Russian

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 35 %
Total number students who qualify: 159

8. Students receiving special education services: 3 %
14 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
- 0 Emotional Disturbance
- 0 Hearing Impairment
- 0 Mental Retardation
- 0 Multiple Disabilities
- 0 Orthopedic Impairment
- 0 Other Health Impaired
- 12 Specific Learning Disability
- 0 Speech or Language Impairment
- 0 Traumatic Brain Injury
- 0 Visual Impairment Including Blindness
- 0 Developmentally Delayed

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 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	1
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects	16
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.	8
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	1

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 18:1
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%	96%	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.

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

Indianola Community School District is committed to excellence and achieving a lifetime of success.

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

Whittier Elementary School is one of four elementary centers in Indianola, Iowa, a place that embodies the district vision of “Proud Traditions...Unlimited Possibilities.” The community of Indianola hosts the Hot Air Balloon Classic, Warren County Fair, Warren County Historical Society, and Simpson College. While tradition runs deep, continuous improvement and meeting the needs of our students in a rapidly changing world are our goals. The community of 15,000 residents is extremely supportive of the work taking place at Whittier, the other three elementary schools, and the middle school and high school. High-achieving students, a dedicated and talented professional staff, and outstanding facilities are hallmarks of our district. Whittier Elementary capitalizes on the support and encouragement of the community while seeking continuous improvement for learner benefit.

Whittier Elementary was built in the 1960s, with the newest remodel being in the 2013-14 school year. At this time, facilities were updated in order to accommodate the 21st century child, including an expansion of the library and the inclusion of a computer lab. Whittier Elementary is unique to our district due to the fact that we host a preschool and Head Start program, serving over 140 preschool children. The elementary enrolls approximately 300 K - fifth grade students each school year. The building consists of two sections of each grade level, averaging 23 students per classroom. In the 2015-2016 school year, 43% of students qualified for free and reduced lunch. Another unique characteristic of Whittier is the longevity of the staff. Educators have been teaching at Whittier an average of over 13 years. The traditions that these teachers uphold, combined with fresh ideas from newer hires, have resulted in a quality teaching and learning environment. Whittier Elementary’s mission statement is, “Learning and Success for all.” In order to fulfill this commitment, Whittier’s faculty believes that student needs are a top priority, and those needs begin with a safe and supportive learning environment. A solid foundation of teacher leadership, combined with a culture of compassion and dedication, has resulted in a growth-minded learning environment for teachers and students alike. Whittier administration, teacher leaders, and teachers work extremely hard to improve professional practice while meeting and exceeding the high expectations of our community, school district, state, and nation.

Our hard work and dedication has been noted. In the 2015-2016 school year, Whittier Elementary was classified as “High Performing,” which identifies the top 12% of elementary schools in Iowa. Additionally, in the 2015-2016 school year, second through fifth grade students scored 88.2% proficiency in math and 89.4% proficiency in reading on the Iowa Assessments. These results were driven in part by individual and class goal setting, with a focus on individual growth. Although our previous accomplishments are notable, we are striving for better, more prestigious results. We will continue to set goals that result in the highest levels of learning for all students.

There have been many key components that have resulted in Whittier’s academic achievements. First, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) were adopted by our school in 2012 and continue to be a driving focus. Over the past four years our district has dismissed school two hours early each Wednesday to allow teachers time to collaborate share, and learn from one another. The three big ideas that drive the work of our PLCs include: a focus on learning, a collaborative culture and collective responsibility, and a results orientation. In addition to our weekly PLC time, our school embraces quality, ongoing professional development time that allows staff the opportunity for continued growth and learning. During the 2015-2016 school year, staff members researched, collaborated, implemented, and reflected about the Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR) framework, along with utilizing Substantive Conversations throughout our study of Authentic Intellectual Work (AIW). A third key component to our academic achievements has been the inclusion of the TLC grant and the implementation of teacher leaders at Whittier Elementary. Within our building, we have an instructional coach, a part-time teacher partner, an AIW coach, a new teacher coordinator, and two Collaboration and Innovation teacher leaders. These teacher leaders have enhanced our professional learning, improved communication at our school, and helped to incorporate and model research-based instructional practices at Whittier Elementary.

There are many key strategies that have encouraged Whittier students to develop to their full potential. Academically, Whittier Elementary is dedicated to making data-based decisions. Teachers use formative and

summative assessments to make instructional decisions in the best interest of their students. Emotionally, students are immersed in a climate of positivity, enthusiasm, and high levels of expectation and support from all teachers and administrators. Physically, teachers understand the importance of movement, engagement, and the stimulation of students' brains with activity throughout the school day. Socially, students are actively involved in their learning and given opportunities to share their opinions, knowledge, and backgrounds. Although Whittier's student population is not overly diverse, teachers and students recognize and celebrate the differences and uniqueness of each Whittier student.

Perhaps the greatest asset that sets Whittier Elementary apart from other schools is the positive culture and climate amongst its students and staff. At Whittier Elementary, we understand that communication and relationships are the keys to success. We understand that building partnerships with families and the community is a complex process; however, we believe that this relationship greatly benefits parents, teachers, and students alike. The collaboration between parents, teachers, school employees, and community members is evident in many aspects of our school.

Whittier Elementary has been nominated as a National Blue Ribbon School for the 2015-2016 school year, and this is indeed worth celebrating. This award has also ignited a fire in teachers, students, and the community alike, and it will continue to create a spark of excitement, motivation, and engagement. We will continue to celebrate our proud traditions while striving to achieve our unlimited possibilities.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

Whittier Elementary’s core curriculum is built on the foundation of the Iowa Core and utilizes a handful of additional resources and supplemental materials to make sure students are engaged, challenged, supported, and monitored to ensure adequate progress and growth are consistently being made. Teachers, administration, and teacher leaders collaborate together to ensure that our curriculum, including math, reading, science, and social studies, is implemented with fidelity. Professional development time was dedicated to aligning standards, creating rigorous lesson plans, and differentiating instruction in order to achieve common formative and summative assessment goals. Formative and summative assessments have been collaborated upon and implemented by staff. In addition, we want to make sure that our students are equipped with the necessary foundational skills, life skills, and social skills so they can eventually be productive, happy, successful members of our society. Our school district’s mission is, “Indianola CSD is committed to excellence and a lifetime of success,” and we work to ensure this is a reality for our students.

Reading and language arts are incorporated throughout our entire school day. Currently, kindergarten and first grade instructors are utilizing ReadWell for teaching reading. In grades 2-5 the resource, Journeys, is utilized. Within Journeys, students are supplied with opportunities to learn and engage with literature, informational texts, and the foundational skills of reading. This instruction is given during universal tier, small group, or intervention groups, based upon the needs of readers, which includes a daily intervention time for all readers. Students in grades 2-5 are guaranteed to receive 120 minutes daily of reading instruction. In 2016, Indianola adopted a diagnostic reading intervention program, 95% Group, for kindergarten and first grades and will extend to grades two through six in the following year. Other Journeys components include writing, grammar, spelling, and phonics instruction. These language arts skills may be taught in isolation but are also applied throughout all curriculum areas. Whittier Elementary recognizes the importance of applying the area of reading and language arts beyond the classroom and into the community in which we live.

All Whittier classrooms, preschool through fifth grade, utilize Everyday Math, a spiraling curriculum, that addresses skills taught continually throughout the school year. Additionally, extensive time has been dedicated to developing the students automaticity of math facts, through various programs, including Kim Sutton’s math fact program. At the beginning of the school year, teachers are asked to develop a grade-level math plan, in which detailed plans are made to ensure students are proficient in math fluency and math concepts. Teachers understand that each grade level has differing needs and goals based upon current students and data. Students are also being asked to think conceptually when dealing with math through engaging in daily Number Talks discussions and lessons. Whole group, small group, and math intervention groups are created based upon the needs of students. Common formative and summative assessments have been created and aid teachers and students alike in the process of goal setting, implementing curriculum, and completing their standards-based grading.

Whittier Elementary uses the Next Generation Science Standards as a framework of criteria and standards all students need to meet. In order to help achieve proficiency at those standards, the curriculum Teach TCI was implemented in grades K-5. This program provides 100% alignment to the standards, resources, tools, and lessons to make science effective and engaging. Science also opens the door for students to have different problem solving opportunities, substantive conversations, real world applications, and time to collaborate. TCI has a quality technology component that has allowed students to also apply 21st century skills and additional presentation methods. S.T.E.M (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) activities and experiments are also integrated into our curriculum multiple times throughout the year. Science instruction is frequently integrated throughout the core reading, small group reading, and reading center time.

Social Studies is an important curriculum area, which allows students learn about the world, its people, and the history of our country. Whittier Elementary also uses the TCI program to meet the Iowa Common Core Standards for Social Studies. This interactive approach engages students of all grade levels, K-5. The

curriculum is presented in a building block format in which one grade level's knowledge is based upon the previous year's. This allows for a strength in background knowledge, which leads to quality conversation and understanding. Similar to science, social studies is also integrated in other core areas and presents opportunities to use substantive conversations and technology to enhance learning experiences.

Additionally, students at Whittier Elementary are provided high-quality, opportunities to develop their awareness of civic learning throughout the school year. Students gain the knowledge, skills, and values that are important to becoming informed and engaged citizens in our democratic world. Examples of civic literacy opportunities include: holding mock elections, visiting the iCivics webpage for classwide activities, games, and discussions, taking field trips to governmental agencies or bringing in guest speakers to speak about various civic learning topics and opportunities, and engaging in substantive conversations about various political and other civic topics. At Whittier, we integrate these opportunities throughout all subject areas and truly believe that students' understanding and appreciation for civic learning not only have great advantages to our students, but also assist in the building of Whittier's outstanding school climate and culture.

Indianola's preschool hosts over 140 students. The program's goal is to provide a high quality early childhood education childhood program meeting each child's needs, including children with disabilities and those from diverse backgrounds. The program provides a rich learning environment that encourages children's natural curiosity and supports them to take risks that lead to new skill development. It is a setting where children feel cared for, safe, and respected. Indianola preschool promotes positive attitudes toward learning by engaging students in developmentally appropriate activities in math, literacy, science, social studies, art, and music.

The Purple and Gold program has been adopted and meets the Iowa Quality Preschool Program Standards, administered by the Iowa Department of Education. The early childhood program is licensed by the Department of Human Services. The Iowa Early Learning Standards, along with The Creative Curriculum Goals and Objectives, are used to guide expectations for the children and instructional practices.

We believe, at the conclusion of a child's preschool years, our youngest students will attain the school readiness skills that will allow them to be socially, emotionally, and academically prepared for kindergarten and the years beyond.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

At Whittier Elementary, we recognize that the impact of having a variety of other curriculum areas to support students. Currently all grades K-5 participate in physical education, art, and music for 30 minutes every three days. Once in a six-day cycle students receive a 30-minute guidance lesson. Grades 3-5 receive a 30 minute-lesson in library skills once in a six-day cycle as well. These times of the school day offer students opportunities that they may not be able to practice as much in the traditional classroom setting. At this time, Whittier Elementary does not offer foreign language instruction.

The visual arts at Whittier Elementary highlight skills in problem solving, creativity, confidence, nonverbal communication, accountability and collaboration. Students are responsible for getting supplies out and putting them away. They quickly learn that if this is not done right, it can affect the students in the next class. In art, students are expected to learn to communicate to the viewer without the use of words and are also expected to present and talk about projects to the class. Creations require thought, previous knowledge, and thinking about topics through different perspectives.

The counseling program at Whittier Elementary is designed to assist all students in developing their potential, socially, emotionally, and academically. We help our students learn and practice important skills so they can handle everyday problems of growing up. We provide classroom guidance, small group guidance groups, individual counseling, and consultation in order to meet the needs of students. All students are taught in the areas of empathy, emotion management, problem solving, safe and healthy choices, careers, bullying prevention, and personal safety. Our goal is for students to be Responsible, Respectful, and Safe.

The Whittier Music Department is committed to scaffolding the skills of our students, starting when they come in as kindergarteners through when they leave us as fifth graders. Our goal in the music classroom is to develop their skills and knowledge of both instrumental and vocal music while gaining an appreciation and hopefully for some, a passion for music. We work to meet our core standards in every age level, such as, “Students can read, write, and perform melodies with do, mi, sol, and la” in interesting and fun ways, and we strive to constantly find new and improved methods and ideas for teaching material.

Technology at Whittier Elementary is growing. It is important that the technology enhances learning and makes teaching more effective. As of now, iPads are utilized in all classrooms preK-5. Starting in the 2015-2016 school year, the district provided laptop carts that teachers could check out. On these laptops, teachers are able to offer opportunities for research, application, and creation. Activities that enhance higher order thinking skills include different presentation methods, blogs, and research opportunities. During library skills class students, learn important skills on Internet safety and how to responsibly cite their sources.

Physical education is also offered to all students. At Whittier we understand and embrace the importance of exercise and nutrition for students. During P.E, students use their large motor skills, increase circulation, gain an understanding of many new sports and activities, and are provided an outlet from the classroom, while gaining a healthy lifestyle in our students. Students participate in different units that are appropriate for their physical development levels. In our experience, we have seen P.E. result in a boost in the confidence level of students that often carries over to the classroom. Also incorporated into P.E. class is health and nutrition. In the 2015- 2016 school year, the students at Whittier Elementary participated in Switch, an innovative physical education program undertaken in cooperation with Iowa State University. This program was taught in P.E, reinforced in the classroom, and then had home components as well. It focused on healthy eating and exercise. Collaboration, cooperation, and problem solving skills are all required and practiced during this time of a student’s day.

Whittier Elementary also offers extra curricular activities for its 5th grade students. Band, Orchestra, and Choir are offered to students one hour a week. This is optional for students to enroll in, but 40 out of 54 fifth graders in the 2015-2016 school year participated in one of the three electives.

Whittier Elementary offers both elective and required non-core subjects. Students in all grades receive activities and expectations that are grade level and developmentally appropriate. These outlets in the areas of guidance, art, music, physical education, and library skills allow students to grow in areas socially, mentally, and even academically.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

The core curriculum is the foundation of all student learning, but it is our mission and goal to have all students succeed at high levels. The students at Whittier come from differing backgrounds and experiences, and retain information differently; therefore, we believe that differentiation is a key to success. At Whittier Elementary, all students are provided quality core and small group instruction, based upon the Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR) framework. The GRR framework allows Whittier teachers to implement a variety of instructional methods and strategies. Teachers and students alike are aware of and strive to achieve district and state benchmarks and standards. These standards are accomplished by providing a variety of educational experiences, which are presented to our students in various ways including: explicit instruction, technology-based instruction, problem-based learning, and daily opportunities for quality core, small group, and intervention sessions. For students who have met or exceeded these standards, enrichment opportunities to further their learning is provided. These opportunities may include tiered levels of support and services from classroom teachers, Talented and Gifted teachers, grade-level acceleration, and/or independent or small group extension opportunities, focusing on developing critical thinking skills and problem solving. Some examples of extension opportunities include: creating Powerpoints, projects, reports, or creating higher-order questions that will later be used in substantive conversations.

Likewise, some students will need extra support in achieving their goals. This support comes in the form of small group instruction, one-on-one learning opportunities, and support from additional teachers, including special education teachers, Title 1 Reading, or reading support teachers. School-wide interventions are also

provided for students that need additional practice and support in both reading and math. For example, every student receives thirty minutes of a reading intervention daily, which is based upon their needs, such as specific comprehension skills, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, and/or fluency. In math, math interviews are held with students in order to clearly define areas of strength, deficits, and beginning steps for creating a plan to close the achievement gap and accomplish goals for individual students. Math intervention groups, small group instruction, and one-on-one instructional opportunities are offered to students with discrepant skills.

Although Whittier Elementary is a high performing school, students, teachers, and administrators are not satisfied. We have many measures in place that ensure that our high levels of achievement continue for years to come. At Whittier, we have a results-oriented culture. Much time is spent focusing on our current reality and establishing and revisiting S.M.A.R.T. (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely) goals that align with state, district, and school goals. Teachers plan and implement lessons geared at accomplishing goals. Each teacher collects formative and summative data to determine student understanding and to make sound educational decisions. Much of this work is done during our weekly PLC sessions.

Teachers gather frequently to ensure that sound instructional decisions are being made in order to accomplish our goals. During these times, teachers use formative and summative assessments in order to plan and/or revise instruction. Examples of formative assessment include: response boards, exit slips, short quizzes, and dialogue with students; these assessments guide our teaching and give us a quick glimpse into student understanding. Summative assessments, including end of unit tests, projects, and reports are also important and provide teachers and students an overall picture of student understanding. One example of how Whittier teachers use assessment is partaking in Math and Reading Data Days. These are held three times a year, following students' fall, winter, and spring reading and math testing benchmark periods. These days are spent collaborating with our problem solving and grade level teams to make decisions, problem solve, and create action plans based on each grade level team's current reality. Area Education Agency content specialists contribute their expertise to Data Days, and the principal and instructional coach are active participants as well. In addition to Data Days, weekly PLC sessions, and grade level meetings, 95% Group Reading regrouping meetings are held to ensure that teachers are continually making decisions based upon current data and student need. During our regrouping meetings, teachers meet every twelve to fifteen days to examine reading intervention students' current data and realign students into flexible groups, where the reading and classroom teachers are best able to identify problem areas and create small reading groups to meet their needs.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

At Whittier Elementary, we are a community of teachers who are built on the foundations of collaborative teams that work together toward one common goal, student learning. At Whittier Elementary, we believe that the climate and culture of a school is a key component to success. Within the staff, there is an immense amount of positive energy, and a “can do” attitude that each person attains that has created a sense of enthusiasm and energy throughout our building. Teachers at Whittier fully embrace the growth mindset and work in an environment that encourages deep thinking and the exchange of ideas. We thrive on celebrating successes, while encouraging personal growth. Teachers are celebrated in many ways including: conversations, staff meeting recognition, Whittier “WOW” certificates, emails, and notes placed by peers on the “Staff Shout-Out” bulletin board.

The energy and enthusiasm that teachers at Whittier Elementary possess directly affects our learners. We support our students academically, socially, and emotionally. Academically, our students own their learning and are engaged because Whittier teachers don’t teach AT them, rather, we learn with them. Whittier students are encouraged to take an active role in the learning process. For example, students frequently use dialogue and substantive conversation to share their knowledge, unique backgrounds, and opinions with their peers and teachers. At Whittier, students also engage in collaborative group work opportunities in all subject areas which enhances their skills academically, while also fostering 21st century skills, that are essential for success in today’s classroom, and also in tomorrow’s world.

At Whittier we strive not only for academic growth, but also for social and emotional growth. Teachers understand that each and every child has different skills, abilities, and backgrounds; these student differences are celebrated and embraced. All students are offered opportunities to grow socially and emotionally in various ways including: weekly whole class guidance classes, small group sessions for students sharing like issues, problems, or concerns (examples include: students with parents going through divorce, issues working with peers, behavioral problems, etc.), and individual mentoring or help sessions from the guidance counselor or on-site psychologist for more personal or confidential matters. We also embrace a building-wide approach to teaching appropriate behavior choices. Students are immersed in a climate that focuses on the three building blocks of the Positive Behavioral Intervention System (PBIS): Be Respectful, Be Responsible, Be Safe. Each month in guidance class, students are introduced to new skills and expectations that help them understand with how to deal with differing interactions, emotions, and feelings. Later, students meet for a PBIS assembly which celebrates the progress made by students who have excelled in these areas.

Whittier students also are also taught about the importance of setting goals in order to achieve high levels of success. Students set goals, create learning plans that include checkpoints along the way, and learn what to do when a goal has been achieved. Goals are used in many differing formats and contexts such as: math fact achievement, reading fluency rates, and individual and class goals for assessments such as the Iowa Assessments. Students and teachers alike take the opportunity to celebrate with students when goals have been accomplished, as well as when growth occurs throughout the journey.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Administration and teachers at Whittier Elementary believe that creating a partnership with families and our community is in the best interest of all. In fact, we believe that parental involvement in our students’ education is critical to their academic success. Our community is very interested in the performance of our students, as well as in the daily occurrences at Whittier Elementary.

The teachers at Whittier believe that effective communication is essential for engaging families and our community. At Whittier, teachers communicate through newsletters, class websites, social media, behavior notifications, report cards, positive notes, phone calls, and more. Additionally, our school releases a

newsletter to all families, keeping them abreast of the latest developments at our school. The principal at Whittier Elementary also uses social media, as well as our local newspaper, and television media to highlight events and happenings within our school. In addition, our district does an excellent job keeping the community informed of district-wide initiatives through mailings, emails, social media outlets, and community meetings and forums.

As teachers, we try to reach out to families before our students walk through the door to begin a new school year, for we believe that developing positive relationships from the start is essential. Teachers accomplish this task in many ways, including: letters to families and students, home visits, and/or phone calls. In addition, an Open House is held prior to the first day of school, which allows students to become familiar with their new environment, meet their teacher, and allows the parents and the teacher to begin building a relationship.

Whittier Elementary boasts of an active Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) which works to provide opportunities for teachers and families to come together. The PTO hosts monthly meetings, as well as quarterly family events, such as family movie nights, talent shows, open house ice cream socials, and Meals for the Heartland events. This organization also works to support our building and teachers by planning Teacher Appreciation luncheons and events, assisting with Track and Field day, supply students with nutritional snacks during Iowa Assessment week, and financially supports teachers with supplemental supplies needed in the classrooms. Our Parent Teacher Organization holds many fundraisers throughout the year in order to fund these special days and causes.

Whittier Elementary also supports several outreach programs that directly support our town, state, and beyond. These programs include the HOPE Foundation, United Way, Everybody Wins Iowa, Orchard Place on-site therapist availability, and ISmile dental screenings for Kindergarten are examples of these programs. Teachers allocate their financial support, as well as their time to many of these organizations.

3. Professional Development:

At Whittier Elementary, teachers and students alike embrace Indianola's mission statement, "...committed to excellence and achieving a lifetime of success." Teachers embody a growth mindset and are continually striving to improve in professional practice and pedagogy. We are guided by a Three-year Quality Instruction Professional Development Plan, which was collaboratively created by Whittier's administrators, coaches, and the Building Leadership Team. This plan guides our professional development focuses, including state, district, and building needs. We offer in-depth monitoring of data and climate in various forms that guide our professional development, including: Math and Reading Data Days, the focus on quality teaching through the blending of the Gradual Release of Responsibility framework (GRR) and Authentic Intellectual Work (AIW), walk-through data collection by administrators, peer observation by teachers, completion of PLC logs, and the direction of the findings from Instructional Rounds.

Professional development opportunities are planned and facilitated by a combination of teacher leadership, guest speakers, AEA representation, and various other forms of instruction, based upon Whittier's determined need. All sessions require teachers to be actively engaged, and swiftly implement new learning into practice. For example, teachers are currently implementing new learning about collaborative group work and substantive conversations into detailed lesson plans regularly throughout the school year. Teachers then video record their teaching and self-reflect on what they see, including what went well and areas needing improvement. Following their self-reflection, teachers collaborate with peers sharing their lesson plans, video recordings, and examples of student work. These reflective peer sessions have provided outstanding learning opportunities for all teachers at Whittier Elementary.

Currently, Whittier's professional development is centered around the blending of AIW (Authentic Intellectual Work) and the Gradual Release of Responsibility model (GRR) to create a quality teaching and learning environment. Specifically, Whittier has centered on the Focused Instruction component of GRR and is now currently researching and implementing the Collaborative Group Work phase and implementing substantive conversations into their teaching.

Additional professional development has been provided to address specific curricular and/or grade level needs. For example, Number Talks, have been incorporated preschool through fifth grade as a result of data showing a need for more conceptual number sense throughout all grade levels. Science and Social Studies professional development has been given as a result of the adoption TCI, a new curriculum. In addition, differentiated small group professional development opportunities are offered to teachers wanting support and resources in specific areas, such as incorporating Whole Brain teaching within our classrooms.

At Whittier we have proudly accepted the PLC mission and work to embrace a PLC culture within our school. Whittier has a PLC Committee that meets monthly and shares readings, videos, and emails with staff regarding professional development, and initiates PLC challenges to staff members, stressing the goal, “At Whittier we are going from good to great!”

Professional development opportunities do not end with the teaching staff; rather, administrative teams from across the district and district-wide coaching teams meet weekly to address the needs of their building, staff, and students. Administrative and coaching teams complete book studies, examine data, and continue to collaborate and learn as leaders of their school. These teams also meet jointly once a month to continue to grow together as a leadership team.

4. School Leadership:

We believe that no one person can be solely responsible for achieving high levels of learning for our students. Rather, we are a team in which teachers work no in isolation, but in a collaborative culture working toward the ultimate goal of improved learning for teachers as well as students. At Whittier we trust one another and have complete confidence in all teachers and administrators alike.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

At Whittier Elementary the key ingredient to our success is our commitment to making data-based decisions. Goals, professional development, and daily planning of lessons are constructed with the purpose of allowing each child to succeed at high levels. Teachers collaborate, self-reflect, and evaluate their own teaching techniques, strategies, and effectiveness that is measured by student outcomes.

Teachers work to create many different assessments, both formative and summative, that are consistently given throughout the school year to inform teachers and coaches. Teachers regularly give formative assessments that give quick snapshots of students' learning so teachers can make informed decisions. Many of these common assessments have been collaboratively compiled either by Whittier staff or district members. Other ideas for formative assessments are demonstrated and shared throughout a variety of different professional development sessions.

Making decisions based upon data also includes looking at summative assessments. District Benchmark tests are given at the beginning, middle, and end of year in the areas of reading and math. These tests are then compared to look at student growth, closing of gaps, and also highlight successes and concerns of individual teachers. These data points are also taken into account and help to make decisions for the upcoming year's professional development plans.

Once a quarter, grade level teachers, along with special education teachers, building leaders, and members from our AEA meet for Math and Reading Data Days. The PLC mentality of "our kids" is vibrant during this process, as we all work together to identify needs for ALL students. During this time, teachers are able to get support, ideas, and suggestions for how to improve teaching practices as well as have several eyes examining the data to ensure instruction is meeting the needs. This practice allows grade level teachers to set a focus for the classroom, such as fluency, a specific comprehension skill, or a specific math concept. Once the concern is resolved, we are able to examine other data at a later date and readjust our goals and focus areas. Data days are very organized with a specific goal and purpose. Even though teachers meet on a regular basis using the PLC framework, it is vital to have fresh eyes and new ideas looking at the data.

Decision-making based on student outcomes and data has helped Whittier students achieve at high levels. Teachers are able to make informed decisions based on the level of proficiency students demonstrate. Formative and summative assessments, data days, and collaboration time during PLC are all conducive to Whittier's academic success.