

**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 Dr. Brian Bullis

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

Official School Name Charles J Caruso Middle School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 1801 Montgomery Road

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

City Deerfield State IL Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 60015-2650

County Lake County

Telephone (847) 945-8430 Fax (847) 945-1963

Web site/URL http://caruso.dps109.org/ E-mail bbullis@dps109.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. Michael Lubelfeld E-mail mlubelfeld@dps109.org  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Deerfield Public Schools District 109 Tel. (847) 945-1844

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. Nick Begley  
(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):
- 4 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 2 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 0 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	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	89	81	170
7	88	123	211
8	82	93	175
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	259	297	556

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 1 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 7 % Asian
  - 0 % Black or African American
  - 0 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 92 % White
  - 0 % 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: 1%

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	2
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	1
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	3
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2015	580
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.005
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	1

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 0 %  
0 Total number ELL

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 0 %  
Total number students who qualify: 2

8. Students receiving special education services: 14 %  
79 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.

- 4 Autism
- 0 Deafness
- 0 Deaf-Blindness
- 6 Emotional Disturbance
- 0 Hearing Impairment
- 0 Mental Retardation
- 2 Multiple Disabilities
- 1 Orthopedic Impairment
- 20 Other Health Impaired
- 38 Specific Learning Disability
- 8 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: 5
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	3
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects	25
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	27
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a licensed professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	11
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 22:1
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	95%	95%	95%	95%	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

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award. 1984

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

Provide educational experiences of the highest quality that engage, inspire, and empower each student and to promote the continuous growth of our students.

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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Honor the Past and Prepare for the Future.

Charles J. Caruso Middle School serves over 500 students from the Deerfield and Riverwoods communities in Illinois. Founded in 1969, the school was originally called Wilmot Junior High. As Wilmot Junior High the school was honored with the national blue ribbon award in 1984. The school changed its name in honor of the former superintendent who served the District in that role for a remarkable 36 years before retiring in 1991. Dr. Caruso remains active in the community and still attends our eighth grade promotion ceremonies each year. Caruso Middle School's mission is to provide educational experiences of the highest quality that engage, inspire, and empower each student to excel and contribute in a changing world and to promote the continuous growth of students.

Caruso is successful because of its culture of caring and innovation. This culture embraces the social-emotional needs of the whole child while also operating under the best practices and cutting edge strategies in education. The school adopted a middle school model to best promote the holistic needs of students. This environment has allowed a core group of teachers to serve the same team of students each year. The team approach has allowed staff to build stronger relationships with students and parents while also providing teachers with more opportunities to collaborate with one another. The goal is to have every student reach their full potential and the structures in place at Caruso promote this growth.

Caruso's culture of caring is clear throughout the building and into the community. Each year, the student council leads an all-school fundraiser which generates awareness and funds for worthy student-selected charities such as Bikers Against Child Abuse, Dare to Tri, and Sesame Street Workshop. Caruso recently adopted the Botvin Life Skills program to promote student social and personal self-management skills while also reducing high-risk behaviors related to violence and substance abuse. A multi-tiered social-emotional and academic response to intervention structure focuses on meeting the individual needs of each student.

Caruso offers students a multitude of experiences to connect them to the school in ways that align with their interests while promoting self-discovery. These opportunities include everything from student council to athletics to debate to Gay Straight Alliance to Lego club. Students are encouraged to propose new ideas for clubs and each year new experiences emerge based upon their feedback. Caruso also supports student choice in our encore electives by providing an expansive list of courses which includes instrumental music, digital music studio, filmmaking, engineering challenge, musical theatre workshop, and peer buddies.

Meanwhile, the culture of innovation can be seen through several recent initiatives focused on promoting student growth and preparing them for their futures. In the school's 1:1 technological learning environment, every Caruso student has a Chromebook. This environment has positioned countless, valuable resources at our students' fingertips while simultaneously providing teachers with the opportunity to further personalize and differentiate the learning experience for each student. Teachers can monitor student learning in real-time and provide students with instantaneous feedback.

Innovation is also visible through the multiple facility upgrades completed over the past few years, all focused on further enhancing the student experience. Through collaborative efforts with multiple stakeholders, Caruso enjoys STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) and Communication Media Arts labs, and completely renovated science labs, spaces that embrace the Next Generation Science Standards. Vocal and instrumental music areas and the visual arts classroom have been reimagined and redesigned. The school also features a maker space, flexible furniture throughout the building, instructionally focused corridor images, and even instructional connections built into the floors. Large monitors in the hallways display student announcements and promote celebrations shared on social media. Banners around the exterior of the building are a constant reminder of the tenets of Caruso's mission and vision.

One of the most recent and impactful additions to our innovative culture has been the adoption of standards-based learning, grading, and reporting systems over the past year. Students, staff, and the parent community

can now be better informed about how students are performing in relation to their grade level standards. Caruso puts a premium on recognizing growth and attainment of standards while reporting separately on habits of success, which also play a critical role in the development of students.

Caruso has traditionally been one of the highest achieving schools in Illinois. The Caruso community continues to embrace this tradition, tirelessly exploring and integrating ways to provide an innovative learning environment that best prepares students for their future as caring, contributing, successful, and happy citizens.

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

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

#### Core Curriculum, Expansive Learning Opportunities

Students at Caruso Middle School experience excellent, research-based, interdisciplinary core curriculum instruction delivered by teams of dedicated and knowledgeable educators. Core teachers meet frequently with resource teachers, interventionists, and instructional coaches to examine data and evaluate the ongoing progress of all students. Professional learning communities (PLCs) allow teachers to collaborate in order to create and align curriculum to standards and effectively use student achievement data to inform our instruction. Through PLCs, core teachers have collaborated to create pacing guides, curriculum maps, unit learning objectives, standards-based rubrics, and district common assessments.

Caruso provides a comprehensive approach to literacy skills, integrating informational, argumentative, and narrative writing, as well as speaking and listening skills, across a variety of genres and mediums. The English language arts program uses the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) to develop lessons that focus on applying skills to comprehend and analyze complex texts including literature, poetry, and informational texts. The curriculum is designed to enable students to solve problems and think critically and creatively across all content areas. Technology is incorporated as students collaborate, revise, and publish work in various online formats. Advanced seminar classes enrich the depth and complexity of students exceeding standards, as teachers push for deeper analysis on demanding content.

The mathematics program at Caruso Middle School is a cumulative, skills-based program, that promotes the application of learning to real-life problem-solving. Teachers incorporate spiral learning to help students retain concepts. With differentiated classes that meet individual students' needs, each student has a personalized experience. Using inquiry-based projects, students take leadership over their own learning, often participating in flipped classrooms or furthering their own knowledge through independent, online study for exploration and enrichment. Students use patterns and problem solving to create algorithms, further understand concepts through the use of hands-on manipulatives, learn through inquiry-based projects, and apply knowledge to problem solve. Students connect to the content and solve real-world problems with mathematical applications. Course work includes curriculum that reaches as far as tenth-grade geometry.

The science program at Caruso is aligned with both the CCSS and the Next Generation Science Standards. Caruso's future scientists are immersed in problem-based and inquiry-based instruction with hands-on activities and learning in new, state-of-the-art science labs. Students study life sciences, physical sciences, earth/space sciences, engineering, and technology in ways that are relevant to the students' lives. These studies are enhanced through the use of student- and teacher-led labs, activities, and assessments. Classes are designed to enhance interdisciplinary connections and highlight self-discovery while encouraging students to develop critical thinking about the world around them. Student-led labs and activities have interdisciplinary connections that emphasize self-discovery while encouraging students to think critically as they explore and examine current, real-world scientific issues.

By aligning with the Illinois State Social Studies Standards, the Caruso social studies program provides students with opportunities to learn from the past and to gain civic awareness of modern global issues to prepare them for the future. Students embark on learning through engagement in simulations and debates, self-selecting topics of interest for choice projects, and participating in authentic learning experiences connected to our community and the world at large. Students regularly have opportunities to examine primary documents and credible sources through close reading and research. Cross-curricular connections are also emphasized with a focus on critical thinking and analytical writing. Teachers extend these civic experiences through courthouse visits and direct interactions with local politicians.

Caruso Middle School has created a strong, collaborative, and civic-minded community with rigorous goals for itself and its members. Teachers connect content to real-world situations and project-based simulations

that allow students to demonstrate mastery of standards with college or career tasks. Skills are not taught in isolation, but rather there is an emphasis on consistent proficiency and mastery demonstrated throughout all curricular areas. Caruso continually seeks to fulfill its mission to engage, empower, inspire, and grow all students.

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

In addition to taking core classes, Caruso students also participate in three “encore” classes each day. Encore offerings are unique, but also connected in their collective promotion of the four Cs (Communication, Collaboration, Creativity, and Critical Thinking).

Our encore classes include world language, physical education, and a combination of the following practical arts classes: communication media arts (CMA), Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM), peer buddies, music, art, orchestra, and band. Students in sixth, seventh, and eighth grade take world language and physical education daily. Sixth and seventh graders experience STEM, CMA, art, and music on a rotating basis each semester, followed by additional student choice in 8th grade depending upon person interests and passions.

In our world language classes of Spanish and French, students study other cultures and traditions, in addition to working on reading, writing, and speaking skills in the target language. Students have the opportunity to communicate in authentic conversations with native speakers through Google Hangouts and Skype with other classrooms around the world.

Physical education and health classes provide students the opportunity to actively practice collaboration and communication while learning how to care for their bodies and lead a healthy lifestyle. The goal of the program is to grow every student to be their own personal trainer by the end of their 8th-grade year.

In STEM, students build the essential skills of creativity and critical thinking as they embark upon a variety of learning launchers that they select themselves, depending on their interests and passion. These experiences often introduce or apply concepts that are also part of our science and math core curriculum. Examples of projects that Caruso students have completed in STEM class include flight simulations, model roller coasters, robot coding, and compressed air pneumatic projects.

The CMA class promotes the essential skills of creativity, innovation, critical thinking, digital responsibility, and technology operations. Like STEM class, students participate in many self-selected learning launchers in this course that build their capacity to effectively utilize a variety of technological tools and software. These skills are often transferred and applied in their other classes as they complete projects, create presentations, or collaborate with one another. This year, CMA students were recognized outside of school for their creativity in CMA, winning top awards at the first Google Student Film Festival.

Drawing, painting, and pottery are just a few of the areas of focus during art instruction. Students work both collaboratively and independently to understand, create, and reflect on their work. Self-expression and an appreciation of the arts and culture are encouraged through choice in assignments. Students have authentic opportunities to display their work; artwork appears in public areas throughout the school, and also has been shown in exhibits at the Deerfield Public Library.

In August 2016, Caruso unveiled a renovated music wing to further promote the engagement, growth, and success of vocal and instrumental music students. General music is offered at Caruso in sixth and seventh grade followed by the opportunity to participate in digital music studio and musical theatre workshop classes in eighth grade. Students are able to engage in music by performing, creating, and analyzing music. The orchestra and band programs offer fun and engaging learning experiences that include performing, creating, and analyzing music. Students have the opportunity to utilize music software programs and technology. Students perform concerts for their peers and parents throughout the year and also perform at community events.

During the 2016-2017 school year, Caruso began offering a peer buddies elective course for eighth graders

to work with students who have disabilities. The students in the class receive training focused on communication, team building, disability awareness, sensitivity demonstrations, strategies for working with peers with different abilities, technology usage, recognizing strengths, and identifying tools to promote their buddy's independence and engagement. After the training, the students work with our students in Caruso's Guided Instruction special education class in a mentor role, applying what they learned through a variety of activities, including crafts, structured social game time, jobs, exercise, and service projects.

Encore programming is an integral component of the school day that allows Caruso students to enhance their skills. Students who may struggle to find success in the core curriculum often find ways to shine in these encore offerings. Caruso values this important balance of core and encore curriculum to best meet the needs of each student.

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

Caruso Middle School integrates instructional methods, interventions, and assessments that focus on meeting the individual needs and promoting the growth of every learner in the building. Teachers constantly build upon a repertoire of effective instructional strategies while providing a robust system of interventions when students are not growing at expected rates. National and District-wide assessments allow teachers and administrators to gather data that helps guide instruction and maintain high levels of achievement for each student. Teachers and students alike use the data to set and achieve goals.

Teachers at Caruso Middle School utilize a variety of instructional strategies to ensure that each student learns to the best of their ability. Teachers incorporate student choice, interest, movement, and content-based games, in addition to regularly using differentiation to meet the needs of each individual learner. Many teachers incorporate small-group instruction, flexible groups, and centers into daily instruction. Teachers widely use problem-based learning, allowing students to solve real-world problems and engage in authentic learning.

Caruso's instructional strategies are further enhanced by the fact that the school is a 1:1 school with each student having access to a Chromebook. The technology has positively transformed instruction in a multitude of ways. Many of the math teachers at Caruso masterfully use the flipped classroom model. In this model, students watch a short video that teaches content for homework and then work collaboratively with peers during class on activities or practice work while the teacher works with individual students or small groups to build their skills. Technology also allows teachers to quickly and effectively gauge student understanding and use that information to drive instruction. Resources such as Khan Academy, TenMarks, and Study Island allow teachers to provide extra practice and support for students who need it in the areas they need it most, whether they are working to close gaps or are extending their learning beyond grade-level standards.

At Caruso, assessments are not separate from instruction, but are an integral part of student learning. Three times a year, Caruso administers the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment. Results of this assessment show how students perform within the school, throughout District 109, and nationally. During the year students meet in small groups with school staff who act as mentors to view their math and reading scores. Students create specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-oriented (SMART) goals in reading and math based off of their MAP scores. In order to help achieve their SMART goal, students choose the areas from their MAP reports they need to most improve upon and set goals related to how they will achieve their goals. Parents also receive the breakdown of the MAP data so they can clearly see their child's progress, understand when interventions or further enrichment are necessary, and help support their child at home.

Teachers review the data to determine if students need response to intervention (RTI) support in math or reading. Class performance, class history, and assessment history are also taken into account when determining whether a student needs an intervention. If students qualify for RTI, they receive targeted instruction to focus on improving academic understanding and achievement in low-scoring areas. Tier 1 support is provided by the classroom teacher while tier 2 and 3 are small group or individual interventions provided by the RTI Specialist.

Locally each quarter, language arts, math, social studies, and science teachers give a District Common Assessment (DCA) to evaluate how students are progressing within their classes. These DCAs also inform and drive future instruction. Teachers collaborate in grade-level meetings and content area PLC's to use these data to assess the impact of the current curriculum on improving or maintaining student growth and achievement. The test identifies "STOP Standards" in which less than 60% of tested students are not meeting standards. This helps teachers identify where they need to reteach standards in order to improve student achievement.

Caruso Middle School's integration of effective instructional strategies, intervention, and assessment systems provides a comprehensive and interdependent approach that ensure that no student falls through the cracks while all students are provided individualized opportunities to learn and grow.

## PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

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

Caruso’s culture of inclusion and collaboration starts on the first day of school. Students are welcomed by our student council and bluejay mascot who are cheering and waving spirit signs at the entrance of the building. This sets the tone that all students are welcomed and supported at Caruso from day one.

The inclusion and collaboration continues in countless ways as the school year progresses. Students participate in inclusion events such as No One Eats Alone, Peer Buddies, and Random Acts of Kindness. On Walk to School Day, teachers and students meet at a designated area and walk together to school. We host a number of student-planned spirit weeks featuring themed dress-up days and team-building activities. Students create murals in the main foyer of the school to advertise activities or upcoming events.

The Caruso annual FUNdraiser is a tradition that has become a centerpiece of our school’s culture. Student council solicits recommendations for worthy non-profit organizations to be the beneficiary, then they present each option to the school community, and vote to select the deserving organization. The student body spends weeks planning and preparing for events to raise money and awareness before the FUNdraiser, held just before winter break each year. The spirit of giving lights up the building and “the big donation reveal” assembly is electric. Students take great pride in the outcome and giving back to the community, and staff members receive great joy in seeing the success of authentic, service-based learning.

Students complete engagement surveys each year and which illustrate that students continue to feel safe, supported, included, and engaged. Staff reviews results of these surveys and develop action plans for continued improvement. The action plans have led to more focused efforts related to teachers welcoming students to each class and making learning objectives more explicit.

Staff members experience this same positive climate and culture by extending the spirit of inclusion and collaboration to them. Our staff members have a voice in how our school is run, are given autonomy to make decisions that are best for students, and exist in a culture of “yes” where we invite and encourage fun, innovative, and creative ideas that best serve our students. The annual, district-wide staff culture survey shows Caruso employees are engaged and satisfied in their work at rates that far exceed schools nationwide.

All of this together creates a culture and climate for our students and staff that is inclusive, collaborative, and ultimately, successful.

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

Caruso Middle School embraces and generates opportunities to engage families and community stakeholders to work together to promote the growth and achievement of our students.

Parents are involved in several ways, including formal and informal opportunities for participation. Our Parent Teacher Organization is an active, benevolent group that provides countless resources and opportunities for our staff and students, from flexible classroom furniture to educational programming such as Civil War re-enactments. Our Parent Advisory Committee, a trusted sounding board for the administrative team, meets regularly to provide input on significant instructional initiatives and topics. Many parents attend Caruso’s “In the Spotlight” award ceremony, where students are recognized for acts of kindness, leadership, and other worthwhile traits that the school values. Parents have also participated in evening events such as standards-based learning sessions, an “understanding your child’s data” event,” and a technology parent edcamp.

Grandparents are also an important part of the extended Caruso family. We host an annual grandparent night for each grade level where grandparents come to Caruso for tours of the facilities, presentations about curriculum and extracurricular experiences, and even student-led technology lessons. Grandparents love

connecting with their grandchildren's school experience, and students take ownership of their learning and share with a valued family member. The program has become a model for a similar program at the District's other middle school.

Caruso Middle School partners with members of the community to enhance and enrich the learning environment. Scientists from a locally based worldwide scientific company teach lessons in science classes. Local pharmacists speak to health classes and local fitness instructors contribute in physical education. In social studies, Holocaust survivors share their experiences to personalize students' understanding of World War II, a panel of religious leaders give their perspective on history and current events, and elected officials present and answer questions about government and politics.

Caruso Middle School and the Optimist Club of Deerfield teamed up this year to provide recognition and support to students that engage in an optimistic lifestyle. Staff members nominate students every quarter for the award; the Optimist Club recognizes nominated students, parents are invited to join their child for a recognition breakfast, and an award board hangs prominently in the school's front hall.

Caruso is fortunate to have a supportive community that plays a role in helping each child succeed and is proof that a village can make an enormous impact on each student's success.

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

District 109 and Caruso Middle School administration recognize that teachers themselves are the best professional development resources for each other. In 2016, the District implemented "Early Release Wednesday" to increase focused, consistent collaboration and professional development opportunities within and across buildings, grade levels, subject areas and teams. Each staff member is also supported by instructional coaches and is encouraged to pursue personalized experiences that further their growth as educators and meet their individual needs.

During building staff meetings, staff members often lead their own professional development through interactive showcase sessions in a breakout format where each educator determines what areas they want to explore. The learning opportunities are always connected to the academic and social-emotional growth of our students.

Each semester, teachers also participate in one of six professional learning workshops, which are delivered by teacher leaders, instructional coaches, and administrators. Topics include: Teaching the 4Cs with Tech, Student-Led Learning, Understanding by Design, Professional Learning Communities, Project Based Learning, and Success for All (growth mindset, grit).

Staff members meet with subject-level counterparts in Professional Learning Communities to create common units and assessments. Through collaborative discussions, members focus on successful classroom practices, create interventions for struggling students, and develop enrichment for those who have mastered classroom objectives.

Our two instructional coaches are highly valued members of the Caruso staff who provide individual and group professional development. That iCoach PD is based on building and District initiatives; they also respond to needs that arise in each curricular area. The iCoaches have been instrumental in supporting the 1:1 initiative and the transition to standards-based learning, grading, and reporting.

Many Caruso teachers attend regional Tech Camps which are led by teacher leaders who have an expertise in a specific program or application of technology. Caruso has also helped District 109 host its own Tech Camp and EdCamps. Teachers have taught classes related to flipped class techniques, student portfolios, and Nearpod utilization, allowing other staff members to elevate the quality of instruction and improve the classroom experience for students.

Lastly, at Caruso, staff are encouraged to attend workshops that address unique personal needs. Many Caruso teachers are currently pursuing the National Board Certification with strong support from District

109 and Caruso's several current National Board Certified teachers. New this year, each staff member has a specific budget allotted to them to attend a workshop of their choice that addresses an individualized topic of interest to further promote their professional growth.

Caruso administrators, teachers and other staff members take their role of "lead learners" to heart, focusing on a growth mindset for themselves, in order to instill it in their students.

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

The leadership philosophy of Caruso Middle School is built upon the ideals of shared, collaborative leadership. The building administrative team facilitates the learning, growth, and operations of the staff, but not in isolation. There are systems and structures in place to promote a learning community that elicits feedback, shares ownership, and empowers all. Everyone is involved and represented, so everyone is invested Caruso's success.

School leaders clearly demonstrate a deep appreciation for stakeholder voice. A number of organizations and structures allow seamless and meaningful input, and two-way conversations with stakeholders, including: building team leaders; student advisory committee; parent advisory committee; Parents and Professionals for Success (an organization to support families of students with special needs); building advisory committee; student council; student leadership challenge; and the high school vertical alignment committee.

The building leadership team includes twelve staff members representing each the many teams of staff in our building. This group formally meets weekly and is in constant daily communication. They bring important conversations to the attention of the administration and lead the work of the building in promoting student growth. Team leaders facilitate the effective operations of their respective teams as they conduct instructional meetings and problem-solving team meetings.

The professional development that school leadership facilitates aligns with this shared leadership philosophy. Our students are released early on Wednesday so our staff can collaborate, learn, and teach one another in a variety of ways. This includes grade level and vertical PLCs (professional learning communities). We also use this time for PLWs (professional learning workshops) where a collection of teacher and administrators lead learning around major district initiatives focused on impacting student learning and growth. We also conduct building staff meetings where teachers and administrators share the responsibility of staff development through presentations, showcases, and workshops, often providing choice in learning and the promotion of dialogue and application around the different objectives.

All of these leadership efforts are grounded in the pursuit of the goals of the school improvement plan (SIP). These goals include a focus on growth and achievement in our core instructional areas and often include an additional focus on items such as student engagement or staff culture. These goals are grounded in data-driven decision making where our progress is monitored through the year through data retreats and team reviews.

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

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Students at Caruso Middle School demonstrate high levels of engagement because they have abundant opportunities to choose their own learning paths. Teachers ensure student choice and listen to student voice to create and integrate challenging, stimulating lessons.

As a school within a 1:1 district, Caruso has global resources that students can access anytime, throughout the school day and outside of school. Every student has a Chromebook and access to iPads. The technology allows infinite possibilities for differentiated instruction, and Caruso teachers are well versed in guiding students to find the opportunities that meet their interests, challenge them, and increase learning. Students may be Skyping with scientists studying penguins in Antarctica, using computer coding to illustrate their knowledge of an atom's structure, collaborating on projects via video and shared documents with peers across town in our other middle school, posting blogs to authentic audiences, or accessing online resources such as Khan Academy or TenMarks to extend their learning.

In STEM and communication media arts (CMA) classes, students choose from almost infinite “learning launchers,” allowing them to create their own class, with the teacher as a resource and guide. Students have used CAD software to design buildings, have composed and recorded original music, programmed robots, filmed a short horror movie, coded gaming software, created model roller coasters, and filmed public service announcements. The success goes beyond good grades; two Caruso student videos won top honors at the inaugural Google Student Film Festival in Chicago, and many others received honorable mention.

Our annual “Quest Day” is the ideal example of student voice and student choice increasing student engagement, learning, and academic success. Students volunteer to teach a class of their passion to peers; those who don't teach choose to attend the peer-led classes that interest them. The classes ranged widely with examples such as flight simulator tutorials to singing competitions to LGBTQ+ seminars to learning how to break-in your baseball/softball glove.

Student choice extends beyond the school day in meaningful ways that enhance engagement and learning. After-school opportunities range from athletic and musical options to specific interest areas including Debate Club and Destination Imagination. Students, with staff support, create their own clubs, such as LEGO Club, Doctor Who club, and Gay, Straight Alliance (GSA).

Students who are active in contributing to their environment have a positive attitude towards school itself -- and when school itself includes student voice and student choice, students reach high levels of academic success.