

**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 Ms. Cindy Anderson

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

Official School Name Romona Elementary School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 600 Romona Road

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

City Wilmette State IL Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 60091-2125

County Cook County

Telephone (847) 256-0211 Fax (847) 251-4153

Web site/URL http://romona.wilmette39.org E-mail andersoc@wilmette39.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. Raymond Lechner E-mail lechnerr@wilmette39.org  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Wilmette School District 39 Tel. (847) 512-6000

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. Mark Steen  
(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	40	32	72
K	32	38	70
1	52	42	94
2	55	52	107
3	45	58	103
4	55	48	103
5	0	0	0
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
<b>Total Students</b>	279	270	549

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 21 % Asian
  - 1 % Black or African American
  - 9 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 61 % White
  - 8 % 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.

<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	54
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	4
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	58
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2015	549
(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: 11 %  
62 Total number ELL

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

Spanish, Greek, Italian, Polish, German, Korean, Japanese, Ukrainian, Hungarian, Cantonese, Thai, Portuguese, Assyrian, Romanian, Dutch, Hebrew, Mandarin, Farsi, Turkish, Urdu, Russian, Gujarati, Malayalam, Marathi, Yoruba, Coratian, Arabic, and Bosnian

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 4 %  
Total number students who qualify: 20
8. Students receiving special education services: 20 %  
111 Total number of students served

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

<u>7</u> Autism	<u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment
<u>0</u> Deafness	<u>14</u> Other Health Impaired
<u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness	<u>4</u> Specific Learning Disability
<u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance	<u>24</u> Speech or Language Impairment
<u>2</u> Hearing Impairment	<u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury
<u>0</u> Mental Retardation	<u>1</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness
<u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities	<u>59</u> Developmentally Delayed

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 2
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects	24
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	21
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a licensed professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	29
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	10

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 21:1
12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

<b>Required Information</b>	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012
Daily student attendance	96%	96%	96%	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. 2006

15. In a couple of sentences, provide the school's mission or vision statement.  
Provide a safe, nurturing environment in which students are motivated to become lifelong learners and develop a positive self-image while appreciating the differences in others.

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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Romona Elementary School is a neighborhood public school that serves a population of preschool through fourth grade students in the west Wilmette and east Glenview area of New Trier Township. The student population is approximately 560. Romona is one of six schools in Wilmette District 39, which has four elementary schools, a middle school, and a junior high school. Wilmette is a suburb on Chicago's North Shore, approximately fourteen miles north of downtown Chicago.

Many families choose to live in District 39 because of its reputation for high academic standards and achievement. Romona is highly regarded within the District for excellence in meeting the needs of all of our diverse learners. Romona is known throughout the New Trier Township as the most diverse school on the North Shore and a leader in inclusion, flexible service delivery, and differentiation. Our team prides itself on providing a safe and inclusive environment for all students, including the 11% of the students who are English Learners and the 20% of students who receive special education services. Our student population is 61% White, 21% Asian, 9% Hispanic or Latino, 8% Multiracial, and 1% Black. Last year, the mobility rate was approximately 11% and we focus on ensuring a smooth transition into school for all students.

Romona proudly houses the early childhood program for all of District 39. We have 72 preschool students who range in age from three to five. Our early childhood program offers six sections of blended half-day classrooms serving students who demonstrate developmental delays and typically-developing students, and two self-contained classrooms for students with complex needs requiring a full of day service. Children in this program receive services from a learning behavior specialist and related services providers such as social work, occupational, physical, and speech/language therapists.

Romona has a strong focus on character education with a school motto of Romona R.O.C.K.S., which stands for Respect, Originality, Courage, Kindness, and Sincerity. This motto was created based on feedback from staff, students, alumni, and families as these were the most important qualities to be learned and demonstrated by the Romona community. Throughout the year we celebrate these characteristics by bringing together the students and staff to engage in activities, daily announcements, the Romona R.O.C.K.S. song, and presentations. It is through these activities, lessons, and celebrations that we promote positive peer interactions and awareness so that students are available for learning at school. In addition to the Romona R.O.C.K.S. program, each classroom focuses weekly on a social-emotional curriculum (Second Step) in the classroom, helping to reinforce these characteristics.

Romona provides an enriched environment in which our students are challenged and motivated to reach their full potential. The school enjoys dedicated and enthusiastic administrators, teachers, staff, and special services professionals. Students engage in a rigorous curriculum comprised of reading, writing, math, social studies, science, and Spanish. In addition to the core academics, the children participate in music, art, technology, physical education, and library skills. Our students greatly benefit from our school-wide, updated technology, including SmartBoards in each classroom. Learning opportunities abound in our curriculum-based, state of the art, outdoor garden classroom.

The Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) is an integral part of Romona. Through school fundraisers and the efforts of dedicated, hard-working volunteers, the PTA provides meaningful support that greatly enhances the quality of the learning experience. Field trips, guest speakers, lunch clubs and hands-on activities are among the many programs provided by the PTA. The annual international week and festival, sponsored by the PTA, helps the school community celebrate the many diverse cultures represented at Romona. We believe that a strong home-school partnership is key in supporting our students.

Romona was honored to receive the National Blue Ribbon School award in 2006. It is one of the many reasons that our community is proud to have Romona as their neighborhood school. Since that time, Romona has continued to strive for excellence every year by setting new goals for improvement. In curriculum and instruction, we review our resources on a regular rotation, constantly striving to meet our students' needs. We provide regular professional development for our teachers with regards to new curriculum, standards, progress reporting, and many other areas of best practice. Every year, the

administration works with the staff to set goals for improvement as we strive to create the best environment for students. This year we have three main areas where we have focused on improvement. We are implementing new curricula in writing and word study in addition to many Response to Intervention (RtI) programs. We are also designing a new Learning Commons to upgrade our library and technology space to be a 21st century space that focuses on collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and creativity. Lastly, we are focusing on student growth using Student Learning Objectives and other strategies at our periodic data meetings.

The motto of District 39 is "Together We Learn and Grow." Romona School embodies this as we focus on connecting the parents, staff and students to create an environment of respect, inclusion, persistence, and kindness. Our team is child-centered, collaborative, and focused on student growth, helping all students develop their full potential.

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

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

District 39 believes in a focused, coherent, and rigorous study of mathematics that encourages students to develop perseverance. Application of mathematical ideas emerges through the development of conceptual understanding and procedural fluency. Through evidence-based arguments and critiques, students engage in mathematical discourse. Students represent their ideas in multiple modalities and explore mathematical connections within the world around them.

A few of the instructional practices in a mathematics classroom should:

- provide concepts-based instruction rather than skills-based instruction.
- differentiate instruction to meet the needs of the varied learners in the classroom.
- allow for exploration, explanation, and evaluation of progress.
- ask probing questions which require students to justify their responses.
- accept divergent ideas and promote the sharing of these ideas.

District 39 values a lifelong pursuit of literacy through metacognitive and collaborative experiences. Standards and current research guide explicit, balanced, and scaffolded instruction. Literacy instruction is differentiated according to student diversity, background, readiness, ability, and interest. Ongoing, balanced assessment practices inform instructional decision-making, goal setting, and reflection about progress. Students develop strong foundational skill sets, using a common language that can be transferred across content areas and grade levels. Respecting multiple perspectives and audiences, students become critical consumers and creative producers of informational, media, and literary sources.

A few of the instructional practices in an ELA classroom should:

- encourage student-directed learning through the gradual release of responsibility model: modeling, guided practice, independent practice, and independent product.
  - provide access to authentic, quality texts at differentiated levels.
  - support self-selected literacy experience for students to fuel curiosity, engagement, creative personal expression, and skill reinforcement.
  - provide explicit, integrated skill instruction and modeling for balanced literacy components in varied genres: reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing.
  - prioritize process over product in balanced literacy instruction and embrace multiple ways of demonstrating understanding and knowledge.
  - facilitate student-driven instruction, collaboration and discussions: brainstorming, reflective listening, conferencing.
  - encourage high-level thinking through questioning (i.e., Webb’s “Depth of Knowledge”).
- model and promote information literacy to increase student skills in analyzing and evaluate sources for credibility, bias, purpose, and audience.

Our vision for science education, supported by the research on student learning, has informed our decision to develop a science curriculum that provides students the opportunity to experience the dynamic nature of science. Our goal is to engage students through the inquiry approach. Teachers present science as an imaginative endeavor that creates opportunities for students to ask questions, engage in systematic planning, and to collect data that can be shared in an electronic fashion. The ability to understand how to investigate questions, to share collaboratively, to present findings, and to synthesize information will help prepare students for the 21st Century. Ultimately, we want students to not simply report the ordinary, but see the extraordinary.

The science curriculum will prepare children for life in a globally interconnected age where information rests at our fingertips. As we know, the skills required for success in the 21st Century shift our vision to less importance on recall of facts, prescriptive scientific investigations, and the notion that science is a set body of knowledge. Instead, the curriculum helps students engage in experiences that replicate the work of scientists.

As a district, we have adopted the definition and purpose for Social Studies curriculum as provided by the National Council for Social Studies (NCSS):

"Social Studies is the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world."

The social studies curriculum is rigorous and encourages analytical thinking. Our goal is to engage students through the inquiry approach as it fosters curiosity, desire to explore and investigate, and encourages students to raise questions to solve real-world problems. As a result of our social studies curriculum, students will develop improved ability to reason, to use creative thinking and innovation, and to take risks to uncover new possibilities which together will prepare them for jobs and careers for the 21st Century.

Our students engage in inquiry by utilizing five conceptual lenses: civics, economics, geography, history and cultural anthropology. Civic learning and engagement are addressed in each grade level. For example, in first grade, the students reflect on this inquiry question: How can I bring about positive change in my community?

District 39's Connecting Kids Preschool program uses Creative Curriculum to provide instruction in all areas of early development and the Second Step Curriculum for Social Emotional Learning, including the Child Safety Unit. These curricula are aligned to the Illinois Early Learning and Development Standards which correlates with the Illinois Common Core Standards. All students are regularly assessed using Teaching Strategies Gold, an authentic, ongoing assessment that captures student strengths and needs within the natural classroom environment. Typically developing students in our preschool program enter kindergarten ready to learn, with strong early academic and social skills developed for the school environment. In order to monitor early literacy skills, students are assessed using the Individual Growth and Development Indicators three times per year in order to monitor development and continued growth. Transition meetings are held for children with Individual Education Plans moving from Early Childhood to kindergarten, with continued services outlined.

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

Physical Education/Health is provided to Kindergarten for 20 minutes per week and to Grades 1-4 20 minutes/five days a week

District 39 Physical and Health Education develops, integrates, and promotes enjoyment through increased knowledge, positive attitudes, healthy behaviors, and lifelong skills, which meets the needs of all students. Through engagement in individual, small group and team activities, students build confidence, promote positive self-image, and work to achieve personal goals.

Rather than focusing on specific games or sport goals, the revised curriculum emphasizes concepts and skills that are applicable to many activities, games, and sports. As in all areas of physical and health education, the sequence of concepts and skills is developed for age appropriate study.

The personal and interpersonal skills emphasized in each of these are easily identifiable in goals of sportsmanship and cooperation. Additionally, the curriculum provides opportunities to integrate English language arts standards for academic vocabulary related to the disciplines of PE and Health. Technology integration is also embedded within curriculum. Students can use technology tools to monitor their own progress and to create plans for self-improvement.

General Music is provided to Kindergarten for 30 minutes per week and to Grades 1-4 30 minutes/twice a week

Music is a unique form of human expression that is universal and essential. As an ineffable aural art form, music communicates ideas and emotions. Music education is an independent and integral part of the development of the whole child. Through music education, District 39 students will become literate in the elements of music while developing performance skills and a lifelong appreciation of music.

The fundamental music processes in which students engage are listening, singing, playing, creating, and performing. Although the music curriculum map presents each process separately, District 39 believes that these processes are meaningfully integrated to achieve a balanced and comprehensive experience of study in music.

A few of the instructional practices in a music classroom should:

- develop skills and techniques that are required to create and perform music.
- promote active learning that allows for inherent sound and movement.
- engage students in common musical goals through cooperation and collaboration to build a musical community.
- develop a musical environment that is inclusive and respectful of all learning profiles.
- use formative and summative authentic assessments to guide teaching and learning.
- provide opportunities for student choice as part of their musical experiences.

Spanish is provided to Kindergarten for 20 minutes/twice a week and to Grades 1-4 20 minutes/five days a week. The Elementary Spanish program in Wilmette is a FLES (Foreign Language in the Elementary Schools) program. Students learn vocabulary and concepts designed around the integration of curricular goals and objectives in content areas such as Social Studies or Science.

Here are the goals of the program:

- Every child will have the opportunity to participate in an elementary foreign language program during the optimal years of acquisition
- Every child will have the opportunity to acquire functional proficiency in one or more languages other than the child's native language
- Children will be exposed to cultures different from their own and therefore will develop positive attitudes about language and culture
- Students will be comfortable with the language and will be inspired to continue language learning
- Students will acquire language-learning strategies in addition to basic vocabulary and conversational skill

Art is provided to Grades 1-4 for 60 minutes per week. District 39 students experience a wide range of art experiences such as drawing, mixed media, painting, printmaking and three-dimensional art. Our students learn that an artist is a person who practices any of the creative arts. They also have traits such as persistence, understanding with empathy, taking risks, and of course, creativity and imagination. Through analysis and discussions, students learn to decode their visual surroundings developing necessary skills to navigate through and appreciate our ever-evolving world.

Technology & Library Media is provided to Kindergarten for 30 minutes per week (Library only) and to Grades 1-4 for 30 minutes per week each. District 39 believes in equitable access to information and information technology to learn effectively and live productively in an increasingly global and digital society. We strive to empower students and teachers to become critical consumers and creative producers of information in our global society. We teach our students to become enthusiastic readers, skillful researchers, and ethical users of information by incorporating innovative technologies that promote learning through collaboration, creativity, communication, and critical thinking.

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

Romona uses the Response to Intervention (RtI) approach to identify students needing additional supports and enrichment. Students are universally screened three times a year using Aimsweb products, Scantron Performance Series, and a district created writing assessment. Students are categorized into quadrants with teachers developing Instructional Planning Forms (IPFs) to provide remediation within the classroom. For some students, more intensive supports are provided by reading specialists and/or special education teachers through a pull-out model. For students at the advanced end, our differentiation specialist provides enriched instruction supporting higher level learning. Grade level data check-in meetings are held half way through the intervention period to validate that interventions, strategies, and materials are supporting students and that all students are making anticipated progress.

Romona has an Intervention Team (I-Team) that is a general education problem-solving team made up of a variety of staff with different backgrounds and specialties. I-team serves two primary roles: to help teachers problem-solve for individual students or a group of students and to use data to help facilitate the RtI process. The I-team members work with teachers to collect data on students to generate ideas for interventions, set goals for students, and progress monitor students to ensure that all students are making growth.

Every year, we have a significant number of families moving into the Romona community that speak more than one language at home. During the registration process, all families fill out information letting us know about the languages that are spoken at home so that we can screen all students. We use both the WIDA and Access testing to ensure that our students' EL needs are met.

Since we have a large population of English Learners and students with IEPs, and our students come from a variety of socio-economic factors, we analyze data to ensure that all of their needs are met. Recently an analysis occurred to investigate the percentage of students in each ethnicity and English Learner groups compared to the percentage of the same group receiving IEP services. We then participated in discussions at the department level to raise awareness of any groups that were over or under-identified as needing support.

District 39 contracted with a statistician to analyze seven years of district data from the Scantron Performance Series assessment. Bands of expected student growth were created. Romona teachers monitor students' growth within the appropriate band with the goal of all students achieving at the expected growth within their band. This has provided a critical look at our students on the high end as well as students who are performing below grade level. We continue to evaluate our curriculum for rigor, impact, and relevance using this data as a guideline.

Romona teachers use formative and summative assessments in their classrooms to inform instruction. These assessments are in line with the curriculum and pulled from curricular resources or teacher designed. Additionally, District 39 has common assessments aligned to content areas of study that are analyzed to validate the quality of instruction and learning of students. Teachers also participate in a process of setting instructional goals for groups of students based on baseline assessments, monitoring progress through informal assessments, and adjusting instruction based on student response.

Within the classroom, our teachers are constantly adjusting their instructional approaches to meet the needs of their students based on the data that is collected. Our Romona team has embraced many approaches including problem-solving, using evidence and claims, the workshop method, and integrating technology into instruction. Our teachers have the autonomy to design instruction based on student need; all of these approaches are used throughout the year to ensure that all learning styles are met. We are now beginning to explore personalized learning and determine how we can best incorporate this strategy into our instruction.

## PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

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### 1. School Climate/Culture:

Our school culture is built around a foundation of our motto, Romona R.O.C.K.S. At every assembly, we begin by singing the Romona R.O.C.K.S. song:

R is for respect, the golden rule.  
Originality, always be yourself.  
C is for courage, try to be brave.  
Kindness to everyone, care for each other.  
Last but not least is sincerity,  
Romona School is where we want to be.

This illustrates who we are and what we stand for at Romona. We use these characteristics to remind our children how to create a positive environment for learning and growing. Our students are here for up to seven years, so it is vital to create a welcoming, comfortable culture for all students and families.

Romona administration worked with the teachers on helping students to create a growth mindset, to have courage when faced with challenges, and to embrace mistakes. We participated in professional development that focused on how to instill this in our students. Students now talk about having a growth mindset and use phrases such as “mistakes make your brain grow.”

Romona understands that some students need additional social-emotional support in order to be successful at school. All students at Romona receive weekly age-appropriate social-emotional instruction through our Second Step curriculum. Additionally, we use programs such as Zones of Regulation and Super Flex to support students who need additional guidance. Lastly, we have two social workers who work with students from early childhood through fourth grade.

Fostering autonomy with our teachers to be creative in their planning of instruction motivates and engages our students. Every day at Romona you will see a variety of instructional techniques being used in order to inspire children. Teachers are constantly collaborating to integrate the content areas and to embed technology, hands-on-learning, and project based learning into their instruction. We focus on 21st century learning and incorporating the four Cs (creativity, communication, critical thinking, and collaboration) into our instruction.

We encourage leadership among our students and offer opportunities for students to show their school pride. We have a Student Advisory Council and Green Team, our students do daily announcements and help in the lunchroom as “hoppers” putting away the hand wipes. At evening events, our students welcome parents wearing blue Romona R.O.C.K.S. vests.

At the core of everything we do at Romona is our wonderful teaching staff. It is essential to ensure that our staff members feel valued and supported. We not only focus on Romona R.O.C.K.S. for students, but also for teachers. For example, we focus on kindness with students and teachers by using the “How Full is Your Bucket?” philosophy. We want everyone to feel as described in our song: "Romona School is where we want to be."

### 2. Engaging Families and Community:

Romona Elementary School prides itself on being a neighborhood school that builds a strong home-school connection and a positive relationship with the community.

The Community Review Committee (CRC) is a group of teachers, administrators, parents, community members, and School Board members that works together every year to research a topic that can improve our schools. This year, the Romona principal and social worker are on the CRC with two Romona parents

and numerous community members. The CRC is researching school climate by focusing on diversity, empathy, and inclusion. Past topics have included 21st century learning, cultivating growth minded, resilient students, and technology & learning environments.

Romona has an extremely active Parent Teacher Association (PTA) that is involved in many aspects of the building. The principal works closely with the executive board of the PTA, meeting monthly to discuss the school and parent involvement. The PTA begins the year with Rockin' Romona, a family style picnic that brings together the entire Romona community and welcomes new families to our community. The PTA provides enrichment opportunities for our students that enhance the curriculum. Examples of this enrichment include a visit from a local veterinarian for the pet study unit in early childhood, a field trip to see a play in first grade by a favorite author, and a visit from "Abraham Lincoln" in third grade to bring social studies to life. Our PTA is also extremely involved in our outdoor classroom, providing an authentic learning space for children to engage with nature. Romona's robust garden allows students to do a variety of activities at recess and after school at our yearly Garden Open House with the help of parent volunteers.

Communication is a key component of inviting the parents and community to be active members in our school. We have a variety of communication methods including frequent newsletters, an informative website, a public Facebook page, and many evenings where we invite parents into the school including Curriculum Night and Open House. We are in frequent contact with parents about student progress, calling and meeting with parents whenever there is information to share. We conference with parents twice a year and send home two progress reports, one at the end of each semester. Each year, we use benchmarking assessments to measure student growth and share this with parents and families at the end of the year. We also share the results of benchmarking and PARCC assessments with the Board of Education and the community at monthly School Board meetings. The Romona team believes that the home-school partnership is key to helping all students succeed.

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

One of our strengths in District 39 is our thorough approach to providing professional development for our teachers. Before the school year begins, all new teachers participate in a week long new teacher training where they are introduced to the District philosophy and curricula. Then all teachers, veteran and new, spend two days together in professional development as they prepare for the new year. This year, our entire district attended a keynote speaker on embracing diversity and then spent the rest of the two days in sessions that applied to their specific positions.

Throughout the year, our district provides many opportunities for professional development for all certified staff members. This includes district wide professional development days where speakers and trainers are brought in and providing staff members the opportunities to attend out-of-district workshops and trainings. This year, our district began using a new writing resource and our teachers have engaged in numerous trainings with the Chicago Literacy Group to ensure that we are implementing the resource with integrity.

Our teachers also have many in-house opportunities for professional development. District-wide, we offer 'Academy 39' classes where our teachers teach other teachers. This year, Romona teachers have taught Academy 39 classes on discussing best practice, technology, and social skills development. There are specific Academy 39 classes that are tailored for our new teachers to offer them support throughout the year. Additionally, all new teachers participate in monthly new teacher meetings at Romona and each new teacher has the opportunity to work with a mentor teacher for their first two years.

This year at Romona staff meetings we have focused on how to effectively integrate technology into the classroom. Our teachers have led workshops throughout the year demonstrating how to use technology tools to enhance instruction. We have explored new technological resources for instruction that engage students in coding, offer online collaboration options, are creative communication tools with families, and other new engaging ways to embed technology in the classroom.

We not only provide opportunities for professional development for our teachers, but also for our paraprofessionals. Throughout the year, we provide specific training for our paraprofessionals that

supports their work with students including behavior modification techniques, understanding of a variety of student disabilities, and technology training. The paraprofessionals also are given time to research an area of interest and to share their findings with their colleagues.

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

Romona has two administrators: a principal and a part-time assistant principal. The assistant principal also works at another District 39 elementary school, splitting his time between the two buildings. Romona has two special education coordinators, one that leads the early childhood program and the other who works specifically with the kindergartners-fourth graders.

Our administrators are the visionaries for the building, helping to create a safe environment for students to take risks and persevere in their learning. The administrators regularly spend time in the classrooms, hallways, cafeteria, and playground in order to build relationships with the students. The administrators regularly greet the students at the front door in the morning and say goodbye to the students at the door at the end of the day. The administrators aim to create a positive environment for students to learn where all students and families feel welcome.

The administration leads a group of staff members in a group called the Principal's Advisory Committee (PAC) where they are able to work with the staff in order to ensure that all school improvement decisions are child-centered and focused on student growth. The administrative team is involved in leading schoolwide data meetings, staff meetings, crisis-committee meetings, Intervention Team and IEP meetings, grade level meetings, and new teacher meetings. The administrative team also works closely with the Romona PTA and other community-run groups including the Community Review Committee and Educational Foundation. These groups and committees have a variety of purposes, but in every conversation the focus is always on what is best for children and what will help them grow academically, socially, and emotionally.

At Romona, we have a variety of ways to measure student achievement and growth. We benchmark all students three times a year in math, reading, and writing. We then analyze this data as a staff at data meetings to ensure that all students are making growth. We have numerous programs in place to support students including supports at all three tiers of Response to Intervention in reading, writing, and math, Individualized Education Plans and 504 Plans, and a Differentiation Support Teacher who works with students who need further enrichment to demonstrate growth. The building level leadership oversees all of the data meetings and conversations to ensure that all student needs are being met.

In addition to academic oversight, Romona's second grade students participate in a social-emotional screening developed by Rush Medical Center. This screener is used to identify students that might be struggling with social relationships and/or social skills. For identified students, interventions are provided by the school social workers, school psychologist, special education teacher and/or general education teacher. Romona takes a "whole-child" view to ensure students can achieve at their optimal level.

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

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Romona has a strong focus on inclusion and differentiation. The belief that all students can be successful in our school is at the core of every decision that is made at Romona.

Twenty percent of Romona's population receive support from our special education services. When new families come to Romona, they often share that they have heard about our wonderful programming and came to Romona specifically because of these services. This begins with our Early Childhood program, which offers services for our students in either a half-day blended program or a full day comprehensive program. The support then continues through fourth grade and students receive individualized plans based on their needs. We have a variety of specialists that work with our students including a psychologist, social workers, occupational therapists, speech language pathologists, physical therapists, a low vision and blindness specialist, orientation and mobility specialist, adapted physical education teacher, and learning behavior specialists. Our team is extremely dedicated to developing individualized plans to meet the needs of every learner, focusing on the least restrictive environment and including students in the general education classrooms as much as possible.

Romona also has the largest population of English Learners (EL) in the New Trier Township at 11%. Our EL program is highly inclusive, pulling students out for small group work as necessary and supporting the students within the classroom throughout the day. Romona prides itself on welcoming students from a variety of different cultures. Over the years, our current EL teacher has worked with students that have spoken over thirty different languages. Our PTA also embraces the variety of cultural backgrounds of our family by celebrating with the International Week & Festival every year. During the week, the daily student announcements are done in different languages and all students have an opportunity to write their name in different languages during recess. The International Festival is a community event that celebrates Romona's diversity with a Parade of Nations, student performances, and a variety of food from around the world.

Differentiation is a part of every classroom at Romona as our teachers strive to meet each and every student at their level and challenge them appropriately. Our Differentiation Support Teacher (DST) works with all teachers to ensure that all students are challenged. Our DST works with students who perform significantly above their peers, ensuring that all students are making growth at every level.

The O in Romona R.O.C.K.S. stands for Originality. At the core, we believe that every student at Romona is unique and we work as a team to provide the support that they need to be challenged appropriately every day.