

**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. Robert McBride Jr

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

Official School Name Neuqua Valley High School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 2360 95th Street

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

City Naperville      State IL      Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 60564-8934

County Dupage

Telephone (630) 428-6000      Fax (630) 428-6026

Web site/URL http://nvhs.ipisd.org/      E-mail bob\_mcbride@ipisd.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. Karen Sullivan      E-mail karen\_sullivan@ipisd.org  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Indian Prairie School District 204      Tel. (630) 375-3000

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. Michael Razcak  
(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):
- 21 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 7 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 4 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 32 TOTAL

### SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located:
- Urban or large central city
  - Suburban with characteristics typical of an urban area
  - Suburban
  - Small city or town in a rural area
  - Rural
3. Number of students as of October 1, 2016 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	0	0	0
1	0	0	0
2	0	0	0
3	0	0	0
4	0	0	0
5	0	0	0
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	438	451	889
10	498	448	946
11	495	493	988
12 or higher	493	456	949
<b>Total Students</b>	1924	1848	3772

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 1 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 23 % Asian
  - 7 % Black or African American
  - 6 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 60 % White
  - 3 % 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	12
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	34
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	46
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2015	3834
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.012
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	1

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

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):  
Spanish, Urdu, Mandarin (Chinese)

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 5 %  
Total number students who qualify: 195

8. Students receiving special education services: 9 %  
345 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>59</u> Autism                | <u>4</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness               | <u>67</u> Other Health Impaired                |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness         | <u>104</u> Specific Learning Disability        |
| <u>27</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>2</u> Speech or Language Impairment         |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment     | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>11</u> Mental Retardation    | <u>1</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |
| <u>3</u> Multiple Disabilities  | <u>0</u> Developmentally Delayed               |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 9
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	6
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects	219
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	22
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a licensed professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	28
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	27

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 20:1
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	97%	97%	96%	97%	93%
High school graduation rate	97%	98%	99%	99%	99%

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	913
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	79%
Enrolled in a community college	17%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	0%
Joined the military or other public service	1%
Other	3%

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.  
Yes    No X  
If yes, select the year in which your school received the award.

15. In a couple of sentences, provide the school's mission or vision statement.  
We believe in fostering a climate that encourages learning and personal growth. We value a commitment to excellence, active involvement, and positive relationships between one another.

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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Neuqua Valley High School opened in 1997, and our school serves three Chicago suburbs, Naperville, Bolingbrook, and Plainfield. When Neuqua Valley opened, it served 600 students. Within ten years it boomed to 4,886 students housed in two buildings on one campus. Presently, our school serves 3,800 students. Our focus is to make a large school seem small for students, staff members, and parents. Our students represent every race, religion, sexual orientation, academic ability, and economic background imaginable. Our learners range from students with severe disabilities who require medical services every day to individuals who will exhaust our curriculum early in high school and take online courses through the University of Illinois.

Shrinking the size and feel of our school is evident in how we foster student achievement, manage change, and embrace equity. Our school opened with a vision of providing students with choice, freedoms, and resources. Our students are organized into a class house structure. There is one class house for each grade level, freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. These class houses are staffed by one dean of students, three guidance counselors, one social worker, and two secretaries who serve approximately 940 students. The staff of each class house begins their work at our freshman building and follows their class of students to our main building, serving students until graduation. This provides a four-year continuum of student support.

Additionally, our option period program provides our students with extra access to our professional staff. This program provides students with an almost hour long lunch, allowing them to move freely between our cafeteria, libraries, computer labs, class houses, and large study spaces in our buildings. Additionally, we support students throughout the school day with our Academic Resource Centers in English, Math, Science, Social Studies, World Language, and Business. Every class period of the day these centers are staffed with teachers who can provide academic assistance.

We have been a fully inclusive school since our doors opened. We offer a robust college preparatory level of courses open to all and eliminated remedial classes. Instead, we accelerate student learning through proper student supports in college preparatory courses. For students with Individual Education Plans, we staff our English, math, science, and social studies courses with both content teachers and support teachers. Also, we do provide some self-contained classes for our most challenged learners. To provide students with the rigor college demands, we have large Advanced Placement and dual credit (through our local community college) programs. Last year we administered over 2,500 AP exams. The College Board has honored us four years in a row for increasing equity and inclusion of all students in our AP program. We have worked strategically and specifically for nine years to include underrepresented students in AP courses, and we are presently in a partnership with Equal Opportunity Schools to further this initiative.

Collaboration is the word that best describes our school culture. The school's physical plant and decision-making structures promote collaboration to support student achievement. All teachers and support staff are located in common office areas. No one at our school works in isolation. Teacher, class house, and administrative offices create an important, natural collaboration. Weekly, we formalize our work together through a professional learning community structure on Wednesday afternoons. Decisions are made through our Instructional Leadership Team, a body of over 35 individuals from 11 academic areas. For example, each year these representatives convene for a two-day budget workshop to build a school budget line by line so that the allocation of all funds is fully transparent.

Additional, we have a collaborative parent community. Our website makes every staff member easily accessible, posting our direct phone lines, web resource pages, and emails. Monthly, the principal conducts parent "walk and talk" sessions before school. Recently, we conducted 1,317 spring parent-teacher conferences. We have several vibrant parent support groups, most notably our Athletic Boosters, Parent-Teacher-Student Association, and PATHS (our African American parent network).

Honoring and celebrating our students is part of our school culture and tradition. Monthly, we acknowledge 24 students at our Wildcat Pride ceremony. Annually, we acknowledge students for their efforts to promote equity and inclusion at our Neuqua Honors ceremony, and we recognize state and national level award winners among our students and staff at our fall Red Carpet Rally.

In 20 years, our school has had many milestones. In 2009 and 2013 we earned a Grammy as the nation's top music program. We were named a Kennedy Center School of the Arts in 2010. We earned the distinction of being a Democracy School in 2012 for our commitment to civic life and education. Also, we have earned 40 state athletic trophies. Finally, our student achievement is the highest in Illinois for a high school in a K-12 district, showing significant achievement gap narrowing between sub-groups.

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

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

The core of our curriculum in all curricular areas is addressed in our Faculty Handbook, a document representing links to the Common Core Standards, alignment to District 204 curriculum, and student need as evident in achievement results. The handbook puts four skills at the core of classrooms: constructing argument, making inferences, drawing conclusions from multiple data points, and acquiring academic vocabulary. Additionally, our school uses formative and summative assessment to measure student growth in these skill areas. Since 2012 these skills have been at the center of all coursework so that our students have a connected, guaranteed curricular experience whether at our freshman or main buildings, in social studies or math, or learning at the college prep or Advanced Placement level. For two years, all teachers have included pre/post assessment results as part of their course team work. An important addition to our core curriculum has been preparing for a digital shift by providing every student with a Chromebook. Across all disciplines we use technology with students to plan and pace learning, extend the place where learning occurs, and connect peers to create products.

We have ensured that staff members are ready to deliver handbook skills and measure results. All staff members are trained in Project CRISS (Creating Independent Student Strategies), and new staff members are required to take this training. Over three years, all staff members received assessment literacy training to construct instructional goals and formative assessments. In English, math, science, and social studies we participate in a three-year District 204 curriculum review cycle, aligning courses with Common Core Standards, Math Practice Standards, Next Generation Science Standards, Science and Engineering Practices, National Business Education Association Standards, National Engineering Standards, National Core Arts Standards, and Crosscutting Concepts.

All academic departments teach reading. Our English Department, in particular, has taken the lead in, showing significant reading gains on ACT and PARCC assessments. English courses focus on a wide variety of texts, placing a special emphasize on non-fiction text as it is critical in college and career settings. Additionally, English stresses analysis and organizational skills needed to construct a clear argument. Argument is a skill required to meet college and career readiness benchmarks. Finally, the department's student-centered classrooms use Socratic seminars and the Harkness method to acquire presentation skills.

Our Mathematics Department has curriculum ranging from Algebra 1 to Calculus III through the University of Illinois. Our goal is that all learners acquire Advanced Algebra by the junior year to perform well on college and career readiness tests. Also, most of our students complete calculus before graduating. Our expanded enrollment in Advanced Placement Calculus includes approximately half of each graduating class. Using the Common Core Standards for Practice, our math instructors emphasize mathematical thinking over calculative mastery. They stress students explaining math concepts in small groups and whole class settings. Additionally, our math department uses formative assessment to provide students and teachers with daily feedback on progress. Technology tools from Fathom statistic software to coding to Math XL grow our students' understanding and have direct career links.

Our Science Department is an exemplar of the modeling method in Illinois. We offer a core of Biology, Chemistry, and Physics, and all Neuqua Valley High School students have a foundation in these subjects by 11th grade. Additionally, our department offers a wide range of Advanced Placement courses such as Environmental Science, Biology, Chemistry, and Physics as well as community college credit courses in Anatomy, Horticulture, and Genetics. Modeling is an important process because instructors ask students to model and enact the scientific process through shared inquiry. Modeling gives students both college and career readiness through problem-solving, collaboration, creativity, and perseverance.

In 2012, our Social Studies Department led our recognition as a Democracy School through the McCormick Foundation. We earned this honor because of our commitment to "Citizen Neuqua," a focus on students being engaged school citizens. Students are required to take government and civics courses, global studies coursework, and United States History. Additionally, we provide students with many opportunities to assist

in the governance of our school through our Principal's Advisory Council and a Social Practicum course where senior students teach freshman students about being engaged as students.

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

In addition to offering the four core areas of study, our school has five additional departments: Applied Arts, Business, Fine Arts, Physical Education and Health, and World Language. All students complete coursework in these non-core areas because our district requires at least two credits to graduate in each of them, and Illinois requires a course in Health and daily physical education to complete high school. All of these courses have direct skills links to college and career readiness as they emphasize skills in performance, product creation, collaboration, management of resources, technical skills, and self-awareness.

The stress in our elective courses is to first and foremost support our core curriculum through teaching the skills in our Faculty Handbook. Inference, argument, drawing conclusions, and academic vocabulary are as much a part of an art class as they are an English class. For example, our Business Department started a "Read Like a CEO" campaign three years ago. In Fine Arts, music and art students create portfolios that include analyses and critiques of performances. In engineering, mechanics, culinary, and media courses, students read non-fiction selections in their subject and provide argumentative analysis of them.

It is important that in our non-core courses students apply their learning in real or virtual settings. In our Project Lead the Way sequence of engineering courses, students take a three-year curriculum to learn and apply the engineering skills many will study in college and use beyond their formal schooling. Students in our media programs create, edit, and present weekly programs that are broadcast to our entire school and community. In our Business Department, 150 students participate in Virtual Enterprise International where they incorporate virtual companies and take on roles such as chief executive officer, human resources administrator, or sales manager. Students in our Culinary Arts program cater school, district, and community events. Finally, students in our Introduction to Education class shadow teachers and complete practice teaching lessons as they learn about the education profession. In World Language, students learn how others think through how they communicate whether in Chinese, French, German, or Spanish. Our fastest growing language offering is American Sign Language.

All of our elective courses have earned honors and awards, demonstrating both the academic skills they teach as well as the career readiness our students acquire. Neuqua Valley marketing students have won an area competition three years in a row that involves presenting plans to several municipal boards. Our Physical Education and Health Department has been named a Blue Ribbon Program four times. Students from our Media Communications classes have won a National Student Production Award. Twice, our music students have earned Grammy awards as the best high school musicians in the nation. We host the largest VEX Robotics competition in Illinois, and our robotics teams have qualified for state and national competitions for the past four years in a row as part of our focus on science, technology engineering and mathematics (STEM).

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

Daily, 1,162 class sections meet at Neuqua Valley High School. Every year, our Instructional Leadership Team conducts walkthrough inventories of the methods our teachers use and students experience in these sections. We are able to capture thousands of snapshots of classes that show three primary methods our teachers use: student collaborative groups and simulations, teacher-led modeling, and activities involving instructional technology.

The most frequent mode of engagement we have inventoried is student-centered activities where students work in groups to problem-solve, research, perform, create, or complete an assessment. This can take place with or without the support of instructional technology. In our classrooms—regardless of discipline—one is likely to see a reading workshop where students are reading and annotating together. Or in many instances our school investment in technology has allowed students to use Google Drive, Classroom, Keep, or Extensions to communicate, create, and collaborate. Recently, we learned that our school is the single largest user of G Suite in Illinois.

In terms of teacher-led modeling, our school expectation is that teachers use strategies to engage students in the learning process. Daily learning targets are published to the entire class and each lesson should have a formative assessment method. Our classrooms all have LCD projectors and whiteboards or smartboards. As such, we expect, and walkthroughs have confirmed, that teachers use strong visuals when conducting teacher-led instruction. Our focused observations have caused us to emphasize the technique of questioning. We have stressed using powerful, direct cues ranging from using the student's name to calling on specific students to using follow up and connecting questions.

Additionally, we monitor the types of instruction and engagement in classes through a formal performance evaluation process using the Danielson Framework for Teaching. This framework stresses student-centered instruction, and in many ways has influenced the strong shift in our classrooms to learning by doing. In particular, we have used this framework to reflect with teachers on building a culture for learning and using formative assessment.

Often students need assistance to arrive at academic mastery. We provide several support interventions. At both of our buildings we provide Academic Resource Centers (ARC) to give students access to teachers throughout the school day. These are drop-in centers for students to seek assistance and re-teaching. To ensure that all students acquire Algebra 1, we offer Math Intervention Program (MIP) at our freshman building so that any student earning a D or F on a math assessment can receive re-teaching and re-test to show mastery. Any student at our school earning a D or F must attend five sessions of After School Assistance Program (ASAP). This twice a week intervention helps students get back on track. Another important intervention is our 20/20 program. The transition from freshman to sophomore year at our school is an important one because students switch buildings. At the end of each year we identify freshman students with organizational and skill deficits, and in 20/20 these students spend 20 minutes of lunch twice weekly with an instructional coach when they become sophomores.

Our school also provides more substantial interventions. We have four Problem Solving Teams (PST) that consider how to support students with challenging social, medical, psychological, economic, and family circumstances. These teams provide social worker supports, community supports, and resources for district supported alternative schooling. One of the most important interventions for each PST is Challenge Lab. This lab provides temporary, on-line, individualized learning when students fall behind and need to catch up or when the anxiety of traditional classwork is overwhelming.

Our school has put an emphasis on assessments to measure student progress and document growth. Supported by the State of Illinois, we use the SAT Suite of Assessments for large census testing. SAT, like the ACT before it, provides us with results that point to areas of student need. To be more specific for each student, we have created personalized score sheets that are easy to read and understand. We want students and parents to know what their test results mean. Also, to personalize assessment more, we have focused our school work on formative assessment, engaging in daily activities that give teachers and students an understanding of skills acquired and emerging.

## PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

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### 1. School Climate/Culture:

Neuqua Valley High School maintains a positive climate through structures that connect staff, students, and community members. Guidance Essentials is an important climate setting activity at our school. Monthly, students meet during lunch with their guidance counselors to receive information about everything from social-emotional topics to scholarship possibilities. This program helps our students remain oriented towards our school. Additionally, our Naviance web-site gives students continuous access to school, scholarship, and college information. We maintain a strong climate by paying attention to transitions. Each year, staff members provide mentorship for students transitioning from 8th grade to high school, moving from our 9th grade building to 10th grade at our Main Building, entering our school as an ELL student, or entering our school as a transfer student. Finally, acknowledgement is important. Monthly, staff members nominate students for Wildcat Pride awards. The annual Neuqua Honors is organized by our school Equity Committee, and the awards are designed to acknowledge students who might be overlooked by our school. Finally, our annual One Book, One School is a collaborative learning experience that engages our staff and our students in reading together.

We also provide a specific social-emotional curriculum. During freshman year, all students participate daily in Advisory. Advisory classes are led by one adult and two senior students. The Advisory curriculum touches on every aspect of high school life. We host programs to build awareness of critical issues. In 2016, these programs earned Illinois' Building Community Bridges Award. One program, Confront the Elephant, looks at the impact of substance abuse in our community. Another program, Hello My Name Is, asks students to understand "others" through hearing from autistic, African American, immigrant, Muslim, Gay, Transgender, and Hispanic individuals. Finally, our four-year partnership with author Mawi Asgedom provides students with experiences in self-leadership.

Finally, giving our students and staff voice creates a positive climate. Weekly, our Media students maintain a website of media stories and broadcast Wildcat Weekly. Our Principal's Advisory Councils (PAC) advise the principal on school governance. Events such as Writer's Week, our African American Read In, and our Monologue Show give students a stage to speak their mind. Finally, the emotional resilience of our staff is critical, and we have been in a partnership with national speaker Phil Boyte to deepen personal relationships between colleagues. Our Climate Committee and Parent Teacher Association work together to host events that honor, feed, and acknowledge our staff.

### 2. Engaging Families and Community:

Neuqua Valley engages both our families and our surrounding community through communication, collaboration, and criticism. A school our size is a busy place with many programs. We never forget how difficult this can be to navigate for our families and community members. Frequent, timely, multi-faceted communication is critical. We use several web-sites such as our home page to provide up-to-date information for our entire community about events, times, and locations. Our NV Connect web-site provides community members a single web page where they can access all of the web-sites relevant to our school. Our staff directory is fully transparent, providing all direct contact information of staff members. Also, parents can use our e-School Home Access Center (HAC) to review student grades, transcripts, attendance, and discipline records. We use social media, primarily Twitter, to stay connected with the entire community. Finally, we use weekly communications to all families through our Notes From the Principal's Desk and weekly e-News.

Collaboration is also an important part of our work with our families and community. Through organizations like our Parent-Teacher-Student Association (PTSA), Athletic Boosters, and PATHS (our African American parent network), we partner on decision-making and direction at our school. Each of these organizations provides valuable input on school programs, practices, facilities, and decisions. For example, PATHS has been an instrumental partner in narrowing our achievement gap between White and Black students. Additionally, we founded and continue to partner in a family and community organization,

ParentsMatter Too ([www.parentsmattertoo.org](http://www.parentsmattertoo.org)) to promote resilience and prevent destructive decisions among teenagers. This organization uses parent and community member conversation circles to build informed and active adults.

Additionally, we believe it is important to encourage constructive criticism and receive it with grace. As such we have several structures to facilitate this. Annually, we invite parents and community members to come to The State of Neuqua. This is a town hall event involving staff and community members where the principal facilitates a discussion of where our school can improve. Also, we have taken Illinois' 5Essentials survey for the past four years. This survey invites critical feedback on our climate, communications, achievement, and staff.

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

Three tiers of professional learning have ensured student, teacher, and administrator achievement at our school: district, school, and department. Indian Prairie District 204 provides on-going professional development to staff members through institute days, district coursework, and workshops. Our school uses institute days, weekly team meetings, lunch sessions, and professional days to provide adult learning. Finally, the academic departments at our school are empowered with decision-making, choice, and funds.

Some specific examples of district provided professional learning are institutes focused on instructional technology, restorative justice, and measuring student growth. Our district has sponsored full-day institutes reviewing the Substitute-Augment-Modification-Redefinition (SAMR) model of instructional technology. As we have revised discipline procedures, our district has supported restorative justice institutes. Also, during the school year, our district has provided day-long and half-day workshops on 1:1 technology as well as how to use assessments to measure student growth. Finally, our district provides teachers and administrators with the opportunity to earn micro-credentials through online coursework.

At the school level, our professional learning strategy is give professionals time to review student results and training in techniques to address those results. Our Professional Development Committee guides site based professional growth. Overall, this committee has stressed time for teachers to collaborate. In a typical professional learning day, we provide teams of teachers with about an hour of guidance and then the rest of a day to apply their learning to student achievement results from their students. Our committee provides frequent "Lunch and Learn" opportunities throughout the school year and seeks feedback on these events. All after school faculty meetings involve dialogue between colleagues rather than presentations from leaders. Finally, this committee has supported training for all staff members in reading strategies and assessment literacy.

The Professional Development Committee allocates school funds to departments to support national, state, and regional conferences so that our faculty members stay current. Additionally, department chairs guide weekly professional learning teams that examine student achievement data and prepare weekly instruction to address progress.

Finally, we have found technology a great ally in professional learning. Throughout our staff, we have provided training to embed tech experts in every department. These experts have helped to develop online tools that are easily accessible, self-paced, and comprehensible. These tools reside on our Staff Splash Page that opens up every time a staff member uses an Internet browser. The Staff Splash Page provides brief, small technique and instructional reminders for staff.

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

Leadership at our school is characterized by inquiry, collaboration and transparency around what is best for students. Our school has an administrative team of a principal, four assistant principals, and an athletic director. This team joins our eleven department chairs and four department chair assistants to make up an Instructional Leadership Team (ILT). Two forms of inquiry guide our decision-making: review of student results and classroom observations. Our entire ILT regularly reviews data about our students from standardized test results to homework completion to absenteeism to social-emotional issues. Also, we make

frequent classroom visits using the Instructional Practices Inventory to understand the type of learning and engagement that our students experience. Results and observations guide our decision making.

Two important, collaborative decision-making processes that characterize leadership at our school are when we build a master schedule and a line-item budget each year. From student enrollment until a final schedule, the principal, assistant principals, and department chairs engage in a process that is fully collaborative. Decisions about class and staff sizes are made in workshops with department chairs and members of our teacher association. All stakeholders see the results and have a voice in reviewing them. Similarly, when we build a line-item budget for our school, all leaders on our ILT meet for a full day. All funds are allocated cooperatively. ILT members receive quarterly updates on our budget. Our scheduling and budget processes are collaborative to build accountability so that staff resources, class sizes, and funding address student needs.

Our leadership processes and decisions are transparent as well. Our weekly ILT meetings and minutes are accessible to all staff members. ILT members have the opportunity to review and question decisions in these meetings. School wide committees such as our Equity Committee, Professional Development Committee, and School Improvement Team are comprised of faculty members and empowered to make program and funding recommendations to meet student needs. Membership on these committees is open to any faculty member who wants to join.

Finally, our school has participated in Illinois' 5Essentials Survey for the past four years. Annually, the administrative team has shared the community and staff member perceptions captured in these surveys, pointing out both positive perceptions and room for our leadership to grow.

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

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In 2012, our Instructional Leadership Team faced many challenges. The Great Recession caused staff and resource reductions. Our state adopted the Common Core Standards. Instructional Technology tools were exploding. Our fastest growing student sub-group was low-income learners. And most disconcerting, our school achievement results showed that African American, Hispanic, Low Income, and Special Education students had never performed better than 48% of students in each group meeting state standards.

In response, we developed a strategy based on the book *Switch* by Chip and Dan Heath. This book recommended that large organizations “shrink the change.” Rather than meeting complex problems with equally complex plans, the authors suggested simplicity.

We shrank the change with a focus on the learners who were under-performing the most. Our School Improvement Team dove into the four previous years of ACT test data and discovered that four skill areas persisted as weaknesses: inference, argument, academic vocabulary, and drawing conclusions from multiple data points. Digging even deeper, we found that these four skill areas were a weakness for all students regardless of demographic or ability. We decided to shrink the change by focusing our instruction, professional development, observations, and teacher evaluations on guaranteeing that these skill areas were taught and assessed across campus, from 9th grade through 12th grade, and in every discipline.

Investing professional development, professional learning community team time, faculty meetings and institute days, and conference attendance on these skills gave our staff a specific focus and the direction to develop a skills focus as it pertained to their discipline. Every department has found an entry point in their instruction for these skills, and we have maintained this focus over the course of four years.

In those four years, we have had strong achievement results. Our African-American, Hispanic, Special Education, and Low Income students all of have seen gains of 20-25 points, narrowing the achievement gap with their White and Asian peers. When Illinois introduced a new assessment, PARCC testing, our scores showed resilience and then significant growth when comparing 2015 results to 2016 results. Now, our state uses the SAT for testing, and early pre-tests show that our gains are holding on that assessment as well. The strategy of shrinking the instructional change has created greater focus, coherency, and clarity for students and staff members. It has ultimately led to a sustained period of unparalleled academic growth at our school.