

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

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Mrs. Becky P FitzPatrick

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

Official School Name Olive-Mary Stitt Elementary School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 303 E. Olive Street

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

City Arlington Heights State IL Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 60004-4754

County Cook

Telephone (847) 398-4282 Fax (847) 394-6935

Web site/URL http://www.sd25.org/Domain/13 E-mail rfitzpatrick@sd25.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. Lori Bein E-mail lbein@sd25.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Arlington Heights School District 25 Tel. (847) 758-4900

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. David Page
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

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

Date _____

(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

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

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

Part I – Eligibility Certification

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

1. The school configuration includes one or more of grades K-12. (Schools on the same campus with one principal, even a K-12 school, must apply as an entire school.)
2. All nominated public schools must meet the state's performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group and all subgroups, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
3. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2017 in order to meet all eligibility requirements. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
4. If the school includes grades 7 or higher, the school must have foreign language as a part of its curriculum.
5. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2011 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
6. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, or 2016.
7. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's application and/or rescind a school's award if irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state.
8. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as "persistently dangerous" within the last two years.
9. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
10. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
11. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution's equal protection clause.
12. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Data should be provided for the most recent school year (2016-2017) unless otherwise stated.

DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 7 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 2 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 0 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 9 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	41	42	83
1	40	56	96
2	52	57	109
3	48	50	98
4	42	55	97
5	59	44	103
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	282	304	586

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 6 % Asian
 - 1 % Black or African American
 - 4 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 87 % White
 - 2 % 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: 2%

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

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	5
(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)]	9
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2015	583
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.015
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	2

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

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):
French, German, Indonesian, Japanese, Mandarin (Chinese), Polish, Romanian, Spanish

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 6%
Total number students who qualify: 36
8. Students receiving special education services: 12%
73 Total number of students served

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

- 1 Autism
- 0 Deafness
- 0 Deaf-Blindness
- 5 Emotional Disturbance
- 0 Hearing Impairment
- 0 Mental Retardation
- 0 Multiple Disabilities
- 0 Orthopedic Impairment
- 14 Other Health Impaired
- 15 Specific Learning Disability
- 47 Speech or Language Impairment
- 0 Traumatic Brain Injury
- 0 Visual Impairment Including Blindness
- 4 Developmentally Delayed

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 6
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	Number of Staff
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects	28
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	13
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a licensed professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	8
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	5

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.

Required Information	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012
Daily student attendance	97%	97%	96%	97%	97%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

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

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

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.
Yes No 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.
Olive-Mary Stitt is a collaborative school community with responsible students who are passionate, global learners.
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

Named for a former principal and world-renowned educator, Mary Stitt, Olive-Mary Stitt Elementary School (OMS) celebrated its 50th anniversary during the 2012-2013 school year. Our namesake continues to be active in our school and community. At 91 years young, Mary has made over 40 philanthropic international trips, primarily through Rotary International. Her work has inspired a schoolwide commitment to service. Nestled in Arlington Heights, Illinois, the school serves 588 students in grades kindergarten through fifth, with 28 classrooms and 72 staff members. Our student enrollment and diversity is steadily rising, and a new addition to the building has offered us room to grow with five classrooms, an expanded gym, and common spaces. Our students represent nine different languages and a variety of cultures. OMS is one of seven elementary and two middle schools in Arlington Heights School District 25. The district, committed to “Embracing Today - Inspiring Tomorrow”, is home to over 5,400 students and 800 staff members. Located 25 miles northwest of Chicago and spanning 16 square miles, the village’s 75,000 residents suggest it has a small town feel due to the neighborhood schools and active community organizations.

OMS prides itself on consistently providing a child-centered educational experience, dedicated to ensuring success for all students. Through inquiry and the design of purposeful and effective instruction, the staff provides students the opportunity to own their learning. Collaboration and taking risks is evident throughout the school’s community. Teachers, parents, and community members possess a growth mindset, working together to provide an educational program that challenges and engages all students in learning opportunities that promote 21st-century readiness skills such as critical thinking and problem-solving, communication, collaboration, creativity, and innovation. Coupled with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), the roadmap for student success is clearly defined for our school community. Embracing shared leadership and ownership of our school community, we remain focused on cultivating responsible students who are passionate, global learners.

The OMS community has established a positive school climate via our Olive Owl Give a HOOT expectations. In classrooms, on the stage, in hallways, and at recess, students exemplify positive behavioral attributes: Hooray for good choices, Our job is learning, Only kindness, and Take time to do our best. Parents have embraced and incorporated these tenets outside of the school day. Our partnership with our PTA allows families to participate in a variety of social and educational activities. “Owls for Others” defines the work of our Service-Learning Club and Character Counts committee that have provided students with opportunities to participate in community service projects throughout the year. In one year, our students and families wrote letters of thanks to deployed military through Operation Gratitude; donated 442 pieces of winter wear to a local shelter; collected a truckload of pop tops to benefit Ronald McDonald House; raised \$437.50 in coins for Charity Waters, an organization that brings clean water to people in need; made Valentine’s Day cards for veterans at VA Medical Center in North Chicago; collected 596 pairs of gently used shoes for Share Your Soles, an organization that provides shoes for children and adults in impoverished areas of the world; and donated 295 bags of food to a local food pantry.

Believing that all of our students can learn and grow, we have developed a system for monitoring student progress so we are able to intervene early to provide targeted intervention and enrichment during Target Time, a designated schedule block. Staff members contribute to the process of analyzing student data to provide responsive instruction. Staff meeting time is structured to maximize the opportunity for specialists such as our advanced learning facilitators, literacy specialist, math interventionist, and special education specialists to attend grade level meetings for the purpose of developing differentiated learning experiences and individualized support. Our students continue to perform well on standardized assessment measures. Over 90% of our students met nationally-normed benchmarks in reading and math. Named one of Chicago Tribune’s Best-Performing Schools on the PARCC test, 74% of students met or exceeded expectations.

People often refer to OMS as the “love” school, indicating they immediately feel welcome. All decisions are focused on “what’s best for the kids?” Members of our community capture the essence of what it means to be an Olive Owl, including one of our parents, “OMS is like a family. I could feel it from the very first week when the office staff already knew my kindergartener’s name. The OMS community has a passion for

helping others, not only within our school, but all those around us that need it." According to a first-grade student, "OMS feels like a special place because it makes me happy, and we have epic adventures. Our teachers are like family and care about us." Proclaimed by an OMS teacher, "Simply put, OMS is a wonderful place to learn and grow! Parents and staff put students' needs at the center of all decisions made, truly striving to make elementary years ones of wonder and delight for our Olive Owls. There is a warm, positive feel, the school is a place where staff members support and encourage one another, showing excitement for ideas and achievements of colleagues. We are a team where individuality and risk-taking are welcome. We learn from successes and failures and grow forward, always with the needs of our students in focus."

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

OMS educators are passionate about their craft and share the philosophy that we are educating the whole child to become life-long, 21st-century learners and critical thinkers. Personalized Learning elements (questioning, documentation, reflection, peer/teacher feedback, self-assessment, and student choice) are embedded into all core curricular areas. Students are considered partners and are actively engaged in their learning. As one teacher stated, “Students at OMS understand that learning is a process and not a finished product.” The instructional program provides students with fair and equitable educational opportunities while remaining complex and rigorous for all. Teachers are actively involved in the curriculum review process which allows time to explore and analyze best practice and pilot programs. The curriculum is chosen to best meet the needs of our student population. Teachers are provided significant professional learning opportunities to obtain a thorough understanding of the content they teach. In addition to a strong core curriculum, OMS is committed to ensuring an education that is robust in providing opportunities for civic learning/service engagement for students. Inspired by the example of our namesake, Mary Stitt, and cultivated by our core curriculum, students advocate for members of our community through student-driven projects such as a letter writing campaign to servicemen and women.

Our literacy curriculum is aligned with the CCSS. Chosen for its balanced literacy framework and workshop model, Schoolwide Fundamentals offers opportunities to read to students (mentor text), to read with students (shared texts), and to have students read at their independent reading level. The Schoolwide curriculum is designed to develop students’ foundational skills through teachers’ implementation of the gradual release of responsibility instructional model. Teachers use student conferences and discussions as formative assessments to inform differentiated instruction, delivered through guided reading and strategy groups aimed at increasing student progress toward mastery of standards.

Our primary grades utilize the writing workshop model of instruction, and the intermediate grades utilize the Writers’ Express (WEX) curriculum. Chosen for its workshop model and alignment with CCSS, WEX leads students to become proficient and prolific writers using a daily cycle. After the writing skill is introduced, students engage in low-stakes, sustained journal writing where they are encouraged to take risks. Teachers offer meaningful and targeted feedback through daily over-the-shoulder conferences and weekly written revision assignments. Students are given time to reflect on feedback and revise their writing. Emphasized skills include focus, organization, support/elaboration, and conventions.

Common Core, Illinois Learning, and 21st Century Skill Standards guide our curriculum alignment work in math. University of Chicago’s Everyday Mathematics is implemented in all classrooms. It focuses on developing children’s understandings and skills in ways that produce life-long mathematical power. This curriculum applies multiple methods and problem-solving strategies to foster true proficiency and different learning styles. Many OMS teachers implement a workshop model which allows for differentiation. After presenting a mini lesson on rounding, students complete practice problems to demonstrate understanding. Teachers evaluate responses to inform instruction, re-teach where necessary, and increase rigor for those who demonstrate proficiency. Differentiation is also provided through an advanced math curriculum offered to 4th and 5th grade students who meet a set criteria.

Likewise, the CCSS guide instruction in social studies. Students experience social studies through thematic units, a combination of teacher created activities, various textbooks, nonfiction books, primary sources, and maps. Concepts are divided among the major disciplines of social science: civics, history, economics, and geography. Standards are aligned to the disciplinary concepts for students and are taught in conjunction with inquiry skills. One example of inquiry skills embedded in the standards is in the study of the first colonies in 4th grade. After learning about the lost colony of Roanoke, students develop theories about why the inhabitants vanished. They present arguments using support gathered from the curriculum and additional research. This is just one of many examples of the rigorous but engaging activities OMS teachers provide.

The science curriculum is aligned with the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), and its core

philosophy is inquiry-based, student-centered learning. In the Science Companion curriculum, students become problem solvers, make observations and develop explanatory models based on their data. In essence, students become junior scientists. For example, 5th grade students investigate and develop theories about how organic matter is recycled in ecosystems through observation of decomposers. Health education is provided collaboratively with the Robert Crown Center for Health Education in intermediate grades.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Students at Olive-Mary Stitt develop important skills such as thinking creativity, collaborating with others, problem-solving, and developing focus through participation in visual and performing arts, physical education, foreign language, and library programs.

Through the visual arts program at OMS, which aligns to the National Core Art Standards, students learn the elements of design. Students in grades kindergarten (30 minutes) and first-fifth (45 minutes) attend weekly art classes taught by a certified art teacher. They create digital media, collages, prints, paintings, and work with clay. Curriculum connections and skill development are woven into the program. For example, first graders illustrate Japanese bonsai tree collages and fifth graders create models of pioneer homes to align with social studies topics. Students use creativity and problem solving to design a superhero who could solve a world problem. Framed student artwork is showcased around the building and at the district administration building. Excellent student work is displayed at the public library's art exhibition.

At OMS, students have numerous opportunities to participate in the performing arts through the music program; the band program; and Music For Youth, a parent-run, stringed instrument instruction organization. In addition, interested students in grades 3-5 may participate in a biennial variety show. First through fifth-grade students attend two 30-minute music classes per week while kindergarteners have one class per week. They are taught by a certified music teacher. Rhythm and melody are two of the key concepts that correlate to the National Core Art Standards. In music class, students have access to a full set of Orff instruments, a piano lab of 15 keyboards, and a full classroom set of 26 world drums and percussion instruments. Students showcase their music skills at annual grade-level music performances. Both the shows and the general music instruction connect to the curriculum. For example, the second-grade performance highlights patriotic music while students learn about voting, presidents, and patriotic symbols in their classrooms. Interested students can learn to play instruments through participation in the band program and Music for Youth. Fifth graders are taught skills through weekly group lessons and ensemble rehearsals with the band director. Performances are given several times per year. Through Music For Youth, a Suzuki-based stringed instrument program, students attend weekly lessons and perform with an ensemble group.

Our students participate in rigorous, physical activity for 60 minutes per week in a structured physical education class plus 45 minutes of extended PE per week. Kindergarten students participate 60 minutes per week. Health and nutrition are incorporated into the physical education program through games such as Heart Attack that combines cardio-activity along with an opportunity to learn about a healthy heart. There are opportunities throughout the school year for children to develop healthy lifestyles through participation in Walk to School Day, jump rope challenges, a bike rodeo, and a yearly field day. PE classes utilize technologies such as pedometers to measure their vigorous physical activity and to learn ways to incorporate movement into their daily lives. In addition, they are taught to make personal goals for fitness testing and assessment. Healthy choices are promoted through a wellness policy designating snack choices of only fruits and vegetables.

Foreign language opportunities are offered through a partnership with Language Stars. Currently, 53 students attend before or after school classes for instruction in Spanish, French, or Mandarin which prepares them for middle school language instruction.

Access to educational technology such as iPads and laptops is provided through devices housed in classrooms, on carts, and in the library media center (LMC). The number of devices nearly equals the number of students. Third and fourth graders develop technology skills through the 1 device per 2 students programs. Students are invited to pursue extra technology experiences through participation in the Hour of Code and Techsperience Club.

Our LMC provides access to information tools and content such as books, and eBooks and audiobooks housed on circulating iPods, databases, iPads, and laptops. The LMC director, a certified library media specialist, provides a combination of fixed/flexible scheduled instruction in 60-minute blocks with classrooms teachers also in attendance. She collaborates with teachers on the design of research experiences for each grade level to coordinate with classroom curriculum. For example, fifth graders research the effects of the Revolutionary War on various groups such as Native Americans and slaves. Fourth graders study early colonies and develop advertising videos to encourage new colonists (third graders) to move to their colonies. Through the research projects, students practice information literacy and technology skills. Students are encouraged to participate in shared reading experiences through the Chat and Chew book club. The LMC director organizes special events such as author visits, Nonfiction November, and Poem-In-Your Pocket Day.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

The staff is dedicated to educating the whole child so differentiated instruction is the heart of the instructional design process. All teachers believe students should be taught in ways that engage different learning styles and utilize a repertoire of strategies. Weekly meeting times are used to analyze data, collaborate, and plan best practice instruction to meet the diverse needs of students. Teachers tailor their instruction based on quality assessments that measure student achievement. Whole group, small group, partnerships, and 1:1 conferrals are utilized to deliver targeted instruction. Teachers become experts in their students so all can achieve.

Formative, summative, and universal screening assessments are used to track each student's historical achievement and current performance. Using the tiered Response to Intervention model, grade-level teams consisting of classroom teachers, special education teachers, specialists, principals, and the school psychologist meet five times a year on a data day. Teams analyze data from AIMSweb, Measures of Academic Progress, Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System, Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, and classroom assessments. The data team is large because all staff is invested in improving the achievement of all students. The first step in data analysis considers the efficacy of core instruction. Currently, data indicates that well over 90% of students score at or above the average range compared to national norms in reading and math.

Staff use color-coded spreadsheets to identify students who require additional supports, per district criteria. Students not meeting criteria, or who have historically not met targets, are candidates for intervention. Instruction is delivered via a tiered approach. Tier 1 is high-quality instruction of core curriculum provided to all students. Tier 2 consists of small-group interventions that are provided when data indicates additional support is needed beyond core instruction. Tier 3 interventions provide intensive, strategic, and highly individualized instruction to students who require additional support beyond Tier 2.

Through careful data analysis, we ensure that instruction remains rigorous to promote high levels of student achievement, while interventions are designed to meet the needs of students who need support. An example of how we use data to inform differentiated instruction to improve our achievement performance is reflected in our schedule. We dedicate a half-hour to Target Time (TT). During this time, students are grouped homogeneously to receive targeted instruction to meet their needs, based on analysis of data and classroom performance at data day. For example, based on data, third-grade students might participate in the following Target Time groups: a math intervention, a math enrichment, phonics/word study, reading extension, or a fluency intervention group utilizing technology. During TT, specialists in the building work with students in Tier 2 interventions so they are not missing core instruction. TT groups also ensure students performing above target can receive instruction that enriches and challenges them. TT groups run for 6-8 week cycles. Students in interventions are progress monitored by the interventionist. The data team meets mid-cycle to analyze progress-monitoring data to determine if interventions are effective. If so, it will be continued. If not, the team modifies the intervention.

To ensure we maintain high levels of achievement, specialists collaborate with classroom teachers. For example, our advanced learning facilitators coach classroom teachers to increase their capacity to meet the

unique learning needs of all students, especially our highest achievers. Using data, they enhance units to engage and challenge learners. They recently redesigned a unit on matter into an interactive learning experience by adding engineering activities and student-designed experiments. The reading specialist, school psychologist, and resource teachers also collaborate and coach other staff members to improve student learning. For example, the reading specialist works with teachers to use running records to track reading growth. Our English Language teacher collaborates with classroom teachers on ways to differentiate instruction for the success of English language learners.

Another example of how data is used to inform and improve school performance is through professional learning communities (PLC). PLC's employ a systematic, collaborative cycle that includes gathering evidence on current levels of student learning, setting specific and measurable goals for improvement, developing and implementing responsive instructional strategies, analyzing the impact of those strategies through common assessment data, then applying new knowledge in the next cycle of continuous improvement. For example, the current fifth-grade team's goal is for 85% of students to score proficient on a constructed response to fiction.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

OMS offers an experience of acceptance, kindness, community, and inspiration. It is a place to belong, a place to learn, a place to be challenged, and a place to grow. OMS's welcoming marquee with donated bricks, well-groomed grounds, and efficient traffic lot patterns lead you through the front doors, where the office staff greets all visitors as treasured and important guests.

Beyond the friendly office, clean and bright hallways boasting framed student art, and motivational bulletin boards, are the people. These students, staff, and parents are the heart of OMS. "Olive-Us Own the Learning" is more than a slogan. It is the way this community relates to one another. "Everyone is our student," and "We are a genuine village that surrounds each student," are OMS staff member quotes. One morning, a new kindergartener was reluctant to leave his mom and come into the school. Our custodian noticed this and immediately jumped in to help out, asking the student if he liked the Chicago Bears and building things with tools. After talking for a bit, he and the principal convinced the child to come into the school to check out the tools in the custodian's office. After checking out the tools, the student eagerly walked down the hall to his classroom. All staff members at OMS show empathy as well as high expectations for student behavior.

The school mascot, Oliver the Owl, gives a thumbs-up on many school publications. OMS "gives a hoot" about developing strong character values in the students and rewards students who demonstrate excellent HOOT behaviors. Good character, modeled by staff members and emulated by students, leads to a sense of belonging and community. Students feel safe in developing positive relationships and taking social and academic risks. Fifth graders partner with kindergarten buddies on a regular basis for reading and skill work. Students visit other grade level classrooms for museum walks, project sharing, and curricular experiences. Aside from meeting with groups and individual students, the school social worker is piloting the Second Steps curriculum which promotes social and emotional growth in students.

Graduating fifth-grade owls leave the nest, receiving a spectacular send-off as they exit on the last day through a giant tunnel of outstretched arms formed by the entire school community. It is a sentimental tradition as evidenced by tears, smiles, hugs, and cheering.

There is a genuine sense of community and an undeniable feeling of family among OMS colleagues, who go out of their way to extend kindness to one another. Walking into the staff lounge, decorated with family photos and favorite recipes, the staff finds a cherished place to celebrate birthday breakfasts or staff luncheons. The Sunshine Committee further supports the camaraderie among staff members by organizing celebrations and care for concerns throughout the year. An owl figurine is passed from one colleague to another with words of appreciation and affirmation at each staff meeting.

The essence of OMS's culture is captured by Carl W. Buehner: "They may forget what you said - but they will never forget how you made them feel."

2. Engaging Families and Community:

OMS administrators and staff take pride in the established sense of community and continuously look for opportunities to further engage families and the community.

OMS administrators value parent engagement. Principals meet monthly with PTA co-presidents, attend PTA executive and general meetings, and partner staff members with committee chairs of PTA sponsored programs. The principals regularly survey the community as a way to include families in the decision-making process. Parents have been asked to share their thoughts about topics such as the 5th-grade breakfast, the design of the new playground, and school improvement goals.

With an active PTA of over 530 members, families and students have access to a variety of programs.

Activity nights include BMX bikers, science, roller skating, ice cream socials, and dine out nights. Our students participate in multiple club offerings such as chess, bike rodeo/safety, camp fit, and ecology. During the year, students attend cultural arts assemblies that highlight theater companies, Irish dancers, Japanese drums, and ensembles from local symphony orchestras.

The OMS community places a large emphasis on teaching children the importance of doing for others through Everybody Counts, Service Learning Club and Character Counts. Everybody Counts teaches students about disability awareness. The Service Learning Club, in partnership with Character Counts, implements monthly service initiatives. Families, students, and staff raise money for The Buddy Foundation, Charity Waters, and the Ronald McDonald House. Students collect shoes for Share your Soles, write letters to service men and women through Operation Gratitude, and collect food to “Fill the Nest” of the local food pantry every spring.

OMS is a place where high school and college students are welcome to visit, observe, volunteer, and student teach. Partnerships have been formed with three local high schools and a community college.

The ABC/25 Foundation is a non-profit organization founded in 1991 by a group of caring parents to build a stronger community for our district. The mission of the foundation is “To foster innovation, creativity, and excellence for the children of District 25.” Over the past 24 years, the foundation has raised and contributed over one million dollars to fund numerous projects and grants for District 25 students and teachers. The ABC/25 Foundation directly impacts the educational environment to better prepare our children for the future. Through grant writing, OMS staff members have been awarded materials that support our curriculum such as classroom document cameras, Boogie Board writing tablets, Apps for Education, Bee Bots, Ozobots, large monitors for collaboration in the LMC computer lab, engineering toolkits, and a mobile maker cart.

Making sure that the community is involved and aware of the happenings at OMS is a top priority. Information is shared by principals and teachers via weekly blog updates, newsletters, Twitter, emails, phone calls, biannual parent-teacher conferences, and progress reports.

3. Professional Development:

The professional learning philosophy at OMS is dynamic and mirrors philosophy employed to engage our students: offer high-quality relevant learning experiences, differentiated to address individual needs, interests, and passions. Our staff members are professional, motivated learners. Teachers and administrators learn side-by-side. Professional learning efforts are focused on student achievement and support our school improvement plan.

District 25 offers world-class professional learning experiences (PLE). Renowned educational leaders, such as standards based grading advocate, Thomas Guskey, and assessment scholar, Rick Wormeli, recently presented. Additionally, an in-depth study of the work of reading workshop expert Jennifer Serravallo, including conference attendance, strengthened our school’s reading workshop practice. Participation in these and other experiences afford staff firsthand exposure to influential educators and ideas. Other district-level opportunities include discussion groups, curriculum and program review committees, Future Administrators Academy, book studies, summer institutes, Twitter chats, podcasts, and a topic specific PLE series. OMS staff members actively participate and often lead these PLE groups.

Studying best practice informs decisions and drives committee work. Piloted curriculums are vetted and decision making is driven by authentic staff feedback and reflection. These practices transform routine committee work into authentic professional learning. Following curriculum adoptions, building-based PLE are provided to support implementation and allow for professional discussion. New technology is similarly supported.

OMS values staff expertise and leverages it through staff created and led learning opportunities. For example, our advanced learning facilitators created and delivered in-depth PLE focused on our district’s largest initiative, Personalized Learning.

At OMS, bringing outside learning into our building is embraced. Our staff members attend and present at state and national conferences and eagerly share experiences. Commonly, staff members lead book studies, share new strategies during lunch-and-learns, and observe colleagues in preparation for peer coaching discussions. Recently, OMS organized a staff-led PLE effort called “PD at the Nest”. By utilizing the talent and leadership within our school, a building-based, interest-driven PLE was designed. PD at the Nest was empowering, and it readied us for implementation of Dufour’s Professional Learning Communities, an organic opportunity to steer our own PLE efforts.

Newly hired teachers are fully supported through an intense New Teacher’s Academy and a two-year mentoring program. Mentors also receive differentiated PLE in preparation to serve as a mentor. Several building-based specialists (literacy specialist, technology facilitator etc.) are available for one-on-one or team-specific professional support in the form of coaching, co-planning, co-teaching, modeling, and lesson design. We are educators who prepare our students to meet and exceed state and national standards, in part due to our staff’s continuous learning.

4. School Leadership:

Based on the fundamental belief in the value of education, the leadership philosophy at OMS is a collaborative endeavor that is student-focused. The leadership structure at OMS is founded on a shared vision among the staff and community that emphasizes a high standard of learning, social-emotional growth, and continuous school improvement.

The visionary leaders are the principal and assistant principal who both truly model and embody servant leadership. Compassionate and passionate leaders who work tirelessly to serve and support their community, they seek opportunities to collaborate with staff members, students, and families, drawing each stakeholder into the shared leadership structure. Teachers at OMS are valued and respected for their knowledge of and experience with children, and they are empowered to take risks and share in a variety of leadership opportunities, from mentoring programs to offering professional development to colleagues.

Team leaders meet frequently with principals to plan and implement initiatives tied to school improvement goals and serve as a vehicle of communication, providing all staff members a voice in the decision-making process. One recent initiative team leaders have been empowered to facilitate is the implementation of professional learning communities (PLC) to further the shared leadership model. At the core of the PLC model is the assumption that in order for students to learn, educators must also continue to learn, so PLC teams meet regularly to share strategies and work collaboratively to improve teaching skills and the academic performance of students.

The Response to Intervention Leadership Team was formed to ensure that all students demonstrate growth. This team meets biweekly to analyze student achievement data, as well as to identify and monitor students receiving Tier 1 core instruction and interventions at the Tier II and Tier III levels. The team collaborates with teachers to develop and analyze progress monitoring data, to monitor the effectiveness of interventions, and to facilitate the use of instructional strategies that promote student growth. Parents are considered a valuable part of the team and are invited to be a part of the decision-making process.

Leadership is also cultivated in the students at OMS. Whether it is seeking input from the student council team members, training a 5th-grade safety patrol, or allowing students to script and present morning announcements, the staff at OMS values a shared leadership model with students and exemplifies how to build future leaders.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

At OMS, it is with much purpose and integrity that staff members across the building have chosen to implement the workshop model in both reading and math. With best practice in mind, staff members have chosen to shift to the workshop model to encourage deep and enduring understanding through discovery and to push students to be creative and responsible in their own learning. Staff members have seen tremendous academic growth as well as a surge in student confidence within this model of instruction.

At OMS, the workshop model typically begins with a mini lesson in which the teacher explicitly provides the students with direct instruction linked to the CCSS. From there, students are intentionally released to experience the curriculum in ways that meet their individual needs. This allows teachers to highlight the strengths of each student by providing the opportunity to explore the material in an assortment of ways. For example, a kinesthetic learner benefits from movement during a game of equivalent fractions musical plates, whereas an interpersonal learner potentially learns best tutoring a peer. Teachers continuously collaborate to develop engaging materials that provide students with choice and collaboration in working with the concepts at hand. Students are given the freedom to create goals and choice in demonstrating mastery. Allowing for student involvement in the development of materials and assessment tools has not only heightened the engagement but also allowed for students to work at a level that is suited to their particular learning needs.

With students highly engaged in a multitude of activities, teachers are available to be fully present with individual students or small groups. For example, in fourth grade, teachers might provide direct instruction of a strategy to an individual or small group. They might also provide enrichment or supplementation on the concepts addressed in a mini lesson regarding comparing and contrasting information from different sources. Students are familiar with how to best utilize time with the teacher to their advantage and have taken ownership of their learning. For example, students ask to meet with the teacher to address misconceptions or gain clarity on a topic that was addressed during the mini lesson.

As an additional benefit, teachers across the building have also seen students grow tremendously in their ability to collaborate and provide feedback to one another. For example, instead of shying away from these opportunities, students are now likely to seek out the chance to provide or receive peer coaching. With the adoption of the workshop model, high academic achievement has been maintained, students have acquired a variety of interpersonal skills, and teachers have discovered an instructional model that allows them the flexibility to best meet the needs of individual students within a whole group setting.