

***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) [X] Title I    [ ] Charter    [ ] Magnet    [ ] Choice

Name of Principal Mr. Jason J. Watkins

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

Official School Name Gardner Elementary School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 218 East Shawnee

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

City Gardner                      State KS                      Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 66030-1394

County Johnson County

Telephone (913) 856-3300                      Fax (913) 856-3385

Web site/URL http://www.usd231.com/ge                      E-mail WatkinsJJ@usd231.com

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\*Mrs. Pam Stranathan                      E-mail stranathanp@usd231.com  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Gardner Edgerton School District                      Tel. (913) 856-2000

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. Rob Shippy  
(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):
- 7 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 3 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 1 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 11 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	7	13	20
K	34	28	62
1	30	32	62
2	27	31	58
3	32	33	65
4	29	27	56
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>	159	164	323

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 3 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 4 % Asian
  - 6 % Black or African American
  - 12 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 75 % White
  - 0 % Two or more races
  - 100 % Total**

(Only these seven standard categories should be used to report the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.)

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2015 – 2016 school year: 11%

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

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	22
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	13
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	35
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2015	316
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.111
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	11

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

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 50 %  
Total number students who qualify: 153

8. Students receiving special education services: 21 %  
65 Total number of students served

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

- 2 Autism
- 0 Deafness
- 0 Deaf-Blindness
- 0 Emotional Disturbance
- 0 Hearing Impairment
- 0 Mental Retardation
- 0 Multiple Disabilities
- 0 Orthopedic Impairment
- 2 Other Health Impaired
- 9 Specific Learning Disability
- 10 Speech or Language Impairment
- 0 Traumatic Brain Injury
- 0 Visual Impairment Including Blindness
- 42 Developmentally Delayed

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 4
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	1
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects	15
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	9
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a licensed professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	15
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	3

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 22:1
12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

<b>Required Information</b>	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012
Daily student attendance	96%	96%	96%	96%	96%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

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

<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.

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

At Gardner Elementary we will tenaciously pursue growth in all children no matter who they are or what thier situation may be.

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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Gardner Elementary is a Kindergarten-Fourth grade Title One School in the heart of Gardner, Kansas, a fast-growing, progressive community of 20,000 people, located in the southwest portion of Johnson County, Kansas.

Gardner Elementary has a long-standing tradition of excellence. The school received the School-Wide Standard of Excellence in reading or math from 2006 to 2012. In addition, Gardner Elementary received the coveted Kansas Governor's Achievement award in 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2012, for being in the Top 5% of schools in Kansas. Gardner Elementary serves a wide segment of the community with about 50% of the student population from economically disadvantaged homes. The ethnic diversity of this school is approximately 75% white, 12% Hispanic, 6% African American, and 7% other. The school hosts three special education programs which make up just under 20% of the student population.

Gardner Elementary student population provides a variety of challenges: truancy, poverty, behaviors, homelessness, and neglect. However, as difficult as the challenges may be, the deep-rooted traditions and values of this school promptly address these issues for each child upon arrival each morning. The school principal and Watchdog Dads can be found opening car doors and greeting parents with a warm welcome and a friendly smile. School peer mentors can be found welcoming students at each entrance delivering high fives and even an occasional "fist bump". The Panther Pride Leadership (AKA Student Council) can be found recycling and helping teachers in their rooms or tutoring students in the Discovery Zone. Other students can be seen eagerly working with staff to produce morning video announcements via our own video production room. Faculty can be seen escorting or sitting with students as they eat breakfast working to meet the student's basic needs for the day. One might say that caring and compassion is palpable as you enter this learning community. Providing basic needs and positively engaging students as early as possible every morning help students open their hearts and minds to the growth that is in store for them each day.

What makes Gardner Elementary different is the fact that we put a lot of emphasis in teaching the "whole child" with the understanding that academics are just one part of a big puzzle in student success. We know that many of our students come to school with a variety of immediate needs, and most of them are non-academic. That is why we are constantly ensuing the Marine mantra of improvising, adapting, and overcoming problems that arise. The acts of improvising, adapting, and overcoming can be seen through collaborative grade level planning each day during scheduled 1-hour common grade level plan times and at our weekly professional learning community meetings. Our problem solving processes continue two times a month in 4-hour structured CARE/RTI team meetings and 4-hour special education inclusion meetings that follow. In these meetings, we meet with parents and all other school stakeholders to research and resolve issues in a very structured time-bound process.

At Gardner Elementary the framework of supports doesn't stop at the school - it begins here. Community outreach for resources and necessities is ongoing to help meet the needs of our students and families. We work with local churches who provide tutoring during the day as well as school supplies throughout the year. We also work with Johnson County Mental Health, Harvester's Food Bank, Rotary Club, American Legion, GEHS Cadets, and Joy Closet, a local clothing ministry in town.

If one were to ask our faculty to sum up the values and traditions that drive Gardner Elementary they could be found referring to our mission statement:

"We will tenaciously pursue academic, social, and emotional growth with every student we work with no matter who they are or what their situation may be." This action statement drives the staff daily at Gardner Elementary. From support staff to administration, everyone understands that once they cross the threshold of our school doors they immediately focus on serving the students and the families of our school.

Our school is focused on helping every student become a lifelong learner. However, to do that, we must teach them more than just reading and math skills before the advance to the next level. That is why we put such great effort in our daily work to instill in each child the growth mindset and prescriptive goal setting beliefs. The progression of these beliefs is monitored as they grow academically, socially, and emotionally

from year to year. Our overall goal is for all Panthers to transition to the next level as confident 5th graders who truly believe that “struggle is growing and mistakes mean they are learning.” It is our belief that having the growth mindset as they continue their educational journey, and into adulthood, will serve them well no matter what lies ahead in their future.

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

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

At Gardner Elementary our core curriculum goal is to make sure every student is college and career ready for the 21st century. The adoption of the Kansas College and Career readiness skills provide a framework to teach basic skills that will help our students contribute to America's future workforce. We teach these standards through a variety of resources which address skills in math, reading/ELA, language, science, and social studies/history. These core curriculum areas are presented in a variety of engaging ways that utilize technology, student engagement strategies, and differentiation to ensure all students are growing toward being college and career ready.

The goal of our reading/English Language arts program is to build the foundational skills necessary to read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently. All students receive core instruction based on the 5 Big Ideas: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Within the core instruction, students may be working with a teacher in a small group, with a partner, independently, or with a cooperative learning group. Each day, teachers use data to form tier 2 groups of students needing interventions. During this time, all other students are actively engaged in Daily 5 Activities. Another key component of our reading program is Guided Reading groups. All students are placed in a group according to their reading level four days a week for thirty minutes. Students needing additional support meet with the reading specialist for tier 3 time to build foundational skills. Some of the resources used are Story Town, Words Their Way, Sound Partners, I-Station, Read Naturally, and Animated Alphabet.

Math instruction is based on a complex student-centered approach. Students receive core instruction from their teacher which entails many hands-on activities, incorporates model drawings to make math more conceptual, uses a common problem-solving approach, and provides extra computation practice daily. A variety of mathematical strategies are taught and students choose, with teacher guidance, which strategy works best for them. Extension projects are provided for students who are performing above grade level on certain skills. Students who need extra math support receive tier 3 time with a math specialist who can focus on the key concepts and modify instruction to meet their needs. In addition to core math, all students in the grade level take placement tests on math standards throughout the year. Data from these tests are used to form flexible math groups for thirty minutes, four days a week. Curricular resources include, but are not limited to, Math Expressions Common Core, Kim Sutton Computational fluency activities, Brain Pop videos, IXL website, and a variety of math manipulatives.

Science curriculum is the Next Generation Science Standards and Kansas College and Career Ready Standards. Teachers take the opportunity to delve deeper into science concepts through a variety of inquiry-based and hands-on investigations and experiments. These cross-curricular critical thinking activities include many foundational concepts that the teachers build background on before the final culminating project. Some of these projects include building circuit houses, where the students independently wire a house using pieces of holiday lights and batteries; the egg drop, where students collaboratively develop a method to protect an egg when it is dropped; baby chicks, where students get to experience chicks hatching in the incubator; bridge building, where students use engineering concepts to build bridges to withstand different amounts of weight, etc. Science is one core subject that our teachers are exceptionally strong in providing hands-on, collaborative, inquiry-based, investigations.

While exploring the social studies curriculum students are guided and encouraged to design a variety of interactive hands-on activities. One of which includes an economics project called "Panther Ville". Panther Ville is a comprehensive unit that includes consumers/producers, opportunity costs, and saving/spending in a real-life student created village. Another example of an interactive summative lesson includes a mock government which includes elections, trials, and the democratic process. Gardner Elementary involves the community by inviting volunteers from the Gardner Historical Society to share experiences and artifacts with the students about the past. Students research and create a wax museum about famous Kansans. This interactive event involves all students and families in both an afternoon and evening museum-like

presentation. In a walking field trip to city hall students learn the responsibilities and duties of the mayor through a town hall type meeting.

The Pre-K curriculum at our school is the Kansas Early Learning standards which align with the K-12 Kansas College and Career Ready Standards. These standards are foundational to students success in learning our adopted Kansas College and Career Ready Standards. The Kansas Early Learning Standards are broken down to 8 domains. Approaches to Learning (ATL), Physical Development (PHD), Social and Emotional Development (SED), Communication and Literacy (CL), Mathematics (M), Science (S), Social Studies (SS), and Creative Arts (CA). Within the Early Learning Standards framework our Pre-K program serves as an early intervention program that target students who have been evaluated using the Assessment, Evaluation, and Programming System for Infants and children AEPS. Once evaluated students who have been identified as having developmental delays or meet the requirement of "at risk" attend our Pre-K program along with peer models. Each identified student has an IEP specific to his or her needs and is implemented within the framework of the Kansas Early Learning standards along with peer models. These early interventions have been very successful leveling the field for Pre-K students entering kindergarten.

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

At Gardner Elementary we understand the importance of preparing the whole child for the future. That is why it is extremely important for Gardner Elementary to provide additional curriculum areas. Each of these areas are described in depth below and provide evidence of how we are preparing all students at all levels to be healthy, well rounded, college and career ready through additional curriculum resources and activities.

All students at Gardner Elementary attend music class once every three days. Fourth graders also have the opportunity to join the Panther Pride Choir, which meets two days a week before school. The goal for learning in music for all grades is to develop a deep appreciation for music by exploring concepts in a variety of ways. Students experience music by listening, singing, playing instruments, acting, moving, reading, and notating. These skills are practiced and performed in front of an audience at grade level programs. While in music, students are building social skills, experiencing teamwork, and becoming more confident in their musical ability. The music curriculum provides a way for students to become well-rounded students who are aware of the musical world around them.

The students at Gardner Elementary have the opportunity to participate in various activities that promote physical fitness. First through fourth grade students have 1 hour of physical education class every 3 days and pre-k and kindergarten get 30 minutes physical education every 3 days. Monthly, a fitness day in Physical Education is scheduled to focus on cardio, strength and flexibility while discussing the importance of overall health. Students measure their current levels of performance and set goals to improve upon. Each morning, the gym is open from 8-8:15 for Morning Rush. Students are able to jump start their day with activity before learning begins. This year, the faculty has had great participation in our first year of Girls on the Run. The staff support health and wellness through lessons on dental health and hygiene, My Plate, classroom Yoga, as well as other ways to promote long lasting healthy lifestyles.

At Gardner Elementary, students are introduced to foreign languages by learning songs from various countries and cultures second through fourth grade throughout the year. Some of the songs, cultures, and languages studied are Spanish, Hebrew, Italian, and Zambia. Students are able to identify where songs are from, instruments from those countries, and the language that is spoken there. Students study and perform songs in these foreign languages while learning the English meaning. Vocabulary is often in other languages, and students learn the English equivalents while using both in class. The reading curriculum also includes cross-cultural stories that help integrate different cultures and languages into learning.

Our technology curriculum is driven by the International Society of Technology in Education (ISTE) Standards; however, from those standards, a committee of teachers created our own district technology objectives and indicators for each grade level K-12. Our library media specialist takes this curriculum deeper by meshing together information literacy and computer science concepts while supporting the curricular objectives in the general education classroom. This is accomplished by collaborating with grade level teachers on projects throughout the year. All students visit the library/computer lab as a part of our

exploratory classes, which rotate every three days. Teachers in the building also do a wonderful job of engaging the students through regular use of technology in the classroom and integrating technology in a variety of ways. Teachers use technology to further personalize learning by utilizing Google Classrooms and Open Ed resources.

Other curriculum that has greatly impacted students is our Character Education Program. This program has a monthly focus on a specific character trait. Students are taught the character trait by teachers and counselor. Students who exemplify that trait for the month are recognized at our school-wide Rise and Shine Assembly each month. One student is selected each quarter as a Student of Character and recognized at the Board of Education meeting. In addition to instilling great character, students are taught the growth mindset. This philosophy and curriculum celebrates struggle as growth and the fact that mistakes are just learning opportunities. The curriculum also teaches perseverance and grit which are traits our students greatly need to have in order to face daily obstacles in their life. The growth mindset philosophy has greatly reduced the stress of school and home for our students. The growth mindset curriculum and the Character Education Program are both offered to all students kindergarten through fourth grade. Both of these programs are visited weekly during morning class meetings. Due to this program and our current practices we have observed greater effort and less anxiety in both our students and parents since adopting the growth mindset philosophy and curriculum.

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

The instructional approaches used at Gardner Elementary start with Assessments to measure current levels of performance. These assessments are NWEA MAP, DIBELS, fact fluency assessments, and Fountas and Pinnell. Once a baseline for each student is established, teachers begin to collaborate and design lessons and tiered groupings that are prescriptive to the student's current levels of performance. In addition, teachers implement a variety of researched-based instructional methods and interventions.

Student Goal setting is an instructional strategy used to create relevance of future instruction and set high expectations. This also allows students to become vested in the learning process. The teacher and student review data and choose a time-based goal and action plan.

An instructional strategy that has increased student engagement is Kagan Structures and brain-based strategies. These student-centered instructional methods focus on cognitively engaging students to transition effectively and interactively engaging each other to learn the lesson objective.

Timely instructional feedback through the use of "exit tickets" is another impactful instructional strategy used to measure learning. These tickets help teachers identify and address student misconceptions during "Daily 5" independent work time. It also allows students class time to work on areas of need rather than just doing homework.

Technology is used to enrich and remediate the curriculum through the use of adaptive web-based programs that instruct students at their current level while collecting data for individualized instruction. This technology also bridges the gap between school and home by being available to students through phone apps and tablets.

All of these instructional strategies are implemented within a tiered intervention process which are data driven within a collaborative schedule. This provides grade level teachers with one hour each day to review data, research, develop and implement instructional strategies that move students along the learning continuum.

Teachers are also provided weekly PLC's with instructional math and reading specialists to develop tier 2 instructional strategies and interventions for students who are not responding to tier one grade level interventions. These PLC's work with grade level teams to begin specific individualized interventions for students who are time bound and assessed at the next PLC. This process repeats itself to keep moving students with tier 2 interventions.

If students are not responding to those specific interventions then our Tier 3 intervention CARE team meets. This team is comprised of speech pathologists, psychologist, special education personnel, counselor, reading and math specialists, the classroom teacher, and parents. They follow a very structured process that reviews the student's data, concerns, brainstorms possible strategies and interventions, creates an action plan, and finally sets a time-bound goal. The team also provides a "to do" list for all stakeholders to ensure follow through from everyone. The tier 3 Care Team meets every 2 weeks to review progress of specific students who are on 4 to 6 week intervention plans.

## **PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS**

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

The heart of our success lies in the positive culture and climate created within our learning community. All members of staff support this culture through selfless service to care and nurture the whole child. Every staff member understands their priority is to support each other and serve the students and families. Staff start each day with a goal to positively impact students through authentic praise at least five times before entering class. This is achieved by staff greeting students as they exit cars in the morning, and followed by student door greeters welcoming students with a high five or a fist bump. Staff members are staggered throughout the building in the morning welcoming and praising students as they walk to their classrooms. This warm positive culture every morning is followed up with a variety of student centered strategies/interventions that help students take ownership of their emotions throughout the day. This has positively impacted the culture and climate for both students and staff.

Staff has implemented a variety of strategies and interventions to positively impact students; however, the following have had the greatest impact. Students are taught the “growth mindset” which allows them to understand that struggling is good and mistakes are part of the learning process. In addition, all students are supported through the “Love & Logic” philosophy and Positive Behavioral Supports. Each of these have taken the “emotion” out of discipline and created a positive influence on students and staff.

Our school maintains a positive culture and climate by supporting every staff member through face-to-face, daily positive communication. Each staff member has been trained to be an active listener and a positive communicator. This ensures every staff member is sincerely heard and has a voice. This open communication coupled with our collaboratively structured master schedule allows for staff at all levels to have an active role in our learning community. Each staff member knows they are a valuable part of the learning community.

Teachers are supported within our school by supportive administration and a PTO that delivers positive notes of appreciation, daily face-to-face communication, and resources to support the learning process. The PTO provides snacks, dinners, and other teacher appreciation initiatives throughout the year.

The positive environment, effective communication, and strong relationships provide all stakeholders a friendly, comfortable place to come and be a part of the learning process. Our established culture and climate have dramatically increased parent involvement and improved student attendance. The positive behavioral interventions and best practices provided by staff has increased the academic performance and continues to close the gap for our students of poverty.

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

We believe the best way to get families and communities engaged is through positive relationships. These relationships are built through ongoing organized communication, public relations, and activities supported by PTO, Site Council, Family Engagement Committee, and our Panther Pride Leadership Council.

Our Parent Teacher Organization provides many opportunities to support students and families throughout the year. They work with school staff and local businesses to provide a potluck picnic with entertainment and swimming activity called “Back to School Splash”. This summer celebration provides an opportunity for families to meet new and veteran staff members, new families, and build positive relationships before school begins. The PTO also provides Family Movie Nights, Donuts for Dad, Morning with Moms and Grandparent Lunches to engage families and encourage them to visit the school.

Gardner Elementary established a Family Engagement Committee to actively seek ways to encourage families to visit the school and engage in the learning process. They host Fun Nights such as Harvest Festivals and Frosty Family Fun to bring families to school and participate in projects. They also host math and literacy nights which provide fun learning activities that involve parents working with their children on projects. The Family Engagement Committee coordinates with a district middle school and the high school to involve older students by volunteering and leading activities.

The Gardner Elementary Site Council engages parents, community members, and school staff in the school decision process. General Student Testing Results, New Curriculum, upcoming events, troubleshooting problems, and round table discussions are common agenda items that produce changes in the way our school operates. It allows parents and the community to take ownership in decisions within our building. Each person from this committee engages their respective areas and reports back improvement suggestions.

Our Panther Pride Leadership Council is a student leader organization whose purpose is to serve our school and our community. They each engage daily in community service by being a door greeter, student tutor/mentor, recycling, and a teacher helper. They engage our school and community in food, clothing, and personal hygiene items drives to provide to needy families and organizations within the community. They also volunteer time to go to Meadowbrook Rehabilitation Center to read, sing, and play games with patients.

There are multiple ways our school works to engage families and the community, each of them focused on involving all stakeholders in students success and improvement. We have witnessed a dramatic increase in parent involvement through these engagement practices which has in turn significantly impacted home support and student success.

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

Data drives our professional development approach. Data collected and discussed in our structured collaborative framework drives professional development for all staff. Our professional development needs are identified through processes that incorporate teacher surveys, data and instructional PLC's, and special education inclusion meetings.

Teacher and staff surveys have identified the following areas of need that have been addressed through professional development:

Students social emotional needs once identified through surveys led to teacher professional development tools such as "growth mindset". They have also provided staff professional development from organizations such as from local mental health agencies and their offerings which has helped staff provide resources to families. Surveys have identified needs in the area of differentiation for special education students and produced training for all staff in accommodations and modifications within the general classroom setting. Finally, our surveys have identified a need to provide more support to our new teachers and have led to a two year New Teacher Mentor program that ensures new educators are equipped and supported their first two years. The professional development provided from these surveys have reduced student behavioral referrals, increased student attendance, and positively impacted new teacher retention rates.

Data and Instructional PLC's: These collaborative data sessions have identified areas of need based on student data and drive change in instructional practices.

These collaborative meetings identified a need for increased student engagement which led to professional development in Kagan Structures and Brain-based strategies.

Another area identified was the need for students to have more practice with computational fluency this led to professional development in engaging web-based programs accessible from home which significantly increased our students computational fluency. The sharing of professional articles and discussions have influenced our professional development in E.L.A. and have led to implementation of programs such as Close Reading and Fab 4 reading comprehension strategies. Finally, our staff data/instructional PLC discussion has led to teachers sharing instructional successes, which has led to professional development and the implementation of "The Daily 5" classroom reading structure. The professional development from these PLC's has significantly increased student achievement and closed the gap for our students in poverty.

Special Education Inclusion Meetings: Data collected from our teachers and paraprofessionals during these bi-monthly meetings have led to professional development for both classified and certified staff.

The discussion of our IEP students identified a need for training in the area of accommodations and modifications. This led to professional development in accommodations and modifications along with inclusion best practices for classified and certified staff. Meetings with our classified staff helped us recognize a need for para-professionals to understand at-risk students. This led to professional development in Understanding Poverty, by Ruby Payne. Finally, through our collaborative inclusion meetings we recognized the importance of our IEP student's social needs. This led to professional development from Richard Lavoie, "Helping the Child with Learning Disabilities Find Social Success". The professional development from these inclusion meetings have positively impacted growth from students with disabilities as well as a decreased office referrals. We have also observed an increase in classified staff retention since implementing this prescriptive professional development.

The collaborative framework we built has identified specific professional development needs, that once addressed, have positively impacted individual growth in staff and students.

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

The leadership philosophy at Gardner Elementary centers around the belief that it's people who make a school great, not the programs or the curriculum. The principal believes the right people along with high expectations, a collaborative framework, and distributed leadership have the greatest impact on student growth and development.

High expectations are woven into the fabric of Gardner Elementary. We set high standards because our students deserve nothing less. We are reminded in our mission statement to meet, and if possible exceed, those expectations each and every day.

“We will tenaciously pursue academic, social, and emotional growth with every student we work with no matter who they are or what their situation may be.”

Our time to impact students is very limited. Everything we do is data driven and specific to student needs. Staff collect ongoing data in areas of academic and social emotional growth. Data is discussed and acted upon within our collaborative framework within our schedule. Each of these collaborations end with teachers equipped with action plans, and with clear expectations, to prescriptively impact student growth in academic and non-academic areas.

Collaboration- Our staff knows that the academic, social, and emotional needs of their students are much bigger than they are as individual teachers. The following collaborative framework put in place provides common grade level plan times every day. These common plan times are coupled with building data and instructional PLC's, which are facilitated by reading and math specialists each month for teachers to objectively review, create student action plans, and adapt general instructional practices. In addition we dedicate time and resources to provide two half days a month for CARE/RTI teams of specialists who work with teachers and parents to problem solve and identify interventions for struggling students. Resources are also invested to provide time for special education teachers to meet with general education inclusion teachers and paras to ensure students with disabilities are provided a least restrictive environment where success can bloom.

Distributed Leadership- It is understood that we are all true leaders. A true leader can be defined by one that boldly leads with their strengths, but also acknowledges their weaknesses and humbles themselves to learn from others. Gardner Elementary principal collaborates with staff and distributes leadership accordingly through committees, instructional specialists, technology experts, and many other areas. Each of these leaders graciously serve each other so everyone is authentically improving and students are succeeding.

These three areas are common best practices, but at Gardner Elementary these practices combined with “true leaders” have produced some amazing results.

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

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At Gardner Elementary the single practice that stakeholders believe has been the most influential in the school's success can be explained in our "determination" to pursue growth in the whole child. The dictionary defines determination as "firmness of purpose; resoluteness" or "the process of establishing something exactly, typically by calculation or research." Both of these definitions explain how the staff, students, and families work together to ensure growth at all levels.

As the first definition states, our staff is resolute and firm in purpose as our school action statement: "We will tenaciously pursue academic, social, and emotional growth with every student we work with no matter who they are or what their situation may be."

The professional learning community at Gardner Elementary pursues this growth by establishing structured collaboration times within the master schedule. This ensures all staff and stakeholders have time to collectively gather student information, along with student data, to develop action plans that impact growth in the whole child. The schedule provides common daily grade level plan times for teachers to review student data and adjust instructional decisions and develop data-based interventions. The schedule also provides monthly instructional and data PLC's where grade level teachers meet with reading and math specialists and special education teachers to review academic and behavior data to provide level 2 instructional and behavioral interventions. Finally the schedule provides monthly level 3 student support collaborations for teachers, specialists, parents, and other professionals to meet and develop ways to support students through a very structured process.

As the latter definition of determination states "the process of establishing something exactly, typically by calculation or research." This definition defines the way our stakeholders utilize the aforementioned process by developing student action plans with goals that are specific, measurable, agreed upon, and time based. These action plans and goal setting procedures are coupled with responsibilities listed as "to do's" for parents, teachers, students, and other stakeholders agree upon to support the action plan and the goal progress. These action plans and goals are reviewed and stakeholders are held accountable as the teams meet many times throughout the year.

The determination to pursue growth in the whole child has allowed the staff at Gardner Elementary to impact students beyond "academic achievement." Students will leave the building with the ability to self advocate through strong communication skills. They have the tools to work through tough social/emotional situations. They will know that hard work and mistakes are part of the learning process.