

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 Mr. Ben H. LaGrone

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

Official School Name Northwestern State University Middle Lab School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 100 Tarlton Drive TEC Bldg Pod A

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

City Natchitoches State LA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 71497-0001

County _____

Telephone (318) 357-4509 Fax (318) 357-4260

Web site/URL http://nsum.nat.k12.la.us E-mail blagrone@nat.k12.la.us

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*Mr. Dale Skinner E-mail jskinner@nat.k12.la.us
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Natchitoches School District Tel. (318) 352-2358

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. Ralph Wilson
(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):
- 10 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 3 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 2 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 15 TOTAL

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

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

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	0	0	0
1	0	0	0
2	0	0	0
3	0	0	0
4	0	0	0
5	0	0	0
6	38	23	61
7	22	35	57
8	24	33	57
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	84	91	175

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 3 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 1 % Asian
 - 14 % Black or African American
 - 3 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 3 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 76 % White
 - 0 % Two or more races
 - 100 % Total**

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

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2015 – 2016 school year: 1%

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

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	2
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	0
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	2
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2015	172
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.012
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	1

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 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: 29 %
Total number students who qualify: 50

8. Students receiving special education services: 5 %
9 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
- 0 Emotional Disturbance
- 0 Hearing Impairment
- 0 Mental Retardation
- 0 Multiple Disabilities
- 0 Orthopedic Impairment
- 1 Other Health Impaired
- 4 Specific Learning Disability
- 3 Speech or Language Impairment
- 0 Traumatic Brain Injury
- 0 Visual Impairment Including Blindness
- 0 Developmentally Delayed

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

	Number of Staff
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects	9
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	8
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a licensed professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	1
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	1

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 20:1
12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

Required Information	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012
Daily student attendance	96%	96%	96%	96%	0%
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.

The mission of Middle Lab School is to provide a learning environment where every student can reach his or her greatest potential.

16. **For public schools only**, if the school is a magnet, charter, or choice school, explain how students are chosen to attend.

NSU Middle Lab is a university laboratory school. Our feeder school is NSU Elementary Lab School. Student enrollment is determined at the kindergarten level through a random draw monitored by professional auditors.

PART III – SUMMARY

NSU Middle Lab School is a grade 6-8 school located on Northwestern State University's Natchitoches campus. More specifically, NSU Middle Lab School is located in POD A of the Northwestern State University Teacher Education Center. The city of Natchitoches has 18,323 citizens and Natchitoches Parish has a population of 39,566. Students may attend NSU Middle Lab School from any school zone in the parish. The school's population includes students who live in the city as well as students who live in rural areas. The student population of NSU Middle Lab School is 175 students of which 29 percent of the student enrollment is classified as Economically Disadvantaged, 5 percent have Individual Education Plans, 11 percent are classified as Gifted Learners, and 16 percent have Talented classifications.

The NSU Middle Lab School staff is comprised of a principal, a school secretary, 11 full-time teachers, 5 itinerate teachers, a special education tutor, a school counselor, and a librarian. Our staff has 5 Caucasian males, 10 Caucasian females, 1 Multiracial male, 1 Hispanic male, and 2 African American females. The NSU Middle Lab School Principal and all teachers are employees of the Natchitoches Parish School Board. Northwestern State University provides additional compensation to the principal and teachers to support supervisory work with college students ranging from observation experiences to student teaching.

One of the more unique features of the school is its dual mission of educating middle school students as well as preparing future teachers for the classroom. A close collaborative relationship exists between the Teacher Education Center (TEC) and NSU Middle Laboratory School. The NSU TEC, constructed in the late 1960's, consists of four round buildings (pods) connected by one common area. Middle Lab occupies Pod A, which was architecturally designed for the open classroom concept of teaching and learning. A round building, curved walls, open classrooms, and limited space provide numerous challenges when educating today's middle school student. The students, staff, and parents have demonstrated great resourcefulness in adapting and thriving in this unusually setting.

Happy students who feel ownership in their school are students ready to achieve. A safe, caring, learning community that functions like a family has been a long standing tradition at NSU Middle Lab School. Parent, student, and staff surveys report this to be strong in the school on an annual basis. We endeavor to help every student make a successful transition from early adolescence into young adulthood. For each individual, we hope to see growth in academic competencies by a mature display of personal responsibility and self-awareness. At the culmination of the NSU Middle Lab experience, students should be confident in their academic skills and possess the ability to actively and successfully contribute to the community and pursue long-term ambitions.

Milestones for our school include 2013 and 2015 ratings of "Top Gains School" by the Louisiana department of Education (LDOE) for upward growth in student academic achievement. The LDOE has also recognized our school in the area of teacher evaluation. Teacher observation and evaluation occur through the use of an instrument called COMPASS. NSU Middle Lab has been commended as a school showing consistency between teacher evaluation ratings and student growth on state testing. In December of 2015, the New Orleans Times Picayune published an article listing NSU Middle Lab School as one of the top 25 public schools in the State of Louisiana. An "A" rating has been assigned to our school for the past five years. Other milestones that are becoming tradition include the development and continued growth of an Advisory Program/Positive Behavior System for all students. Current data strongly supports the positive impact this effort is having on our students.

AdvancED is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that conducts rigorous, on-site external reviews of PreK-12 schools and school systems, AdvancED partners with 34,000 schools and school systems across the United States and other nations. NSU Middle Lab School has held accreditation with this organization for more than 20 years. In March of 2017, our school hosted an AdvancED External Review. The external review scores reported exceeded AdvancED average review ratings in all categories. The overall score for NSUM was 328.85 compared to 278.94, the AdvancED Network Average for all schools seeking accreditation. We consider this rating as a high achievement for our school.

Key strategies used within the school that have encouraged and challenged students include early embrace

of the Common Core State Standards. A standards-based approach to curriculum, data team work, student assessment and professional practice. High expectations for students to demonstrate work ethic, self-awareness, and personal responsibility structured and supported by a data driven advisory program and positive behavior support system. Perhaps the most meaningful strategy prevalent in our school can be summed up by the following student survey response; "I know my teachers care about me."

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

The NSUM core curriculum consists of Reading/English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. The Reading/ELA curriculum is provided by the LDOE is called Louisiana Guide Book. The state renamed the Common Core State standards with a local flavor. Instruction includes learning standards addressing reading, writing, language, speaking, and listening and includes an application of both fiction and nonfiction texts. The school places additional emphasis on writing as all ELA teachers have completed training through the NSU Writing Project. Currently our school is involved in a national study through the NSU Writing Project focused on cross-curricular argumentative writing as a college and career readiness skill. Students have completed service research and writing projects on topics such as appropriate start times for middle schools, junk food at school, using cell phones to enhance learning, and what is respect for others. As a civic learning project, the director of NSU Service Learning worked with all ELA students on writing personal Christmas cards with uplifting messages. These cards were delivered to the Natchitoches Regional Medical Center to all patients spending the holiday in the hospital.

The mathematics students at NSUM learn through the Eureka Math curriculum which is correlated to Louisiana and Common Core Standards. Professional development has focused on unpacking the standards, measuring student grasp of requisite skills, and conceptual understanding. We have grouped our math classes into three sections. In each grade level we have advanced classes that will present high rigor and fast pacing. Our mid-level math students are taught the same curriculum at a slightly slower pace with the goal of moving every student toward the advanced class. The third level math classes are small in size and are for students who are at risk of non-proficiency. We teach grade level standards and include individual intervention through frequent Isteep progress monitoring. All math classes assess learning through common assessments and a structured benchmarking system. Math students are involved in projects to enhance civic learning such as budget planning including a trip to the local grocery store. A connection with NSU University Athletics allows students to analyze real data and construct reports, graphs, and displays for coaches, teams, and players. Several math students compete in local mathematics challenges at the neighboring high school, Louisiana School for Math, Science, and the Arts as well as being members of our Math Counts Team.

Sixth grade Science students learn Physical Science through Louisiana Grade Level Expectations. Life Science becomes the focus as students begin the seventh grade year, and Earth/Space Science is studied in the eighth grade year. All three curriculums are taught from an inquiry basis with frequent lab investigations and application of the scientific method. We are eagerly anticipating a move next year to a new Science curriculum partially based on national standards. To promote civic awareness through Science, students write letters to government officials recommending solutions to environmental issues such as global climate change, resource conservation, and investment in renewable energy. One argumentative writing project requires students to take a position on genetically modified food and cloning. Our sixth grade students spend a full day participating in forestry day which is conducted by a local forestry agency. Forestry day is focused on resource management.

Three years of Social Studies instruction at NSUM moves students through a layered curriculum including History, Geography, Civics, and Economics. Each year a new tier is expanded to enhance student knowledge of historical thinking, key events, ideas, people, geography skills, culture, environment, government purposes, government structure, global awareness, civic literacy, economic resources, interdependence, and decision making. Students often cite evidence from original documents to make claims in task assignments. Each year, 8th grade students dress the era and play roles in the various historical landmarks around Natchitoches (the oldest city in Louisiana) to host a district-wide third grade walking tour. In collaboration with our university and the local historical society, our students engage in a cemetery tour seeking to collect evidence to support a cross curricular writing project between ELA and Social Studies. An additional activity is connected to our student governing body and their election process. Each year students campaign and give speeches before a school-wide student council officer election is held. Social Studies classes will engage in a project to reinforce prior knowledge of the democratic process and all

that comes with voting responsibilities.

Every student in our school is assigned to one teacher who serves as the advisor. NSUM students remain assigned to the same advisor for the full three year middle school experience. Trusting relationships are formed and through this program we seek to address non-core, yet important issues to support student success. One of those issues is college and career readiness. Advisors lead several career awareness lessons each year. In order to begin to establish informed career goals, students complete research, interest inventories, and aptitude questionnaires. A local foundation, Orchard Foundation, provides a Career Compass Program for eighth grade students. A trained instructor is sent to the school to present career awareness lessons and our eighth students attend an event called Students Exploring Career Opportunities. Here students complete a career profile, experience hands-on career stations, speak with a career counselor, and write reflections on their career decisions and ambitions. Following this trip, NSUM brings the high school freshman counselor to an assembly and every eighth grade student and their parents begin completing an Individual Graduation Plan (IGP).

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

NSU Middle Lab School offers students the opportunity to choose and experience a rich, rigorously challenging, three year learning experience in music, art, or technology resulting in one high school credit. Ninety eight students select Art as their elective class. Sixth through eighth grade students will engage in class work following the National Core Arts Anchor Standards. Students study art history, design, professional and famous artists and their techniques. Grading standards are high on all projects and each course progressively builds skill and technique. Students are required to write, research, peer assess, and provide meaningful feedback to classmates.

Students who select music as their elective will play a stringed instrument as a member of the NSUM Orchestra. Approximately 52 students in grades 6 – 8 attend daily orchestra classes. The National Standards for Arts Education are taught in this program. Most students begin in the 5th grade through the NSU Elementary Lab School beginners program. Students in orchestra classes learn form and technique as they are introduced increasingly complex music selections. Annual Louisiana Music Educators Association District and State Assessment events measure performance play as well as sight reading ability. NSUM music students are expected to attend community service performance events 5 to 6 times per year in addition to playing in a school Christmas Concert and End of Year Concert. After four years in NSU programs and four years in the Natchitoches Central High School Orchestra, students have excellent and highly probable opportunities for college scholarship.

A third elective option open to NSUM students is called Project Lead the Way (PLTW). Students who select this option will engage in a pre-engineering curriculum designed for middle school students. Students will work through units to learn programming, mechanical design, and project completion. Students will design, program, and build model race cars, rockets, electrical circuits, robots, and mechanical parts such as gears and levers. Through a partnership with Northwestern State University's Computer Information Systems Department, college students will provide lessons on computer design and programming. Students in the class have the option become a member of the school robotics team and attend state-wide competitions. A continuation in the PLTW program through high school will result in students becoming eligible for dual enrollment classes for college credit. Currently, 25 NSUM students have selected PLTW as their elective class.

We are proud of our Health and Physical Education program for the contribution to our philosophy to provide opportunities to allow students to explore new interests and develop fresh talents. We follow Louisiana Health and Physical Education Standards and National Standards. In P.E. class, students work through a daily fitness routine designed to address fitness goals each student sets through our Fitness Grams pre, mid, and end assessment. Following this 15 minute routine, students learn lifetime sports and games as units. Archery, Volleyball, Yoshi, Frisbee Golf, Ping Pong, Putt Putt Golf, and Cup Stacking are all taught throughout the school year. Once per week a Health/Wellness lesson is taught to all students. Supported by a local foundation (The Rapides Foundation), we teach lessons from the Healthy Lifestyles Choices curriculum. All NSUM students participate in our H/P.E. program and these students love the class.

The Spanish Language was selected as the predominant second language in our local area. Sixty-one 6th grade and fifty 7th grade students attend Spanish class each Wednesday to learn the fundamentals as beginners learning a foreign language. The history and geography of the language is taught as well as vocabulary, spelling, and word pronunciation techniques. Our students are eager to learn and look forward to each class with great anticipation.

An additional class offered to our 7th grade students is a twelve lesson unit focused on Drug Education. Fifty seven students completed the course. The instruction and curriculum was provide by the Natchitoches Parish Sheriff's Department in conjunction with the State of Louisiana DARE Program. This is an annual short course for seventh grade students at NSU Middle Lab School.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

A major instructional technique evident in NSUM classes is the application of cooperative learning. A majority of our teachers are trained in how to apply the Kagan Cooperative Structures to daily instruction. Two teachers have qualified as certified Kagan Coaches. These structures support strong classroom procedures as indicated by walkthrough and formal observation data throughout the school year. With Kagan Structures, students are arranged in groups of four. The teacher uses a class profile from a triangulated data analysis of every student to assign groups. Each group will have a strong student, a weak student, and two moderate students. Much research suggests that students learn most effectively from one another. A lesson will consist of multiple requirements for students to answer a question or complete an activity through a teacher directed structure. Kagan structures ensure equal distribution of student responsibility within groups. Multiple opportunities to provide feedback to students allows for effective assessment of student learning. The teacher might move group to group as students work together providing feedback to the group or individuals. Students might be required to peer assess within the group and give feedback to one another. Classroom observation data has pointed our staff to development of meaningful feedback strategies teacher to student and student to student.

Another prevalent instructional strategy frequently applied in our classrooms is the use of project-based learning allowing students some choice and a self-paced completion time. Centers usually follow these activities to ensure instructional time is maximized. Often students use a pre-determined rubric or scoring guide to self-assess the quality of their work.

A specific study strategy has been implemented as a result of students indicating the need through survey. Help with study skills is being provided through the use of Cornell Notes. In each core class, students discern and write relevant information in the note section. Next students write leveled questions in the left margin and a summary a bottom section. This serves as an instant, well-organized study guide for students needing support with study at home.

Teachers use a variety of assessment methods throughout every lesson. We have conducted professional development on student questioning, rich student discussion, and we use COSTA Question Levels to help students understand and create high order questions. Teachers will use the smart board and a program like "Plickers" or "Grade Cam" to make a quick assessment of student understanding. Whole class or small group adjustments may be evident. Teachers use exit tickets to check lesson mastery and determine intervention needs for students that day and the next. A school-wide system of student self-rating of understanding is used when students turn work in. They simply place the item in one of three hanging folders labeled to quantify understanding. Teachers collect the work and bring those needing help to small groups as others move to next assignments. Additionally, a student who receives a less than satisfactory grade on a major test may complete a "Request to Retest" form to earn a new chance to demonstrate his/her achievement growth. We want students to take personal responsibility for their actions. "Request to Retest" requires the student to explain his/her preparation for the test and outline a different study strategy for the retest.

NSUM data teams are content specific groups that conduct an analysis of student work on common assessments developed by the team. Instructional strategies, intervention needs, and learning goals are

developed during each data team meeting held once every ten instructional days. All data is documented. When the students of a data team achieve the goal, a new need is determined and the cycle starts over from that point.

A formal intervention process does exist at NSU Middle Lab School to assist students in need of tier two and one level intervention. Students are screened using the ISteep Screener in Reading and Mathematics. Secondary data such as STAR Reading and STAR Math assessments, Power School Benchmark Assessments, and LEAP Test scores are considered. Upon agreement of our RTI committee, students are placed on a schedule to receive 150 minutes of small group intervention each week. Our Librarian delivers the Reading Intervention and our Math Staff deliver the Math Intervention. Students are progress monitored and can work out of the assignment. Parents are notified of all actions taken throughout the RTI process.

African American subgroup proficiency reported from 2015 state testing was at 82.4% compared to a proficiency rate greater than 95% for all other groups. Based on this data, NSU Middle Lab restructured the school schedule to include small math classes for those students at risk of scoring less than proficient. Students who were once attending math class in an open classroom atmosphere with no walls separating them from the distractions of the next door class are now having class in a fully walled classroom with no such distractions. Additionally, these students are receiving frequent and consistent intervention daily. While continuing to work on grade level curriculum, much consideration is being given to learning gaps that exist due to a lack of requisite skills.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

NSUM's major strength! Students feel like teachers know them and care about them. Students enjoy classes and indicate that learning is fun. Students feel safe, fairly treated, and socially accepted. We live our mission.

When you meet a former middle lab student and you ask them what they most remember about the school, the answer is often the same, "The Academic Pep Rallies." Academic pep rallies are purposefully planned and organized assemblies designed to recognize team, group, and individual achievement. Team building, mutual respect, creativity, self-control, and accomplishment are all boosted by these 9 week celebrations that appear to begin in adolescent chaos. Grade levels compete with a chant expressing their values. Individuals are rewarded for an assortment of attendance and academic achievements while being cheered on and encouraged by 175 NSUM "Demon" brothers and sisters. Grade level teams win banners to display in their halls for being the cleanest or maybe the best job communicating with parents in the student agenda. Teachers are rewarded for best displays of student work or individual recognitions like Teacher of the Year. In the end all are reminded this celebration will happen again at the end of the next grading period. "Decide what you want! Set a goal and work hard to achieve it."

NSUM has a strong Positive Behavior Plan that rewards both students and teachers with currency called "Demon Dollars." Weekly drawings are held and special events conducted. Demon dollars are valuable! Also outlined in the plan is a plan to document and track minor infractions with full transparency for students, parents and teachers through the student agenda. Clear data driven goals and student behavior expectations are set in the NSU Middle Lab School PBIS Plan.

Every student has one adult, an advisor, to serve as an advocate and parent on campus. Advisory groups meet every Monday for 45 minutes to work on treating others with respect, career awareness, and exercising personal responsibility. Professional development for each lesson is provided on Fridays to each advisor during job-embedded team time.

The NSUM Parent Action Committee(PAC) play a vital role in support of the school. This group of parents work to provide meals to teachers before all after-school staff meetings and on special occasions like teacher appreciation week and major holidays. PAC provides support in school improvement planning, school mission development, state testing times, and extracurricular events. When we have a need PAC is there. Last year PAC purchased sixty new student lockers so all students could have a full sized unit.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Often said; "It takes a community to raise a child." NSUM enjoys tremendous family and community support. Each year in late spring, we hold an orientation event for our incoming sixth grader students. While teachers and our students work with the 5th grade visitors, the principal conducts an orientation for all new parents. This event is well attended and most beneficial to establishing positive relationships with concerned parents making a first time transition to a middle school from their safe and comfortable elementary home school. Our next big event occurs in early August with Open House. Ninety-six to one hundred percent attendance is not uncommon here as parents get to tour the school, review their child's schedule, and meet teachers and staff. One week later parents and local medical personnel man stations in the school and provide free medical screenings for all student athletes and cheerleaders in our school and a partner school with whom we combine students to field a football team.

Throughout the school year, we partner with multiple businesses to provide learning opportunities for our students. The City of Natchitoches with the 3rd grade walking tour, local agencies like "The Women's Resource Center" and "Hope for PAWS" for service projects, and large organizations like the Natchitoches Sheriff's Department for Healthfest and Northwestern State University for CIS students partnering with our PLTW students to learn programing techniques.

Parents and community are kept informed of student success and school improvement through press releases, news coverage, PAC Facebook, school website, monthly school newsletters, and daily emails sent from the school. Parents are informed about student progress through access to an online grade book as well as conferences held at the conclusion of each grading period. Students stay current on their progress through a self-composed progress check that happens at the mid-point of each grading period. Each student writes a letter to their parent identifying and explaining less than satisfactory grades and commending self for good work.

3. Professional Development:

Four teachers, the school counselor, and the school principal make up the membership of the NSUM Leadership Team. This team holds monthly meetings to review progress the school is making concerning achieving the goals outlined in the NSUM School Improvement Plan (SIP). In May the decision will be made to extend any goals to the 2017- 2018 SIP. In June the Leadership Team will conduct a detailed needs analysis by considering existing archival data such as PAC meeting minutes, COMPASS teacher observations, staff learning walk data, and AdvancED accreditation reports. Attitudinal data will be derived from parent, student, and staff surveys. Behavioral Data in JCAMPUS discipline reports and PBIS minor infraction data. Cognitive Data will be available from year end bench mark tests, STAR Reading and Math reports, preACT test results, and previous year state testing data. From these data sources, the school leadership team will determine strengths and weaknesses. Following this determination, an action plan will be constructed to outline professional development needs for the 2017 – 2018 school year.

Professional Development for the current 2016 -2017 has focused on professional practice and has been addressed through weekly team time reviews of individual COMPASS components followed by learning walks taking one component at a time. This peer observation has lead teachers to reflect on their own instructional practices. Collaboratively, we realized the need to learn more about math curriculum support, about meaningful feedback resulting in changes improving student work, and about learning more strategies to differentiate instruction. In responding to the needs, a workshop was scheduled and conducted by a state department representative providing math teachers with knowledge and support on how to use rigor documents, how to unpack standards, and how to plan lessons to assess requisite skills to close learning gaps. Next data teams developed strategies to have student to student feedback become more meaningful and effective. Student work was examined and shared during team time meetings. In the beginning of the second semester, our university partnered with our school to bring in Elizabeth Breaux, the author of “How the Best Teachers Differentiate Instruction.” All teachers received a copy of the book which will be a tool for strategy implementation.

4. School Leadership:

The NSU Middle Lab School leadership philosophy begins the necessity for all involved to share a common vision. We must recognize the needs of the unique student population we serve and prepare to understand and nurture transitions our students make in the three years of our care. All must hold the belief that we never stop learning and challenges will be constantly present. Strong work ethic, enthusiasm for the job, and a student-centered ambition to grow and succeed must be the drive in each of us.

NSU Middle Lab is a small school with one principal, an itinerate counselor, and a school secretary. Much of the leadership capacity must be filled by teachers. The school leadership team plays a major role in monitoring school improvement progress and providing leadership on data teams, professional development, and school decision making. The Positive Behavior Support Team developed a complete and highly effective PBIS plan including quarterly data management and reporting. The special education lead teacher ensures that all requirements are met and students with learning exceptionalities are flourishing in our school. Two teacher leaders have kept ELA and Math teachers well informed of curriculum changes and state testing requirements. Kagan Coaches trained new teachers on core strategies and coached veteran teachers to proper execution of complex structures.

Three of the past four years have yielded school performance growth and increased academic achievement

for all students. Leadership decisions that impacted this growth are an early embrace and commitment to the common core state standards, tight adherence to a standards based curriculum and collaborative measures of student learning through data teams. More actions include the professional development endeavor to conduct a school-wide study of rigor in the classroom. A full implementation of cooperative learning through Kagan structures supported classroom management and student engagement. Using the COMPASS classroom observation instrument as a constant structure for monitoring and improving professional practice led to many improvements in pedagogy. An emphasis on independent reading and diverse student writing opportunities certainly kept our students progressing in practical knowledge and abilities. Perhaps the most important leadership decisions the school has made in the past three years has been to expand opportunities for students through more club offerings, new extra-curricular activities and a more effective looping advisory program. Happy students who feel a strong sense of belonging in the school are students ready to learn.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

The single practice that has been most influential on Northwestern State University Middle Lab School's success has been the collaborative nature of our Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). We work together on all endeavors. Teachers attend job-embedded "team time" meetings two to three times per week during common planning times. Weekly professional development is conducted during these times, often being teacher led. Introductions to new tasks or strategies are followed by meetings of application and analysis. Teams spend time examining student work, analyzing student performance, researching effective learning strategies, and setting goals. Much attention is given to professional practice during team time meetings. Structured learning walks (peer observations) are conducted to encourage full awareness of the components of effective teaching and learning. Teams use learning walks to measure "what lives in the school." We take a look at our SIP in the classrooms, at applications of effective strategy such as Kagan Cooperative Learning Structures or meaningful student to student feedback live and in play, and we have used learning walks to assess the degree to which our school mission "lives in our classrooms." We implemented a new classroom observation instrument (ELEOT) to observe classes not from the perspective of what is the teacher doing but from a perspective that focuses on the student in the classroom.

The frequent practice of structured team time PLC work has stemmed collaboration in many areas beyond the formal meetings. Content teachers collaborate throughout each day as the design of our school allows them close proximity. When you see teachers having conversations in our hallways or before school or at lunch time, you can expect the topic to be related to teaching and learning. A tremendous level of mutual respect and professional collegiality exists on the NSUM staff.

Our PLC work has also influenced the effectiveness of other teams and committees. NSUM Data Teams, Leadership Team, PBIS Committee, School Building Level Committee, Student Council and even our PAC Advisory Committee function at high levels of efficiency and effectiveness due to a culture that is truly a Professional Learning Community. All aspects of our school's organization are designed around people working together to ensure success for every student. This is the vision of Northwestern State University Lab School.

"BE A DEMON"