

***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 Dr. Thomas Michael Ferry

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

Official School Name Cheesequake Elementary School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 111 Route 34

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

City Matawan                      State NJ                      Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 07747-3738

County Middlesex County

Telephone (732) 360-4552                      Fax (732) 316-9353

Web site/URL https://www.oldbridgeadmin.org/Pa  
ge/1743                      E-mail thomas.ferry@obps.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\*Mr. David Cittadino                      E-mail dcittadino@obps.org  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Old Bridge Township Public Schools                      Tel. (732) 566-1000

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. Sal DiPrima  
(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):
- 12 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 2 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 2 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 16 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	19	21	40
1	31	28	59
2	26	21	47
3	34	13	47
4	21	24	45
5	23	28	51
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>	154	135	289

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 28 % Asian
  - 8 % Black or African American
  - 8 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 55 % White
  - 1 % Two or more races
  - 100 % Total**

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

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

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

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	19
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	14
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	33
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2015	289
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.114
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	11

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 8 %  
22 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):  
Albanian (Gheg, Tosk), Arabic, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Nepali (Pahari), Panjabi (Punjabi), Pashto (Pushto), Polish, Spanish, Ukranian, Urdu

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 34 %  
Total number students who qualify: 98
8. Students receiving special education services: 12 %  
36 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
- 1 Hearing Impairment
- 0 Mental Retardation
- 0 Multiple Disabilities
- 0 Orthopedic Impairment
- 9 Other Health Impaired
- 5 Specific Learning Disability
- 19 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: 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:

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects	13
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	7
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a licensed professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	5
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	2

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.

Cheesequake's mission is to inspire the love of learning, embrace diversity, and cultivate a caring, respectful, supportive environment that is conducive to empowering individual achievement.

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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Cheesequake Elementary School is situated in Old Bridge, New Jersey, a large suburban community located approximately 25 miles south of New York City. The location of the school, just feet off a busy state highway, is not ideal, but inside the building's walls is a thriving school community. Cheesequake is one of the most diverse schools in the Old Bridge Township Public Schools. Our racial composition is 55% white, 28% Asian, 8% Hispanic, 8% Black, and 1% multi-racial. Nearly 1 in 10 students (8%) are English Language Learners, and 18 different primary languages are spoken in the homes of our students. Roughly one in three students (34%) receive free or reduced lunch, and we are a targeted assistance Title I School.

Cheesequake is also the oldest school in Old Bridge Township. It became a school in the late 1800s and moved locations several times. The current building originated as a two-room schoolhouse over a century ago, and the school as we now know it, still housing an old room with an antique, original school bell, is now 51 years old. During its long history, the community served by the school has transitioned from a rural, nearly all Caucasian, farming community to a sprawling, densely populated, ethnically and socioeconomically diverse, suburb with many commuters who travel to New York City for work.

The current principal began at Cheesequake in 2011, bringing with him experience as a secondary math teacher and vice principal, as well as a commitment to character education, innovative teaching, and using data to inform decision making and instruction. The school's diversity was quickly deemed to be a potential challenge but also a tremendous opportunity.

Our school's philosophy has been to build and cultivate a thriving, inclusive, warm school culture and strong character education system because we believe that this foundation is what allows our students to then maximally succeed academically. In 2014, Cheesequake was named a NJ School of Character and subsequently judged to be a National Model School of Character. Cheesequake was additionally honored when Character.org invited the school principal to speak at the National Press Club in Washington DC in April 2014 to share how Cheesequake built a positive school climate and character education structures while concurrently focusing on academic rigor and excellence in teaching and learning.

With a foundation comprised of dozens of character education initiatives and programs firmly in place, the school continued its focus on enhancing teaching and learning. New technology, purposeful and extensive use of assessment data, and staff sharing of a rapidly growing list of best practices promoted additional academic growth. Consequently, in 2014/2015, the school applied for and was named a National Title I Distinguished School, one of only two schools in the State of New Jersey during that year to have this honor. The National Title I Distinguished School award was bestowed largely for academic success and growth on state assessments between 2009 and 2014. Since 2015, our academic success on state assessments has continued to climb.

Cheesequake Elementary is proactive and purposeful in supporting and challenging our students to develop their full potential academically, emotionally, physically, socially, and culturally. Through our Eagle Has Landed Program, a nationally recognized Promising Practice, multicultural celebrations, and other initiatives focused on our racial, ethnic, and cultural differences, we have transformed our diversity from a challenge to one of our greatest strengths. We move beyond merely expecting tolerance to celebrating the diversity in our school. As a result of our explicit focus on multiculturalism and the dozens of programs that comprise our comprehensive character education structure, students are primed for learning.

Students begin each day with a ten-minute morning meeting led by their homeroom teacher, allowing students to build consistent connections with classmates and their teacher and to begin each day ready to focus academically. Throughout the day, students are engaged in technologically enhanced instruction. While just six years ago Cheesequake had very little technology other than a computer lab, Cheesequake teachers now consistently employ Smartboards, iPads, HP stream laptops, Apple TVs, document cameras, and dozens of learning apps and websites to meaningfully engage and assess students, enhance teaching, and make learning more enthralling.

Our Challenge program provides a robust Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math (STEAM) program for students identified as gifted and talented, and multiple academic supports exist for struggling learners. A thriving RTI program, now in its third year, provides interventions for struggling learners needing Tier I, II, and III intervention. Academically struggling students eligible for Title I services additionally receive supplemental instruction in mathematics and ELA twice per week after school and for four weeks in the summer. Monthly data team meetings, led by a new full time guidance counselor, allow classroom teachers, interventionists, Special Education teachers, and the principal to monitor student progress and adjust supports and interventions to optimize success. Cheesequake's commitment to rigor, growth, and excellence in academics combined with our deep commitment to character education, culture, and climate continue to help our students flourish.

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

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

Cheesequake’s core curriculum is a demanding, rigorous implementation of the New Jersey Student Learning Standards (NJSLS).

Cheesequake teachers are passionate about ELA instruction and helping our K-5 students become excellent readers and writers. We utilize a balanced literacy approach by using components such as read-aloud, guided reading, shared reading, guided writing, and phonics/word study. The guided reading and writing processes allow our teachers to work closely on reading strategies and writing instruction with small groups of 3-5 students while other students are engaged in differentiated, meaningful learning centers. In writing, responding to informational text, and literature, students are expected to successfully cite evidence from the text to support their positions, statements, or arguments. Students use graphic organizers, self-assess with rubrics, and a multitude of strategies to write narrative, argument, and informative/explanatory pieces. Students engage in civic learning in ELA as well as take part in debates or writing activities that require them to advocate a viewpoint while considering others’ views.

We are incrementally transitioning from a Rigby program to Houghton Mifflin Harcourt’s Journeys program, a research based, standards aligned series. Regardless of the publisher, Cheesequake teachers are adept at drawing from a wide range of materials, anchor texts, and resources to successfully teach reading, writing, speaking, and other ELA standards and skills.

We use a Singapore mathematics series, Math in Focus, as one of our primary means of teaching the NJSLS. Visual models allow our students to grasp and begin to master foundational underpinnings of mathematics in a manner full of rigor and depth. In addition to MIF resources, our teachers purposefully use a plethora of other materials including Study Island, Education City, Khan Academy, PARCC and Common Core websites, iPads with age-appropriate apps, and Smartboards to provide engaging mathematics instruction.

Teachers place focus on the 8 Standards for Mathematical Practice. Teachers present well-chosen problems in problem-solving activities, use them in whole-class instruction or differentiated math centers, and assist students in monitoring and reflecting on the problem-solving process. Students in Grades 3-5 often utilize a unique four-square graphic organizer that provides a structure to attack word problems. Students also use visual representations such as number bond diagrams in the primary grades and bar models in Grades 2-5 to develop conceptual understanding and solve problems. Our teachers encourage students to use multiple problem-solving strategies, compare strategies in worked examples, and articulate the process they utilized to work through a problem and arrive at the answer.

Our school’s social studies curriculum is derived from the NJSLS and aims to have our students be civic minded, globally and culturally aware, socially responsible, and mindful of numerous viewpoints. Teachers utilize Houghton Mifflin’s textbook series as well as many supplemental materials such as Brainpop, Scholastic News, and Discovery Education. Students are active participants in debates, opinion writing, and various other forms of civic engagement. This past November, students voted in a mock presidential election while receiving instruction on the electoral process from their teachers. Elected students in Grades 4 and 5 serve as Student Council leaders, spearheading multiple schoolwide service learning and community service projects. Third grade students research historical figures, dress up, and present a one minute speech as part of our annual Wax Museum. Fifth grade students have begun a global Skype collaborative project during which they are choosing one of the United Nations’ 17 proposed Sustainable Development Goals and acting. Students are charged with making a global difference by inventing, innovating, or campaigning to assist with one of the UN goals for climate, clean energy, or reducing poverty/hunger.

Our school is transitioning to the Next Generation Science Standards. Students in Grades K to 5 learn about topics including: pushes and pulls; effects of the sun on Earth; weather and climate; plants; animals; ecosystems; light and sound; changes to and properties of matter; Earth’s land and water; life cycles; and forces, interactions, and engineering. Cheesequake’s science program provides a hands-on, inquiry rich

program that focuses on application of content through practices and laboratory activities that deepen science understanding. Cheesequake students become adept at thinking scientifically and are comfortable using the scientific process to solve problems. With the transition to the NGSS, increased focus on the STEM design loop has occurred. The biggest science event of the school year is our annual Science Fair during which every Cheesequake student prepares a display summarizing the student's science experiment, hypothesis, and findings.

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

All kindergarten through fifth grade students receive instruction in the visual arts for 43 minutes per week. The art program at Cheesequake allows each child to make connections between subject areas, cultures, and past and present times. It establishes higher order thinking skills through the process of creative and reflective artwork and promotes visual literacy and an understanding of aesthetics. Student artwork is displayed throughout the school's hallways and bulletin boards and is showcased in the community, District Arts Festival, and community poster contests. Students decorate luminaria bags for use in the district Relay for Life fundraiser, and the skills and techniques gained through art class allow our students to make displays such as student council posters, class projects, grade level shows, and school assemblies.

All students also have choral music once per week for 43 minutes. Music instruction is spiraled, and topics increase in sophistication with age. Students learn about beat vs rhythm, melody, tempo, dynamics, music history, music in culture, the families of orchestra, musicals and operas, and various styles of music. The choral music teacher works closely with students as nearly every grade prepares for their culminating grade level events such as plays, ceremonies, and choral shows. Students in Grades 4 and 5 also have opportunities to learn the flute, clarinet, trombone, or percussion as part of our blossoming instrumental music program. Students in instrumental music also have the special opportunity to play several times per year with our national award winning High School Marching Band.

Students in Grades K and 1 have physical education class twice per week for 43 minutes per class, those in Grades 2 and 3 have PE class 1.5 times per week (once per week for half the year and twice per week for the other half of the year), and students in Grades 4 and 5 have physical education once per week. Health and nutrition are taught by grade level teachers, and students in all grades have a combined 150 minutes per week of PE, classroom PE, health, and nutrition. During PE, students are exposed to formal sports activities such as football, soccer, floor hockey, and volleyball, and they also engage in a variety of cooperative learning games. Students take part in Jump Rope for Heart annually to raise money for cardiovascular disease. 5th graders also have intramural sports after school each spring, and the entire school looks forward to our annual field day.

As early as kindergarten and continuing through Grade 5, students are exposed to numerous cultures from around the world. As one aspect of The Eagle Has Landed program, students in every classroom learn how to say hello and goodbye in all the languages spoken in the classroom, create a class poster on multiculturalism, and share items of cultural significance during a cultural show and tell. Spanish instruction occurs for students one time per week in Grades 3, 4, and 5. A unique aspect of our foreign language offerings over the last three years was additional weekly exposure to a Chinese instructor who taught the language and culture to our 5th graders. Listening, speaking, writing, and reading skills are stressed during our language instruction. Our focus on multiculturalism, various languages, and Spanish and Chinese instruction prepare our students for the middle school where they will be exposed to foreign language instruction in five different languages (Spanish, French, Italian, German, and Chinese) and ultimately choose one to pursue.

Technology has greatly expanded at Cheesequake in the last six years. Six years ago, the school had only one Smartboard and a computer lab. Today, students are immersed in technology that meaningfully enhances and optimizes learning daily as students and teachers have access to a Smartboard, document camera, and Apple TV in every instructional space, over 100 iPads, dozens of laptops, and an updated computer lab. Students in Grades 4 and 5 take part in computer class two times per week while those in Grades K-3 engage in the class once per week. During computer class, students learn productivity software

(Microsoft Word, Excel, Power Point), use various software and apps to complete projects, learn aspects of computer design, receive typing instruction, and engage in coding through code.org.

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

Cheesequake teachers employ research-based, student centered, and engaging instructional techniques that allow for teaching and learning to satisfy and exceed the depth and rigor of the standards. Teachers bridge previous learning with new content, incrementally present material and formatively assess students, provide models, guide student practice, obtain high rates of success, and provide scaffolds for difficult tasks. Technology is used daily, and teachers' discovery and collegial sharing of new apps or programs is allowing the Smartboards, iPads, document camera, laptops, and other devices that are now present in classrooms to be increasingly powerful. One means of lesson closure in the past may have been a paper exit ticket. Now, through apps such as Flipgrid, lesson closure may entail a student recording a video explanation of his/her understanding of the lesson objective or a question. The teacher or other students may then respond to or critique a student's explanation.

We have adopted the tiered instruction and intervention model Response to Intervention (RTI). In addition to extensive use of the state assessment (PARCC) for students in Grades 3-5, all students are screened in the fall, winter, and spring using Easy CBM for math and ELA. Other assessments such as DIBELS, DRA, and Achieve 3000 are used for select student populations to further assess students' proficiency levels and monitor growth.

Decisions on whether students become part of the RTI program are based upon multiple criteria including PARCC Score, Easy CBM score, teacher observation, and classroom and other assessments. Cheesequake's 3 full time RTI interventionists, 2 full time Special Education teachers, part time Challenge (gifted and talented) teachers, guidance counselor, principal, and/or classroom teachers attend monthly data team meetings. At our data team meetings, participants discuss the progress of students with classwork and class assessments and review the data from the varied assessments above to monitor student progress. Student progress on benchmark assessments, assessed not by scale score but more appropriately by comparing growth or decline to the national percentile, is normally projected on the Smartboard as part of the data team meeting discussion.

We strive to provide high quality, standards and research based instructional strategies and materials for all learners in every classroom. We identify strengths and weaknesses for every learner and create goals to help each child optimally grow. When students are excelling, teachers, in every subject area, differentiate instruction to provide enrichment opportunities. Struggling students first receive a Tier I intervention plan from the classroom teacher, and this is shared and discussed at the data team meeting and entered into RTIM Direct, an additional student recordkeeping platform used for RTI and assessment data.

Student interventions in our RTI program occur with increasing frequency and intensity as needed, and students can move from Tier I to II to III and then progress in the opposite direction as well. Tier II services continue Tier I interventions and add new ones, and all Tier II and III interventions are conducted by one of the three RTI Intervention teachers. Tier II services occur either within or outside the general education setting, and Tier III services are more intensive, involve even smaller groups, and typically occur outside the general education setting in another classroom.

In addition to the well-rounded instructional techniques and assessments described above, Cheesequake teachers use the PARCC state assessment data in multiple meaningful ways to improve instruction. Teachers (as a grade level and as individuals) formally reflect on the achievement and growth scores for subgroups, higher performing students, average, and struggling students to try to identify any patterns that warrant shifts in instruction. At the start of the year, the principal also creates and provides a "Current Roster Report" containing detailed scores from the PARCC for each student on the teacher's current roster in various domains and standards. Teachers use this information to individually conference with each student, and the student then gains additional practice using multiple resources on his/her specific areas of weakness.

## PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

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### 1. School Climate/Culture:

Cheesequake was named as a National School of Character for 2014-2019 by character.org, and we strive to consistently cultivate and foster a warm, inclusive, respectful, and collaborative school culture. We engage our racially, religiously, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse student population by showing that we value and celebrate diversity while calling positive attention to collective goals and expectations.

We have dozens of programs that comprise our multi-faceted character education program. Each student demonstrates pride in his/her ethnicity through The Eagle Has Landed Program, nationally recognized as a Promising Practice by character.org. Through this program, each classroom celebrates diversity and multiculturalism during a specific week as they learn how to say hello and goodbye in all languages spoken in the room, create a class poster on tolerance, and engage in a cultural show and tell, explaining an item of cultural significance. Thirty at-risk students take part in our Eagle Gets Mentored program and are mentored weekly by twenty-five staff volunteers. To help students with struggling socialization skills, the guidance counselor conducts “lunch bunches” each week, facilitating conversations during small group lunch meetings in her office.

Students who are observed demonstrating a pillar of character are issued “Good Character Leaves,” have their names read over the PA system on Fridays, and receive a Good Character Certificate from the principal in class. Each marking period, students vote on which classmate showed the best character, and a Student With Character is recognized from each class in front of the school during a character education assembly. Students receive “Oh Wow! Certificates” from teachers for work that stands out as exemplary, and the principal places a congratulatory call to the parent in front of the student. These and others are augmented by additional teacher rewards for excellent effort, academic performance, or character.

Teachers are similarly supported. New teachers receive mentoring, staff meet daily during common planning, and PLCs are collaborative. A Teacher of the Month is named at each faculty meeting and earns a special parking spot for the month. Students and teachers issue staff members “Certificates of Gratitude” at specific junctures during the year. Teachers receive letters of commendation from the principal for their above and beyond efforts, explicitly thank each other during faculty meetings for ways they helped each other, receive poems of thanks from students that are placed under their windshield wipers, and are provided with massages, a luncheon, and other praise during teacher recognition week each spring. The staff has grown to become a cohesive, motivated, and supportive family.

### 2. Engaging Families and Community:

Cheesequake has been purposeful in engaging families and communities in varied ways to enhance student success and school improvement. We have an excellent Parent Teacher Association (PTA) who assist with planning school events, trips, and fundraising. The principal and a rotating set of teachers attend the monthly PTA meetings to discuss student and school highlights (and if necessary, challenges). Parent volunteers serve on various school committees, including the HIB / Character Education Team and the Title I Advisory Committee.

Parents and the community are informed of students' academic achievements in multiple ways. Twitter (@Cheesequakeprin and #cheeproud) has become a frequently used social media vehicle to highlight student and school accomplishments. Our student recordkeeping system's parent portal provides updated access to student grades and attendance. Parents receive phone calls home from teachers frequently and from the principal when a student receives an “Oh Wow” for exemplary academic achievements. Honor Roll Certificates, Good Character Certificates, and Kids with Character letters also inform parents of success.

Parents are provided detailed feedback from teachers at Parent-Teacher Conferences, Title I Parent Conferences (Title I parents only), RTI parent meetings, and individual meetings. Because Cheesequake is

a diverse school community, we proactively engage all families from as many backgrounds as possible. A long-standing tradition of a 4th grade multicultural feast with parent-provided ethnic foods has now been augmented by a separate school-wide multicultural celebration that attracted the vast majority of parents and students in our school last year as we showcased the flags, foods, dress, dance, music, history, and unique aspects of the multiple cultures that comprise our school community. This is bolstered by the Eagle Has Landed Program that takes place for several months each year.

Students, staff, and families come together to help our local and extended community in numerous ways. These include attending and contributing to Relay For Life to raise money for cancer research; volunteering at Camp Robin (special program held on Saturdays for special education students in the town); donating hair to Locks of Love; participating in Jump Rope for Heart for the American Heart Association; and engaging in multiple other community service and service learning projects, including a current campaign through which parents, students, and staff have donated and distributed over 100 care packages for homeless individuals throughout the region this year.

We are proud of the relationships we build with all Cheesequake families to enhance students' academic, social, and emotional success. The partnerships we have forged have enhanced student and school success immensely.

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

Cheesequake's professional development approach provides sustained, data-driven, and need-focused support and learning opportunities to enhance teacher and principal effectiveness and student and school success. Cheesequake teachers receive PD through three district-wide professional development days, five research-supported, Cheesequake-based Professional Learning Community (PLC) days (two hours each), and two additional professional days for each teacher. This year a Rutgers University literacy specialist coached teachers over five school days to enhance ELA instruction. At least 50% of every Cheesequake faculty meeting is also used for professional development to transform monthly meetings from information dissemination to professional growth opportunities. By surveying teachers regarding their perceived needs and by assessing need through state and other assessment data and climate surveys, we structure professional development offerings that will be most applicable, important, and useful for teachers in pedagogy, instructional content, assessment, and intervention.

Cheesequake's principal and several staff members have gained local and state recognition as experts in using assessment data to pinpoint school, grade-level, teacher-specific, and student-level strengths and weaknesses, consequently targeting areas of weakness through professional development and instruction. The thorough, multi-lens analysis of PARCC data is one starting point in determining areas worthy of enhanced PD focus for the upcoming year. For example, School Evidence Statement Reports pinpoint the specific math and ELA standards in which the school excelled or fell short of expectations. Full Detail SGP Reports, created by the principal, reveal which teachers and instructional programs and approaches are yielding the most student growth. This mindset is applied to other types of student assessment data and drives many PD decisions.

The principal believes the staff is full of experts, and he reinforces that he learns from teachers just as they learn from him and others. Teachers turnkey information they learn, ideas are modeled, and follow-up discussions occur. Staff expertise is shared, promoted, and enhanced. Faculty meetings and PLCs showcase best practices and provide multiple opportunities for learning. Two Math and two ELA Lead Teachers attend workshops held by district supervisors and turnkey those presentations to the entire staff throughout the year. Internal "EdCamps" allow every staff member to research and share resources and best practices in technology, differentiated instruction, pedagogy, and more. Our PLCs are increasingly successful, and Cheesequake continues to evolve as a "Community of Practice" as its educators increasingly also become parts of technologically enhanced "Personal Learning Networks" (such as Twitter Chats and other online learning communities, both internal and external to the school and district).

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

While Cheesequake's principal is at the helm steering the school, our school's philosophy is one of shared leadership and teacher, staff, and student empowerment. The principal is a detail and results oriented leader but does not believe in micro-managing because he places confidence in the abilities, work ethic, and passion of the staff and students.

Several constituency groups have important leadership roles in the Cheesequake School Community. The HIB/Character Education team, comprised of the counselor, principal, teachers, and a parent, meets to plan ways to enhance school climate. A Title I Parent Advisory Committee, as well as a Consultation and Collaboration Committee consisting of a wide variety of constituents from the school and community, meet to discuss possible enhancements to the Title I Program. The Cheesequake PTA holds monthly meetings, fundraises for the school, and plans and supervises multiple school events.

The principal began at Cheesequake in 2011, bringing with him experience as a secondary math teacher and vice principal, as well as a commitment to character education, innovative teaching, and using data to inform decision making and instruction. Based upon exemplary practices noted during an observation or outstanding teacher performance in specific areas of student assessments such as the PARCC, the principal asks teachers to turnkey successful strategies. Cheesequake teachers, similarly, identify exemplary work in their students and ask students to present to the class or assist struggling peers. This mindset of identifying excellence, and empowering others to share it, has been contagious. Conversely, when weaknesses are identified, a large support network of identified individuals with expertise assists.

Cheesequake's guidance counselor is another key leader in the school building as she serves as the school's Anti-Bullying Specialist, co-chairs the monthly data team meetings, and provides lessons and supports for all students and staff. Three RTI interventionists co-chair the data team meetings, reviewing with teachers each RTI student's progress and analyzing benchmark data and student growth.

Student leadership is also a valued part of the Cheesequake leadership structure. 5th graders lead the school's pledge of allegiance and Cheesequake School Pledge during the morning announcements. Teachers who head the Student Council empower elected 4th and 5th grade student leaders as they meet monthly to discuss ways to enhance the school and give back to the community. Other student leaders serve as Safety Patrol monitors on the school bus, teachers' helpers, nurse's helpers, serve as peer mentors to younger students, and serve as referees during recess.

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

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The single practice that we believe has been the most influential in the school's academic success is our use of assessment data. We analyze state PARCC assessment data through multiple lenses, highlighting strengths and pinpointing weaknesses on the school level, grade level, specific standard level, teacher level, and student level. The Cheesequake Principal has written "Soar the Scores" (STS) programs that have allowed for unique analyses of state assessment data, and teachers have used these and other reports masterfully, resulting in test score results that defy the expected outcome for our demographics. The principal's programs/reports are created for the 15 other schools in Old Bridge Township Public Schools as well and have gained recognition throughout the county and state.

Our PARCC analysis and data discussions occur at faculty meetings, PLCs, grade-level collaborations, individual meetings, and monthly data team meetings. Through STS Grade Level Reports and NJDOE "School Evidence Statement Reports," teachers identify broad and specific grade level strengths and weaknesses. PD for the year is tweaked accordingly, teachers may reexamine scope and sequence, and common planning periods allow teachers to collaborate on how to strengthen any identified weakness.

STS Current Roster Reports are used by Cheesequake teachers to differentiate instruction for every learner, conference individually with each student regarding his/her specific strengths and weaknesses, and provide opportunities for student practice in the weak areas. STS Detailed SGP Reports illuminate details about the single mSGP score provided to teachers by the state. These reports inform teachers of each student's individual growth scores and provide two years of detailed assessment scores for each student. Teachers reflect on their reports to notice trends in student growth. Moreover, by aggregating data to the teacher level and then comparing to a larger sample size for more teachers, the reports allow the teacher to precisely know his or her strengths and weaknesses in teaching content.

We examine a myriad of assessment reports beyond the state assessment, and we believe our use of assessment data has allowed us to objectively identify, study, and replicate success while concurrently pinpointing school, grade level, teacher, and student weaknesses that can be targeted and strengthened. An examination of our state assessment results reveal the extent to which our data focused culture has helped catapult student success. Cheesequake scores have sharply increased over recent years and have been the highest or among the highest in the state when compared to our peer group of similar schools.