

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

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Mr. Tom A. Grosinske

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

Official School Name Washington Elementary School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 506 East Main Street

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

City Whitewater State WI Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 53190-2072

County Walworth County

Telephone (262) 472-8600 Fax (262) 472-8610

Web site/URL http://www.washington.wwusd.org E-mail tgrosinske@wwusd.org

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

Date _____

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent*Dr. Mark Elworthy E-mail melworthy@wwusd.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Whitewater Unified School District Tel. (262) 472-8700

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. Casey Judd
(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):
- 3 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 1 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 5 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	18	22	40
K	26	26	52
1	16	33	49
2	23	22	45
3	35	19	54
4	20	26	46
5	23	27	50
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	161	175	336

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 1 % Asian
 - 3 % Black or African American
 - 41 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 1 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 54 % 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: 4%

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

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	5
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	8
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	13
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2015	336
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.039
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	4

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 29 %
96 Total number ELL

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 48 %
Total number students who qualify: 162

8. Students receiving special education services: 15 %
49 Total number of students served

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

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| <u>1</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>2</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>6</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>4</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>19</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>1</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>3</u> Mental Retardation | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |
| <u>13</u> Multiple Disabilities | <u>6</u> Developmentally Delayed |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 10
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	17
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	11
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a licensed professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	4
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 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%	97%	97%	97%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

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

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

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.
Yes No

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.

Where everyone learns to make a difference.

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

When making application for awards such as the Blue Ribbon School's designation, it is often necessary to start at the end, the empirical measures, data and test scores that indicate accomplishment. Paradoxically, one of the main reasons for Washington Elementary's success in closing achievement gaps is that we start at the beginning. While we live in an educational climate that requires attention to performance measures, data analysis, problem solving based on these parameters, Washington's staff has never lost sight of the fact that student success begins with having a thorough, personal, and functional understanding of the children who face us in the classrooms. Our primary mission is to create self-reliant learners who know themselves as well as they know the curriculum, who know they are allowed to make mistakes and are proud to learn from them. A playful, energetic staff makes learning fun and demonstrates that the willingness to look silly and have fun can be a sign of great confidence.

Established in 1857 as East Side School, Washington is one of three elementary schools serving the city of Whitewater, Wisconsin. Whitewater is a small rural city, and home to one of the University of Wisconsin's smaller campuses. College students make up a large portion of the city's population. This contributes to our community's diversity and to the transient nature of housing and reduced percentage of home-ownership in our town. It also offers opportunities for arts and cultural performances, sports venues, and ecological and scientific connections that might otherwise be unavailable to students in a rural setting. The University of Wisconsin-Whitewater (UWW) graduates more teachers than any other state campus. Student observers, mentors, and interns are a frequent presence in our school. Washington is home to 337 students enrolled in 4K through 5th grade. English is not the primary home language for 29% of our student population and 48% of them receive free or reduced lunch. We also provide a breakfast nutrition program. Special education professionals serve 15% of our students in both pull-out and inclusionary settings. We have been honored as a Wisconsin School of Recognition for both academic performance and closing gaps for students in targeted groups. Our history of service to English Language Learners began as the first district school with a department in this area, and continues in its innovative approach today.

Washington Elementary has a history of innovation and proactive educational practice. We embraced the SAGE (Student Achievement Guarantee in Education) initiative to provide additional funds to reduce class sizes in grades K-3, including maintaining the records of outcome measures necessary for participation in this federal program. Our results prompted the Whitewater district to go to referendum to provide funds to enable all students to be educated in classrooms with a low student to teacher ratio. Our efforts in the other SAGE areas of school community collaboration, rigorous curriculum and strong professional development and staff evaluation continue as this program was replaced by the Achievement Gap Reduction (AGR) Act. Our commitment has always been to meet our students where they are, develop a complete understanding of their needs in and out of the classroom and use the best educational tools and resources available to maximize their growth and engagement with their education.

We partner with many community organizations in Whitewater to benefit from the entire range of talents in our community. UWW psychology students tutor and provide bench-marking for third grade students in reading. Organizations such as Fast Friends and the Student Optimist Club link university mentors with children in need of social and academic support. Students can participate in strings music education, perform with a traveling children's theater troupe or participate in youth sports programs. We are generously supported by local service organizations such as the Kiwanis and Lions Club who assist us in providing diverse needs such as eyeglasses, home use iPads for students on the autism spectrum, winter coats and appropriate footwear housed in our building's shoe and coat closets. Community volunteers come weekly serving as Grandreaders for our students who need practice with a caring adult. A school district emergency fund has provided rapid and wide ranging family support, including services for families displaced by an apartment fire this year. District personnel also coordinate holiday gift giving and other relief for families in need.

Whitewater's community has been very supportive of its schools and teachers, approving referendum to exceed Wisconsin's spending cap, and to renew that funding level in a second election. They have also authorized construction for increasing technology, building safety, and improved instructional spaces. We have been the recipient of a technology bequest that enabled significant upgrades to our technology resources and are honored by our community's investment in us with both their financial and talent resources.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

We trust the professional judgment, experience, and genuine heart of our teachers. We expect that each year will be different than the last because the make-up of our classrooms change every year. Students move in and move out, mature or regress, experience trauma or the enrichment from their home environments. Some years we need more focus on phonics and sound blending. Another cycle will require intense vocabulary instruction or math computation practice for children whose previous background has not prepared them for what comes next. Occasionally we have a group of students who have mastered math facts and basic operations, sound symbol relationships and grade level sight word vocabulary. These students define success as working quickly and often sacrifice accuracy and comprehension in the process. These years we focus heavily on self-monitoring, applications of skills to new learning, and refining independence in reading and math skills. The plan begins with the people, the big ones and the little ones.

Literacy instruction consists of a balanced literacy framework built around the Wisconsin Model Academic Standards for English Language Arts. The elements of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, oral reading fluency and comprehension are foundational. Essential literacy skills and strategies are taught in the context of authentic quality children's literature to ensure students are receiving skill instruction, while instilling a love for reading that will last them a lifetime. Skills mastered in reading for comprehension, learning how to evaluate what they read, and being able to write for both audience and purpose will enable our students to participate fully in their communities, high school, and for some, higher education. Anyone observing a literacy lesson will see both whole group and targeted small group instruction; individual 1:1 teaching for at-risk learners; reading and writing workshop practices defined by the Lucy Calkins framework; and essential independent reading where students apply skills and strategies in text at their own levels. Ongoing formative assessment of student progress helps inform how best to differentiate instruction to effectively support all learners.

Kindergarten through fifth grade students participate twice yearly in the development of an Individual Learning Plan in both literacy and math. This goal setting goes far beyond setting score targets. It includes identification of the learning behaviors in both home and school environments that will be necessary to attain these performance levels. Students know where they are and what their targets are for subsequent testing. Student's take on the responsibility of sharing these aspirations with parents during biannual conferences. Students are offered the opportunity to share when these goals are met with staff other than their homeroom teachers. This reinforces the belief that it takes a team of educators to help students achieve these personal goals. This personal responsibility for learning objectives is a critical component in successes in high school, college, career, and civic participation.

Our building's approach to math instruction is guided by the Math Expressions program. One of its most attractive features is that it provides multiple ways to solve problems and to organize math thinking. Students see and use visual, tactile and language supported methods for solving computational problem. Guided by Wisconsin Model Academic Standards, grade level curricula enable teachers to engage students in discourse around not only how a mathematical rule is used but also why the rule is used and where it derived from. This facilitates applications to more advanced coursework and real-life applications. Teachers monitor student progress in math through unit assessments and formative checks, differentiating instruction based on student need. As in literacy, students set individual goals for their progress in math and work to achieve them.

Science instruction is built around the Next Generation Science Standards. Each grade level team has created units around the standards and although each grade level has units that may differ in specific topics, the Disciplinary Core Ideas, the Cross Cutting Concepts and the Science/Engineering practices are core ideas that build on each other as students progress through the grades. Our district has been unable to find a published curriculum that meets all of our science goals, so individual units are assembled and presented to create a comprehensive and engaging experience which includes hands on, experiment based and student driven opportunities at all levels. The kindergarten dinosaur gig, third grade magnetism and electricity science fair, and solar system tour power points by fifth graders all showcase learning while sharing their

accomplishments with the entire school and sparking interests in pursuing STEM concepts for future study or employment.

The social studies curriculum has been built around the Wisconsin Model Academic Standards for Social Studies. There are five strands that run through each grade level in our curriculum. These strands are Geography, History, Political Science, Economics, and the Behavioral Sciences. Teachers in grades PK-5 have collaboratively created units that encompass these strands at each level. There is a logical progression of units from preschool through fifth grade that teach the overarching social studies concepts. Simulations of community interactions, the immigrant experience and westward expansion enhance our students' understanding of their place in the world.

Washington Elementary School's 4K curriculum is aligned to the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards. Our 4K teacher offers instructional units related to Health/Physical Development, Social/Emotional Development, Language Development, Learning Approaches and Cognition/ General Knowledge. All of this is done in the context of a balanced curriculum that supports learning through play, exploration, and rigorous academically based learning activities. Since the implementation of Washington's 4K program, there has been a significant improvement in readiness for students as they transition to 5K. Because the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards very tightly align to the Common Core Standards, our kindergarten teachers have had to provide less remediation.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

To reach the ultimate goal of creating well-rounded individuals and fostering their unique talents and skills, Washington supports student development through the visual arts, music, health, and physical education (PE). We recognize that supporting all students in these "enclave" curricular areas engages students and provides opportunities for them to both learn and showcase what they have learned.

Integrating visual arts, performing arts and music into the core content areas has been a strong initiative for Washington Elementary School for the last several years. Through an arts integration grant from the Margaret A. Cargill Foundation, teachers have been trained in arts integration techniques by a facilitator from the Kennedy Center arts program. With these tools and with support from fine arts teachers, core content teachers utilize music and the arts in their literacy, math, science and social studies instruction.

Art instruction, aligned to National Core Arts Standards, is delivered in two 45 minute periods weekly. This allows students to see through multiple lenses. The five overarching Core Arts standards encompassing Artistic Process, Creating, Presenting, Responding and Connecting and are all accomplished in the context of the units taught at each grade level. These six units, Line & Shape, Color, Space & Form, Texture & Rhythm, Emphasis & Balance, and Unity, and are implemented specifically at the developmental level of students. Students utilize concepts such as symmetry and perspective that link to our math curriculum. They manifest their understanding of world cultures, the natural world, and key literature references in the art they produce with teacher guidance and inspiration. An exterior mural featuring Wisconsin wildflowers and landmarks of the Whitewater community is beginning to bloom on the east side of our school guided by our art instructor who secured grant funding and designed the project after touring municipal mural sites throughout the United States.

Physical education at Washington is truly wellness education that students participate in three days per week for 30 minutes. Linked to Wisconsin State Standards for Physical Education, there is no better place for students to demonstrate how individual effort pays off for teams and personal goals. Embracing the "Fit for Life" framework, the components of cardio-respiratory endurance, muscular strength, muscular endurance, flexibility and body composition are incorporated in daily lessons. Our students have participated in a voyageurs obstacle course, understand relative measurement, and showcase teamwork and problem solving in team sports. Physical education games have featured stations that include letters for kindergartners and key vocabulary terms, allowing students to use muscle memory to support classroom learning.

Technology education is provided both in classrooms and in two laptop equipped computer labs. Students receive targeted technology lessons addressing keyboarding, publishing, research and search engines.

Project based learning that is linked to language arts, social studies and science curricula allow children to demonstrate competencies in creating documents, PowerPoint, and photo story products. Washington Elementary has support from the library/media specialist, the library/media paraprofessional and the district technology integrator in creating and utilizing high level tech integrated instructional lessons.

Washington's thrice weekly music curriculum is a study in how parts unite to make a whole. Our award-winning music teacher sees herself as a musical storyteller, and she is a pied piper in helping her students to see themselves in that role. The music curriculum is aligned to the Wisconsin State Standards for Music and the national Core Arts Standards for Music. Our students acquire their music proficiency through exploration of the basic elements of music, including rhythm, melody, harmony, timbre, form and texture. Our 4th and 5th grade students have the opportunity to participate in band or an after school strings class. Music is a vehicle for learning content as well as technique, as in last year's ancient cultures themed student musical which included every 4th and 5th grade student in the school.

Washington Elementary School has a full time guidance counselor on staff that provides guidance lessons for all students. These lessons include essential topics for students' mental wellness including, The successful habits of students, skills for learning, empathy, emotion management, fair play, brain-based learning, growth mindset, career exploration, anti-bullying and personal safety. Washington recognizes the necessity for students to have this information while fostering their mental wellness and development.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

Washington succeeds by planting seeds in well prepared soil. This begins with excellent universal instruction that is responsive to the needs of the unique learners. Parental support, administrative guidance, responsive teaching practices, a hierarchy of supportive interventions in literacy, math, and behavioral issues allows Washington to nurture growing students and weed out the impediments to learning and reaching targets. For those children who do not thrive in our common garden, a resource team process is utilized in a formal way in early months of every school year. This becomes an automatic part of individualized instruction as the year progresses, teachers seeking out the ideas, materials, release time, continuing education and team teaching required to allow students to meet their personal and academic goals. Resources are not always formal programs, but often the collaborative discussions to aid student growth in a personally designed set of supports. Washington is blessed with an outstanding teaching staff, with several regional and state teaching award winners in residence. The competence, commitment and collaborative nature of our entire staff is one of our greatest and most frequently tapped assets.

addressed in the venue that best meets students' needs.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

In a time where there are many stresses and demands on the teaching profession, Washington Elementary's staff is a happy bunch. Smiles and laughter abound in this building. On the first day of school the entire staff is in the front lobby to greet our incoming students in the newest version of our staff t-shirt. We send them into winter break with the staff's "festive sweater" photo. Along with this special dress up day, students and staff participate in a snow sledding party complete with hot cocoa. Our students and families know these are not just photo ops, rather a manifestation of the positive feeling between staff members and our families. This team demonstrates a profound trust of each other as educators and as people. We are never bored here. We love our jobs and it shows. We have a history of eating together in monthly pot-lucks, attending district sporting events as a group, and celebrating holidays together. We have a district wide staff wellness program that encourages and rewards exercise and other good health habits. Staff members participate in organized sports, yoga, exercise tapes, hydration and walking challenges together before and after school. Additions to our team via transfers from other district schools have been common in the past. Many of our staff members are or have been Washington parents as well as Washington teachers. That kind of pride and investment is invaluable.

Our curriculum includes a monthly Character–Ed focus, including a student-produced assembly to highlight a specific character trait such as leadership, empathy or fairness. Assemblies also include expressions of appreciation for students and staff that have provided service to others or met academic or social goals. This allows us to highlight what our students do right. It's not just what we do, it's who we are. We work hard to teach our students that they are part of a larger community and that their actions matter. Older students act as cadets, supervising hallways and assisting younger students. A school Green Team takes responsibility for making sure our school grounds are well cared for and welcoming. We have collected Halloween candy in a Sweet Swap sent to military personnel overseas, sent Valentines to veterans, provided Medicine bottles for Malawi, and empathy baskets for community recipients nominated by our students. We find ways for students who might be recipients of these programs to earn ways to be the donors through their in-school behavior or academic achievements. It feels good to do good, not for the reward or recognition, but for the change it makes in the world. We also see the change it creates in our students, increasing their capacity for focus, academic achievement, responsibility, and community service.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Washington pays special attention to reducing barriers in connecting with families and the community. Our building secretary is bilingual enabling her welcoming presence to address the needs of our Spanish speaking families. Translators are available for parent/teacher conferences and other contacts. Most informational documents are available in Spanish and in English. Our guidance counselor provides guidance and assistance in finding resources for families in need. Small groups that address family changes, friendship-making skills, stress management, and flexible thinking and problem solving are offered by guidance, special education, and general education working together. Parents consistently report their children's teachers are friendly, approachable and committed to their children's success. Activities such as concerts, talent shows, movie nights, family fun nights and parent/teacher conferences are extremely well attended. An active Parents-And-Teachers-Together group has sponsored a school-wide Walk-a-Thon, student Opera performances, Souper-Bowl fundraisers for our local food pantry and an annual Family Fun Night that is open to our entire community.

We have worked hard to develop a building-wide literacy/numeracy culture. Parents are partners in this share/practice/enjoy model of skill development. Extensive classroom libraries and book bags sent home for reading practice offer opportunities to share what they have read with others and are key features of instruction. We offer weekly book club opportunities for students to read together during recess. Our BERT (Boys Enjoying Reading Together) and GERT (Girls Enjoying Reading Together) groups are well-attended and often reach many students in targeted categories of academic concern. Take home projects encourage family conversations about books. We are constantly trying to place students in situations where curiosity

and creativity are required for their success. The four C's of 20th Century Learning, Collaboration, Critical Thinking, Communication, and Creativity are at the core of how we organize our students' curriculum and how we present it to parents. Assignment notebooks and parent communication logs enable parents and teachers to remain in close contact while requiring the student's participation and responsibility. Practice materials, flash cards, e-mail contacts and open door policies keep parents in touch and kids on target. When all parties are informed about what is going on in instruction and feel they are critical to success, student academic performance rises.

Parents are encouraged to be an integral part of their children's education throughout the year. Initiatives such as "VIP Day", "Pick a Day, Come and Play", "Donuts with Dad" and "Muffins with Mom" invite parents to participate and celebrate and support academic and social growth.

3. Professional Development:

The Whitewater School District provides professional development for teachers and administrators including understanding responsive instruction, trauma-informed practices and the impact of poverty. Our Spanish for Educators initiative enables teachers to meet weekly to receive Spanish instruction and engage in conversational Spanish with colleagues. Summer Academy offers dozens of professional development sessions to choose from, tailored to specific professional needs and challenges. The district also provides rigorous new teacher orientation and mentor support throughout the year, emphasizing Charlotte Danielson's Framework of Teacher Effectiveness and how the components of the model can guide their instruction.

We stay in touch formally through monthly staff and grade-level meetings. At the same time, we recognize teachers need time to prepare strong lessons and strive to limit meetings that don't directly impact students. We have a highly collaborative spirit here, which includes a willingness to ask for help and to provide it without judgment. There is no pecking order, and all teachers are equally valued regardless of teaching assignment.

While we use technology pieces such as Rubicon Atlas to map our curriculum and to align it to Wisconsin Academic standards, the most valuable interactions around curriculum alignment come in teacher-to-teacher conversations about the topics mastered year to year in all four disciplines. There are ongoing conversations about which books to use for lessons and for read-alouds, and which films and internet sites are best for furthering understanding and piquing student interest. This kind of vertical alignment use of the common language of instruction facilitate a seamless, high-quality education for all students regardless of their classroom placement. Even as teachers individualize instruction, they are mindful of the key elements that must be mastered for students to be successful in the next grade placement. One of the stairwells in our building is adorned by a student crafted ceramic tree-themed mosaic of the curricular themes taught at each grade level. Like their educational experiences here at Washington, kindergarten concepts provide the bedrock foundation and layers are added each year to increase the depth, complexity and individuality of student learning. This ceramic tree is a permanent reminder of the importance of our connectedness across the grade levels, much of which occurs during professional development opportunities.

When areas of concern are identified, Washington Elementary uses the professional study group concept to bridge that gap. Teachers choose a publication that is directly related to an area of professional growth they want to pursue. We read and discuss the findings of the book and its implications for our professional practice. Then we put into action what we have learned collectively.

4. School Leadership:

Washington's principal demonstrates a leadership management style that honors the professionalism and success of teachers, supporting them when needed, celebrating when goals are met, and working together when challenges are presented. He is our conduit for the "must-dos" of education in the current climate; our guide in our "should-dos" as we provide exemplary education; and our cheerleader in the "can-dos" as we seek to provide a rich, engaging and fun learning environment for all students and their families. As the former district head football coach, he also provides a connection to our larger school district community.

Role models in athletics, academics, and the arts are frequent visitors to our school as performers and mentors. These home grown heroes along with their university counterparts provide attainable models for our students to emulate. Once again, it is often about relationships, and this begins in the principal's office, where most of the students are known by name, and not because they need discipline or correction.

Teachers are also encouraged to be leaders in this framework. Multiple opportunities for service and professional growth are available through our building leadership team, curriculum planning, and other district committees. Our monthly character education assemblies and reward activity days are overseen by a character education committee, but crafted by new teacher teams each month.

Our support staff - including guidance, special education and intervention teachers - design, research, develop and facilitate student groups such as Superflex (flexible thinking and problem solving) and Friends on Fridays (friendship and social skills). Teachers lead extracurricular activities - such as Student Council, Cadets, Engineering Club, student art performances, and our internal gardeners, the Green Team - by quality instruction and by example.

When school-wide needs present themselves - such as organizing the school resource book room, coordinating staff wellness activities, facilitating instruction through technology, or implementing programs such as TRIBES - we have a wealth of internal experts and leaders to rely on. We have social media gurus, musicians, poets, wordsmiths, visual artists, organizers and visionaries to call upon. Teachers choose, organize and lead book study groups to further staff learning and passion for education.

Our personal skills and connections become assets for our students and staff. We cultivate our university connections for student access to STEM topics such as anatomy or chemistry. We tap Washington families to lead presentations and learning activities. We lead and are lead by a passion for our kids.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

The things that grow best in the Washington garden are a shared purpose and a sense of internal pride. This is true for students, staff, families and our community at large. One of our school nicknames is “The Pride of the East Side.” Our students know that we care for them, and about them and in return they care. We set realistic expectations based on individual needs of students. Kids know that these targets are possible and that there will be help along the way. They allow learners to compete against themselves, their best imagined selves. Data and test scores are not defining numbers, but markers along a path of continual improvement.

Teachers provide MAP (Measures of Academic) goal cards for student participation in setting performance targets and encourage celebration with all the teachers who have supported students when they are met. We had had many instances where students will ask to visit teachers to show them their results once they have completed their MAP assessments. Our staff always takes the time to celebrate with students when they visit. Mistakes are dealt with as ways to grow, learn, and fix what has not gone well. We regularly monitor and reward improvements in self-monitoring and self-corrections, editing and revision. We share our mistakes and rough drafts so that students see errors as a part of learning and growth. Just as the most beautiful and successful gardens contain a variety of growing things, our school values and cultivates its diverse learners. In our model, increasing self-corrections and editing work is just as important as initial accuracy because it takes students from where they are to where they can be. It also creates the independence to read, calculate, evaluate, and extend without the need of adult support.

Washington provides the kinds of challenges and opportunities that build self-confidence, recognize and celebrate the good choices as a school family. Our aim is not to solve their problems for them, but to teach them to solve their own problems. Like a well cut diamond, we provide many different avenues or areas to shine. Washington strives to provide a positive environment that supports the academic, social, and emotional growth of the children in our charge. In turn, our students foster our growth as educators and caretakers of children.

One of the unique elements of our approach is the focus on the positive. As writer Martha Beck observes, “People blossom when we love them, not when we worry about them. Worry just teaches worry.” We know our responsibilities to close gaps, to fill holes and to eliminate deficits, but we are also mindful of the need to notice, mention and honor the beautiful and successful things about our students and our colleagues. We harvest the flowers and the fruits of our combined labor, instead of focusing on the weeds. That’s how our garden grows.