

**U.S. Department of Education**  
**2018 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 Ms. Jan Murphy

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

Official School Name West School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 769 Ponus Ridge

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

New Canaan CT 06840-3413  
City State Zip Code+4 (9 digits total)

County Fairfield County

Telephone (203) 594-4400

Fax (203) 594-4412

Web site/URL https://www.ncps-k12.org/Domain/12

E-mail jan.murphy@ncps-k12.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. Bryan Luizzi Ed. D

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other) E-mail bryan.luizzi@ncps-k12.org

District Name New Canaan School District Tel. (203) 594-4000

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 Ms. Dionna Carlson

(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 2018 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 2012 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: 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, or 2017.
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 (2017-2018) 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
  - Rural or small city/town
3. Number of students as of October 1, 2017 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
<b>PreK</b>	26	13	39
<b>K</b>	44	30	74
<b>1</b>	46	33	79
<b>2</b>	50	46	96
<b>3</b>	54	50	104
<b>4</b>	49	50	99
<b>5</b>	0	0	0
<b>6</b>	0	0	0
<b>7</b>	0	0	0
<b>8</b>	0	0	0
<b>9</b>	0	0	0
<b>10</b>	0	0	0
<b>11</b>	0	0	0
<b>12 or higher</b>	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	269	222	491

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 6 % Asian
  - 0 % Black or African American
  - 3 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 89 % White
  - 2 % Two or more races
  - 100 % Total**

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

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2016 – 2017 school year: 3%

If the mobility rate is above 15%, please explain.

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, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	11
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	3
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	14
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2016	489
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.03
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	3

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):  
Norwegian, Spanish, Hungarian, Portuguese

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 0%  
Total number students who qualify: 0

8. Students receiving special education services: 9 %  
45 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>14</u> Autism                  | <u>1</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                 | <u>2</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness           | <u>5</u> Other Health Impaired                 |
| <u>11</u> Developmentally Delayed | <u>6</u> Specific Learning Disability          |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance    | <u>13</u> Speech or Language Impairment        |
| <u>1</u> Hearing Impairment       | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>0</u> Intellectual Disability  | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 4
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	24
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	23
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	12
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 19:1

12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

<b>Required Information</b>	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013
Daily student attendance	96%	96%	96%	96%	95%
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 2017.

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

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.

Yes  No

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award.

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

At West School, we are committed to provide innovative and collaborative opportunities that encourage parents, teachers, and community members to work as partners in creating a world class education that is student centered and second to none.

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**

---

New Canaan is an affluent town in Fairfield County, 48 miles northeast of New York City. It is well known for its excellent public school system. New Canaan also boasts a wide range of architecture from the Harvard Five modern homes, to historic New England colonials. New Canaan was primarily known as an agricultural community. As the railroad became accessible to the town, many of New York City's wealthiest residents built summer homes in the area. Eventually, these summer visitors became year-round residents who commute to New York City.

West School takes great pride in being able to recognize the collective efforts of our school system and we know our success is directly related to the strength of the district itself. As a member of the New Canaan Public Schools (NCPS), West School shares the belief of our Superintendent of Schools that, “the work we do with students is the most important work on the planet.” As a district, and a school, we are dedicated to providing an exceptional educational experience for all students, anchored by rigorous standards of performance in an engaging, caring, and supportive environment.

When speaking about the nature and context of the community, we acknowledge our strong partnership with our Board of Education. Every member is actively and thoughtfully engaged in serving our district. Their outstanding service and dedication to our students allows us to continually learn and grow. We are grateful for their incredible support and know they are committed to meeting the ever-changing needs of our students.

At West, we value the concept of balance. We strive to balance high expectations for academic growth with attention to the social and emotional growth of every child. Our core curriculum is developed at the district level and is based on the Connecticut Core Standards. The New Canaan Public Schools’ curriculum is dynamic in nature. It constantly is evolving and changing based on student needs. Under the guidance of our Assistant Superintendent and District Curriculum Coordinators, teachers and specialists from each grade level and from across the district use Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins’ Understanding by Design (UbD) framework to write and revise units of study. During the process, teachers share their strong knowledge of student needs and specialists offer their strong content knowledge to the process. The implementation of new units is facilitated by grade level lead teachers as well as curriculum specialists.

Just as the district addresses the development of academic competence in our students, it also addresses the social and emotional competencies as well. Our District Student Support Specialist works closely with all district administrators to implement New Canaan’s Social, Academic and Personal Learning (SAPL) Framework which is designed to support the needs of the whole child. Our district report cards include indicators connected to the SAPL framework that measure student growth. The indicators provide a common language for conversations between teachers and parents. The indicators provide clear guidelines for student development and are a tool that inform professional learning. Our goal is to provide consistent experiences that support social, academic and personal growth.

Our school-wide behavior matrix called The Three R’s: Be Ready, Be Respectful, Be Responsible was developed to establish clear expectations across all school settings. Students use the matrix as a tool for reflection and personal goal setting. Morning Meeting time is set aside each day to establish and revisit expectations, as needed. Morning Meeting can also be a time for classroom teachers to explicitly teach our SAPL indicators through the use of picture books, role-playing or working with a buddy class.

Town Meetings are student led, school-wide assemblies. They are a cornerstone of our West School traditions. The concept of a Town Meeting was adopted from Responsive Classroom. The meetings highlight our work with buddy classes, grade level service projects and the SAPL indicators. During each performance, our music teacher leads the boys and girls in our West School Song along with others to teach The Three R’s: Be Ready, Be Respectful, Be Responsible. Town Meetings provide a strong sense of school community and student pride.

In describing our students, you will find them to be polite, well spoken, eager to learn, respectful, reflective,

and internationally diverse. Each are actively involved in the community and are eager to help others. They take an active role in their education and value the opportunity to learn. In 2015, the New Canaan Community Foundation published a book called “West Kids Can Change the World!” Of particular note is this quote from the book, “Change can start with one person. That person is YOU! So go out, make a change and see what you can do” (Dewing, 2015). At West, we believe our students have the capacity to change the world!



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

---

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

“Tell me and I forget. Show me and I remember. Let me do and I understand”. ~Confucius

We believe that language is a tool for learning and we use this approach to integrate writing and reading. Children participate in small group instruction that is differentiated to meet their needs and flexible grouping is used for guided reading, strategy groups, and direct instruction on specific core skills and concepts. Students spend a lot of time reading silently and teachers use conferring to check comprehension and levels of understanding of text. The interactive read alouds are carefully planned around a theme for discussion and a great deal of planning goes into an effective lesson for increasing reflections and interpretation for comprehension. Reading is also supported through our library media specialist during the specials block. To provide students with core phonics instruction, we use the Foundations Reading Program in grades K, 1 and 2. This provides an instructional program that is implemented with fidelity, is researched based, and directly aligned to the core standards in reading foundational skills and writing.

In mathematics, students are engaged in opportunities to explore, take risks, and problem solve. There is a clear distinction between solving problems and learning to problem solve. Students learn to think and become responsible for their own learning. Our faculty study group is focused on intentional talk and how to structure and lead mathematical discussions to promote student discourse and deeper levels of understanding. Using carefully selected problems, teacher facilitate conversations that get at those deeper levels of understanding. Students grow in their knowledge of content standards as well as application of math practice standards. This work is helping us to bridge the gap between student engagement and conceptual understanding. Advanced math placement is available to grade 4 students who meet rigorous district criteria. Those who are close to meeting criteria are carefully monitored using what we call “going furthers.” These students learn more complex curriculum that is regularly assessed. We continue to explore ways to use similar strategies with our younger students.

In writing, we use a process vs. a product approach in which students are provided with authentic texts and given relevant tasks that enable them to apply their learning. Foundational skills that teach the craft of writing, and conventions and grammar, are also taught using mentor sentences to explicitly teach how they affect the author's craft. Each grade level has a bag of carefully selected texts for use in the instructional process. We know that writing is developmental and that students learn along a continuum. Teachers continuously assess student writing and use small group instruction to develop a deeper understanding about how and why authors use grammar and conventions in their writing.

Civic learning is embedded into our curriculum through our social studies units and Social and Personal Learning Framework (SAPL). Additionally, every grade level completes one service learning project that involves the entire school. Each project is highlighted and celebrated at our Town Meetings to acknowledge and emphasize our school-wide focus on empathy. Our Kids Care group hosts guest speakers and members of our community to promote civic learning. Our student leadership team provides students with opportunities to participate in food drives and other projects that serve our greater community. We have a partnership with New Canaan Cares, whose mission it is to raise awareness of current, controversial, and challenging issues facing students today. We understand the importance of civic learning and know that it builds 21st century skills.

In science, the curriculum is designed to promote a sense of wonder and curiosity to increase student engagement and promote a deep understanding of the application of concepts and skills. It is designed to ensure common experiences in the area of inquiry, exploration, and application to achieve high standards of scientific literacy. We have a dedicated science teacher and science lab for all grade 4 students. The science teacher also teaches one class of science to grades 1, 2, and 3 once in a six day rotation. An additional science lab is used by grades K-3 and all students receive experiences according to our district curriculum. Units are designed around the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). All students participate in a rigorous curriculum that requires them to ask questions, define problems, and develop and use models.

Students plan and carry out investigations and analyze and interpret data. Students use mathematics and computational thinking in science as they construct explanations and design solutions.

In social studies, inquiry and citizenship are at the heart of instruction. There is a strong focus on content relevance for students as a member of a larger global community. Are they able to transfer their knowledge to another place in the world or another time? Students become informed members of the global community and concepts learned are integrated across all disciplines to promote civic learning. Classroom teachers have time to collaborate with specialists and students make authentic community connections. Students in grade four study U.S. Immigration Past and Present through the concept lenses of migration, identity, and contributions. They use primary source documents including artifacts, pictures, and oral histories as well as secondary informational text. Students then conduct research into their own family including traditions, experiences, or immigration. Part of this work involves creating an oral history by interviewing someone.

Our integrated preschool uses a rigorous core curriculum that is aligned to the Connecticut Early Learning Development Standards (ELDS) which align to Connecticut's Core Standards. Special education students, along with typical peers, learn to explore, create and interact in specially designed lessons to meet their specific needs. Our curriculum includes the integration of language/literacy, math, science, social studies, creative arts, physical development, social and emotional development and cognition. Our preschool faculty uses the work of Michelle Garcia Winner for teaching social skills and students participate in the Foundations reading program. The preschool staff uses benchmark data to analyze student needs and inform instruction. Once a child enters kindergarten, we use the SAPL report card indicators, classroom observations, communication among preschool staff and kindergarten teachers and support staff to continuously monitor student progress.

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

### **The Arts**

Central to all educational experiences, our visual and performing arts add value and merit to the instructional experience. These programs motivate student to think, feel, question, and succeed as lifelong learners. Students learn observational skills and practice as they engage in opportunities to develop fine and gross motor skills. In addition, each of our concerts is linked to the curriculum by integrating music with social studies, science, math, art, and foreign language (Spanish). Students in grades 3 and 4 also have an opportunity to select a strings instrument (violin, cello or viola) to learn at school. Students acquire knowledge in art through a variety of methods. The use of art history provides opportunities for students to participate in the creative process using multiple mediums, methods, and materials. Students are engaged in self reflection of their artwork and inspired to pursue each of the different styles of the artists they have studied. Student artwork is visually displayed throughout the school and is always accompanied with a brief description of the project. Student inspired artwork, which is displayed throughout the school is evidence of student's ability to integrate the many facets from various artists' work and make them truly their own. Students are encouraged to reflect on their art and select their best work for display at our school Art Show in the spring.

### **Physical Education**

Our district will be implementing a health curriculum that uses a skill based approach. The vision is to maintain and enhance a skills based, student centered curriculum with the goal of producing health literate citizens who are capable of making informed decisions that lead to a healthy lifestyle. To be health literate students need to be able to manage their own health needs as they collect and apply learned knowledge and skills. The curriculum is developed using the National Health Education Standards and the Understanding by Design (UbD) framework. To be physically literate, we use the physical education standards, which provide students with opportunities to practice motor skills. We also use movement concepts, at the individual level, partner level, and small group level. Students are also engaged in the practice of self assessment and setting goals. There are strong connections to our Social and Personal Learning Framework (SAPL) and students will be participating in lessons that promote healthy eating, personal safety, and overall health and wellness.

### **Foreign Language**

Our foreign language program introduces students to the Spanish Language in short intervals consistently over the course of a week. In other words, instead of two 25 minute classes a week, our kindergartners experience FLES every day for 10 minutes. This shorten period allows our teachers to remain in the target language the entire time and establish an expectation in students that a world language should be a part of every student's school day, every day. Our curriculum is content related, which means we begin with the Social Studies curriculum and concepts. From there, FLES teachers create lessons that engage students in lessons that require that they understand and use very rich, purposeful, and interesting language.

#### Technology/Library Media

The Media Center learning commons is an inviting, dynamic, and adaptable space designed to maximize the learning potential of every student. The learning commons fosters 21st century learning for all students by providing equitable access to varied and relevant resources to promote literacy and lifelong learning. It provides a program that is fully integrated into the school's curriculum and is central to the learning process. The learning commons strives to be a center of collaborative learning that produces creative students who have a deep appreciation of literature, critical thinking, inquiry, innovation, discovery, risk taking, and a respect for others and self. Our Library Media Specialist (LMS) and Technology Integrator (TI) both have classroom teaching experience, as they work together for the first time this year, they meet weekly to plan units of study and collaborate on maximizing student achievement. This collaborative approach extends to the collaboration with all teachers to collaborate and integrate classroom curriculums. These teachers have created a model for collaboration, piloting with specific grade levels, and even pushing into their classrooms. One example of this was when our LMS front loaded research skills with all second grade students during library time. Subsequently, he collaborated with second grade teachers to plan and enhance grade level research curriculum to increase higher order thinking and student achievement. West School is poised to grow this successful model and have begun this process with first grade.

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

“Learning is a treasure which accompanies its owner everywhere”

At West, all students are provided a robust and relevant learning environment that begins with a strong, solid foundation in core instruction. High quality, scientifically based instruction is differentiated to meet student needs. Teachers are expected to display essential questions for each instructional unit and articulate clear assessment criteria around what students need to know, understand, and be able to do. Through Tier 1 instruction, teachers differentiate process, product, pacing and content and monitor the progress of small groups by using multiple types of formative assessments to adjust instruction. There is a clear and purposeful design to the learning environment to support high levels of learning. Differentiated instruction is matched to the specific needs of the learner and can include academic, social and emotional, and behavioral needs.

Our assessments for reading include the Developmental Reading Assessment 2 (DRA2) in grades K-4, Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) in grades K-3, and research based Foundations Unit Assessments in grades K-2. Teachers triangulate these data to provide a clear roadmap for next steps in their instructional planning for all students. In math, benchmark assessments include district created benchmarks based on the rigorous curriculum. These assessments are dynamic in nature as they are changed based on student response. They are designed by the district math specialists and overseen by the math coordinator. In addition, there are computational sets, and assessments on addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division facts based on the grade level. Students are also given math problems from Exemplars, a hands-on, standards-based assessment and instruction resource that focuses on authentic learning in the areas of math, science, and writing.

At the end of each trimester, a Universal Screening Team (UST) is convened to examine student data by class and as a grade level. The district provides us with a protocol which clearly articulated steps for this process. Our grade level Instructional Leaders are highly trained to facilitate each grade level team, which consists of classroom teachers, content area specialists, administrators, and special education teachers. There is an expectation that everyone in attendance has completed an in-depth analysis of student data in order to be prepared to address the overall needs of the grade level. Teachers use common core standards to identify

strengths, challenges, and misconceptions. After a discussion about the trends they are observing in the data set, teachers set a SMART goal for the grade level as part of Tier 1 instruction. Once the goal is set, the team creates the optimal student response. Effective teaching strategies from Robert Marzano's book Classroom Instruction That Works or discipline based research materials are then developed and a plan is completed for the team. The progress of the plan is continuously monitored.

The UST looks at how we are meeting the needs of those students who are well above the benchmark, those students who benefit from universal responsive instruction, and those students who need a focused, formal Differentiated Instruction Record (DIR). Students in need of a DIR are discussed with each of the content area specialist to ensure a comprehensive plan is in place to support the student.

At the Tier 2 level, we have a Student Study Team (SST) that meets to decide the need for intervention based on DIR progress monitoring data and benchmark assessments. This level of instruction is closely monitored by the team and is comprised of small group instruction by a skilled specialist in the content area. The SST selects the appropriate strategies and progress monitoring. They consider if the tool isolates and assesses the skills or behaviors in a manner that is measurable and reliable. There is weekly or bi-weekly progress monitoring and the classroom teacher works closely with the specialist on a separate goal (DIR) designed with the guidance of the SST. This instruction is in addition to core classroom instruction.

At the Tier 3 level, in addition to core instruction, students receive support 4 to 5 times per week using a research or evidence based approach (e.g., Wilson, Orton Gillingham). The SST oversees the plan and uses data to make decisions on next steps and if a referral to special education is needed.

To maintain high levels of achievement at West School, ensuring our curriculum is implemented with great fidelity is the first and foremost. Teachers are skilled in the district's Effective Teaching Framework and pursue ongoing professional development to further refine their skills in each of the domains, especially in the area of responsive teaching and differentiated instruction. Our performance expectations require students to think at higher levels and teachers to design instruction at the highest levels possible using Webb's Depth of Knowledge (DOK). There is consistent consideration of the learning needs of students and content is presented using strategies that cognitively engage students in the application and extension of new learning.

## PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

---

### 1. School Climate/Culture:

“...take a moment to slow down to a more thoughtful pace, to ponder, reflect, imagine and envision [to] take the time to believe in your dreams, to celebrate possibility (Reynolds).”

West School is remarkable in that it has an exceptionally positive school culture. We support, value, and respect the balance that is needed between work and life, while at the same time maintaining a culture that inspires a love of learning. It is intentional, well planned, and strategic. This is some of the most important work that we do. Our social committee works exceptionally hard every summer to plan innovative and unique ideas that support and value our faculty. We kick off the year with our Back to School breakfast and we pair classrooms together with a “Buddy Class” that allows teachers to get creative and provide positive experiences for older students to be mentors and models for our younger students. Our annual Halloween parade promotes team-themed costumes and our West School Spirit Wear days are sprinkled into every month to ensure there is plenty of West School Pride at every turn of the school year.

Staff birthdays are important at West School. A “Birthday Treat” each month is provided in the faculty lounge to celebrate monthly birthdays. Our weekly TGIF breakfasts provide time for faculty to come together each week and connect on a social level. This year, teachers were provided with gratitude journals, wore ugly sweaters, and decorated classroom doors to celebrate the winter doldrums. Our social committee provided a hot chocolate bar, a popcorn bar, Souper Bowl luncheon, Potato Bar, Salad Bar, and ice cream bar. These are quickly becoming West School traditions. We celebrate International Happiness Day, weddings, babies, and happy events as well as provide support for staff who might have medical emergencies, family deaths, or other life changing events.

This year, our school created a “West School Charter” after many months of professional learning around Emotional Intelligence. Our West School Committee, comprised of 21 faculty members and staff, created a visual using our school mascot, Westy the Whale. The charter states that West School faculty and staff will feel supported, valued, balanced, respected, and inspired every day at West School. The charter is a collaborative document designed to help us establish a supportive and productive learning environment. It was created by members of our entire school community, including secretaries, custodians, and teaching assistants. It serves as a visual reminder of how we want to feel at school. Through our collaborative work in creating the Charter, we were able to establish clear and common goals. As we move into the next school year, our West School Charter will serve as a tool for holding one another other accountable and strengthening our positive school climate.

Finally, our teachers are supported by the great work of our reading, writing, and math specialists who serve as instructional coaches for instruction. They meet with teachers to unpack units of study, plan professional development opportunities within the school, and often form study groups to learn about current hot topics in education. They share pedagogical knowledge with one another and we participate in a school-level PLC (Professional Learning Community) to analyze the specific needs of our school. Our strong collaborative culture of sharing, learning, and responsive teaching sends a message to faculty that their work is valued and respected. Each of our faculty members has a tremendous work ethic, a willingness to try new ideas, and is always looking for way to integrate technology as a value added opportunity to support student learning.

### 2. Engaging Families and Community:

“A child's first and most influential teacher is the parent.” ~unknown

We take great pride in our strong partnership with our Parent Teacher Council (PTC). Our mission is that, “Together, we strive to create and maintain an active working relationship that enables us to work as partners to effectively contribute to the education and welfare of our students.” Our PTC keeps parents, staff, administration, and the community well-informed of the programs and policies of the school through

their incredible website and our weekly Friday Folder that we publish collaboratively.

Our parents are as great as our students and they provide and promote a continuing exchange of ideas and information that enhance our school goals. As partners, we begin our work in the summer with our “New to West” event that welcomes all new families and children to our school. Three years ago, we strengthened this program by adding Kindergarten Ambassadors to our executive board in order to improve the transition into kindergarten. Parents of rising kindergarten students are invited to playground dates after school and throughout the summer as well as a Bike Rodeo to ensure they feel comfortable and familiar with our school.

The PTC helps to organize enrichment programs and events such as Mighty Math, Proud to Read Aloud, One Book West, Family Math Night, Science Fair, Book Fair, Art Show, Kids Care, and Field Day. These are all made possible through PTC funding and volunteer support and encourage student learning by bringing real-world situations outside of the classroom into the educational experience. Our PTC provides grants to classroom teachers and sponsors several author visits through the year. They also work in conjunction with our district parent groups to provide two distinctly different programs in the performing arts each year.

Parents have multiple opportunities to volunteer in the cafeteria, library, serve on the executive board, and be a member of the various committees throughout the year. Parents enjoy being able to be a part of their child’s educational experience. This year, our PTC funded 21st century furniture options for classrooms, STEM carts for indoor recess, and a beautification bulb planting project for our grade one students. We have worked creatively to find new and innovative ways to engage students like our Principal for the Day and our Grade Level Parties. We are always working together to find new ways to engage our students.

Lastly, the success of our Proud to Read Aloud Program this year provided every family in our school with the opportunity to read the same book. Bookbags, including guiding questions for discussion and a journal for parents to share their thoughts was sent to every family at West. Each classroom book was signed by the family and a symbol from the book was placed in a display in the front foyer. It is a visual reminder of the strong partnership we have with our families here at West.

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

At the district level, our Professional Learning (PL) Teams have the philosophy that, “effective professional growth has a positive impact on student learning.” As part of our Teacher Evaluation and Professional Learning (TEPL), teachers have multiple opportunities to grow and develop their practice as individual educators or as part of a collective group. Options include action research, collaborative projects, critical friends groups, individual projects, peer coaching, and PLC’s. Our TEPL framework provides a structure that promotes growth opportunities for teachers that truly elevate their practice.

At West, we have a professional development (PD) committee comprised of classroom teachers and specialists who volunteer to assess the needs of the faculty and recommend areas of focus for our whole school student learning goal. This year, our focus is around cognitive engagement and rigorous and relevant learning. Our PD committee will often recommend books for the faculty, who then form study groups around our learning goal. Others may focus on differentiated instruction, use of questioning, interactive read alouds, etc., working together to refine their practice in these areas.

Professional learning includes the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), triangulating assessment data, implementation of new curriculum, exploring pedagogy, or examining the integration of disciplines for efficiency. Our math specialist offers professional learning focused around intentional talks and how to structure and lead mathematical discussions to promote student discourse and deeper levels of understanding. To support her in this effort, we sent her to a national conference with two classroom teachers who are helping to facilitate the learning. What is remarkable, is that the group focusing on intentional talks included more than half of our classroom teachers.

Grade levels regularly work with specialists to unpack the standards, examine student work and focus on

extending the learning of our most advanced students. There is a great deal of collaboration across grade levels, content areas, special areas, and special education staff. Our Technology Leadership Team, who attends the Teaching and Learning with Technology conference at the University of Connecticut, provides opportunities for faculty to participate in before school “mini-sessions” that provide choice based on faculty’s level of comfort.

Faculty have access to curriculum documents and resources via our district website and our content area specialists receive ongoing professional development from an outside educational consultant in the area of coaching. This year, our focus as a district includes work around Emotional Intelligence (EI) with the school principal and two teacher leaders attending a three day training on EI. Our implementation team used a trainer of trainer model, under the guidance of our District Support Specialist, to provide a year long study around EI.

We continue to look for new and innovative ways to improve our school based PD by using an extended team meeting model with release time. Teachers request time for professional learning and are able to customize PD sessions as a grade level. This model reflects the district model, which allows choice in developing professional learning.

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

“True leaders do not create more followers, they create more leaders” ~ Tom Peters .

West School has a very distinct and coherent leadership philosophy that aligns with the concept of loose and tight. We create space and freedom that enables faculty to talk and share ideas with a clear focus on desired outcomes. Our administrative team consists of the building principal and assistant principal. We also have a team of Instructional Leaders (IL’s) that meet twice a month as a leadership team to make decisions around our school goals, instruction, and assessment. We have a highly unified, well-functioning team of school leaders who are empowered to achieve desired outcomes by our leadership philosophy.

Our Instructional Leadership Team is comprised of one grade level teacher from each of our kindergarten through grade four classrooms. Additionally, we have one leader from our special area faculty, special education, preschool, and instructional specialists, respectively. The agendas for these meetings are set in collaboration with team leaders. We meet on Tuesday morning and each instructional leader, in turn, meets with their respective grade levels the same day to communicate what was accomplished or discussed during our IL meeting. This ensures a coherent process for information sharing and provides a structure for these teacher leaders to grow and learn.

To support this team, we also have content area specialists who are highly trained as coaches in their content area. This team is comprised of reading, math and writing specialists who have come together to form what we call our West School Leadership PLC. These teachers assist administration by making sure the curriculum is being implemented with fidelity. They examine student data with grade level teams and assist with differentiated instruction for all students. These leaders help us to ensure that our most advanced learners continue to achieve at their highest level as well as those in need of more support. They are a valuable resource to our school leadership team.

As school leaders, we are always looking for the strength that every faculty member brings to our school community. We believe there is a leader in each of us. One example is a grade three teacher, who has a keen interest in the area of health and wellness. We recommended her for the district health and wellness committee where her efforts helped to lead the group to conduct its first ever district health expo.

Finally, we believe that listening is one of the most important qualities of a strong leadership team. At West, we listen to one another, which establishes trustworthy relationships, a level of transparency, and communicates a strong sense of caring. We continuously strive to balance our intense desire to perform with our commitment to be kind and compassionate to the needs of our colleagues. We value, inspire, respect, and support every member of our school community.

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

---

“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.” – Helen Keller

The practice that has been the most instrumental in our school’s success is our ability to collaborate. Collaboration is a noun. It is defined in the Cambridge Dictionary as “the situation of two or more people working together to create or achieve the same thing.”

We know it takes a team. We share a belief about our role in the learning of our students. Every single faculty member at West School works in collaboration to achieve our end results. When our students perform well, we know it is due to the collaborative efforts of everyone. As a team, we are continuously evaluating what we do, how we do it, and if it is effective. We are change agents and experts at adapting our instruction to impact learning. Our faculty is growth minded. We see the opportunities that are presented when we make mistakes and view them as learning opportunities. We continuously look at the impact of our practice.

The collaboration that takes place at our grade level meetings, faculty meetings, and Universal Screening Teams is significant and powerful because of the impact it has on student learning. Together, we analyze data, solve problems, set clear learning targets, establish routines, and set school norms. In every meeting, there is an unspoken willingness to do what is best for students. Their needs are at the forefront of every decision we make. Our ability to do this work comes from the ability to be reflective in our practice and learn from one another. This ongoing reflection and collaboration leads us to continually learn, grow, and reach our goals.