

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):
- 1 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 0 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 0 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 1 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
PreK	12	13	25
K	10	7	17
1	11	12	23
2	8	6	14
3	8	14	22
4	9	9	18
5	14	14	28
6	13	14	27
7	14	7	21
8	16	7	23
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	115	103	218

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 1 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 2 % Asian
 - 7 % Black or African American
 - 4 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 81 % White
 - 5 % 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: 5%

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.

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	7
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	4
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	11
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2016	218
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.05
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	5

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 2%
4 Total number ELL

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 34%
Total number students who qualify: 75

8. Students receiving special education services: 17 %
37 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> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>7</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>7</u> Developmentally Delayed | <u>10</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>5</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>9</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</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: 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:

	Number of Staff
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	11
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	3
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	6
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	1

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 19:1

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

Required Information	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013
Daily student attendance	97%	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 2017.

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.

Giant City School, in partnership with families and the community, encourages students' active participation and ownership in lifelong learning, inspires students to develop confidence to explore new ideas, and supports the social, emotional and academic success of every student.

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

Not Applicable for GCS.

PART III – SUMMARY

Giant City Elementary School is located in rural, Southern Illinois, a few miles south of Carbondale on Giant City Road. Giant City School (GCS) is a family oriented community which values high academic standards, emotional support, and cultural experiences with opportunities for personal growth. Students served come from a variety of backgrounds including farming, children of international students attending the regional university and parents from an assortment of professional occupations from the southern Illinois area.

Giant City School serves students from Prekindergarten through 8th grade. The average class size is 19 students. Teachers know each student by name and give personalized attention on a daily basis. Students who are raised at GCS have a strong sense of community and avoid the disruptions associated with multiple campus changes before high school. Giant City School also provides stability for its youngest citizens through the availability of an on-site daycare and Prekindergarten program (administered by Southern Illinois University). Offering these early childhood transition programs fosters a sense of belonging to families and children as they proceed into the elementary school setting.

Giant City School serves as a feeder school for Carbondale Community High School, one of the state's highest rated schools, and is neighbored by Southern Illinois University and John A. Logan Community College. GCS has consistently performed at the highest percentile rankings for both Jackson County and the state of Illinois at large for standardized achievement tests (PARCC/PSAT). GCS is known for its high academic standards and innovative teaching styles. To embrace our vision, "Inspiring Our Students", Giant City provides a variety of technological experiences for students including smart boards, computer labs and Chromebooks.

Rich traditions are incorporated throughout the school experience for Giant City families and staff. The Giant City Progress Association (GCSPA) and Giant City Booster Club help to support partnerships between families and the district. Family Fun Night has been a long standing tradition featuring a delicious meal, games for small children, a silent auction and basket raffle. Monies raised go back into the classroom for teacher supplies, technology and materials, or field trips. Other opportunities for families include Alumni Night, Fall Festival, Reading Night and Trivia Night all of which build fellowship and a sense of community. Many opportunities are provided in the areas of extra-curricular activities including baseball, softball, track, basketball, volleyball, drama, Scholar Bowl, Beta Club and associations with local community organizations (boy scouts, girl scouts, etc.) through the support of the GCS Booster Club.

Giant City School goes above and beyond to foster a sense of academic challenge and emotional well-being that meet the needs of every student through fun and respect. District staff participates in a wide range of professional development activities to promote a love of lifelong learning in a safe nurturing environment. Academic initiatives that support student growth include Response to Intervention (to provide instructional foundational skills for students below grade level), P.R.I.D.E. program (a living-breathing committee that promotes politeness, respect, integrity, dependability, and encouraging others), STEM Class initiatives to extend interest in the areas of science, math, technology and engineering, and Title 1 services in the areas of math and reading.

A new initiative this year for all students is the Media Center Makerspaces. The Makerspace provides opportunities for all students to explore an assortment of materials and challenges. From sewing classes to aeronautics, students experience the freedom to experiment with new ideas and concepts. Failure is seen as a learning experience with reflection/brainstorming, and re-emphasizing research or experiments to try again, from mentors if needed.

GCS Physical Education focuses on the wellness of children by teaching and modeling best practices through the Child Approach To Coordinated Health curriculum (CATCH). This research-based curriculum helps Giant City School impact our student's lives beyond the classroom. Information concerning healthy lifestyles is combined with fun activities to reinforce optimal physical health provided at a developmentally appropriate level. Blending healthy menu planning (designated smart choices on every meal) with the

nutrition lesson components in the health curriculum fosters the ability to reduce peer and media pressures for unhealthy choices in everyday life.

Giant City School rounds out these experiences with cultural experiences. The cultural events at GCS promote theatrical performances, creative art and music experiences, as well developing an understanding the myriad of international cultures that make up our student body. Students are provided opportunities to explore and undergo creative expression through art classes, music appreciation, band (5-8th grades), and Drama Club. At GCS, we feel that cultural vitality goes hand in hand with a sense of identity and heritage. Our goal is to expand “Inspiring Our Students” beyond traditional values to enhance the very quality of our students' lives.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

Giant City School (GCS) offers a continuum of academic services and standards to meet the needs of our students. Rigorous goals are achieved in English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies every day. Students are challenged to meet their academic potential, explore and value the fine arts; and understand the interrelationships of the countries and cultures of the world. Giant City School believes that an early foundation for learning is the key to building the steps to educational success.

The elementary English Language Arts (ELA) program is able to encompass a well-rounded set of skills through comprehension, skill-building, writing, and language arts integration. While language arts skills are taught in isolation through mini-lessons, their application goes deeply into the full reading program and is evident through the students' verbal and writing skills. The reading program highlights selections from a wide variety of genres, including realistic fiction, nonfiction, historical fiction, poetry, folktales, fables and proverbs, and plays. Comprehension of the stories is evident through writing; student-created projects, games, and assignments; and tests. Vocabulary acquisition is taught through traditional means and also includes both hands-on and verbal games, mapping, and application through writing. Teachers work together with a Title I teacher, utilizing both pull-out and push-in services for students. The Speech teacher also incorporates vocabulary and word meaning to expand student understanding. Teachers collaborate and bridge the curriculum from year to year. Computer programs, such as STAR, Moby Max, and Study Island are used to show student growth in terms of reading skills and comprehension throughout the year. Some are used daily through the technology program. The ELA standards are also prevalent in the other content areas and are evidenced through reports, response writing justifications and explanations.

The Common Core math standards are achieved through the use of Illinois Model Math in the early grades, bridging to more intensive curriculum later in elementary. Students learn through a variety of units and hands-on, problem-based math concepts. In all units, students must show their work through a model or give numerical evidence, followed by supporting their work with justification in the form of written explanation. Students become very skilled in using models and diagrams to explain mathematical processes. First and second graders have a basic understanding of fractions before third grade even begins. Third graders are able to manipulate fractions in model and number line form in order to explain equivalence. The teachers work together to ensure that the curriculum bridges, giving the students the foundation needed to acquire the next grade level's concepts and skills. Computer programs such as Study Island, Moby Max, and Ten Marks are used to give students instant feedback on concepts being learned in class and to provide additional instruction and support; students have daily access. STAR (an online assessment and instructional software) is used to monitor student growth and to pinpoint which specific areas classrooms need to focus their efforts. A collaboration with the high school district offers on-site courses for students exceeding the elementary curriculum in junior high.

The Next Generation Science standards are met through a variety of demonstrations, experiments, and science note-taking activities, using a test as a basis for concepts. Using Southern Illinois University and our very qualified community as resources, students are able to take trips to see science concepts as they exist in the real world. Parents and community members come to the district to make both informational and hands-on presentations to students. Junior high students experience the laboratory setting to make observations, collect data, and formalize conclusions and opportunities for dissection. Seventh grade students also participate in science fair, researching and presenting their projects to local university staff and students. Staff and students utilize the district greenhouse and donated garden beds to contribute to the salad bar, developing a hands-on understanding of the farm to table connection.

Social studies standards and goals are met using both a written text and periodical curriculum. Teachers connect current events with historical events, highlighting how past events affect current society. Eighth grade students participate in History Fair, creating engaging web sites regarding significant events in Illinois history. Civic learning is met through a periodical text publication and classroom token economy systems. Giant City School also utilizes our talented community and parents to share their experiences through

meaningful presentations benefiting our students. Non-traditional interactions including a career fair (student interview community members about their chosen career) and multicultural camps (depicting parents demonstrating their cultural foods, ideas, clothing, etc) offer our students valuable perceptions of the world around us.

Giant City School believes that the best support for each of these core curriculum offerings is strong foundational support at the earliest levels. GCS works hand in hand with the early childhood programs offered through Southern Illinois University on-site. This coordination for wrap around care and education continues at the Little Giants Daycare facility (on-site). Both programs offer developmentally appropriate practice and licensure through the Dept. of Child and Family Services and the Illinois State Board of Education. Our high quality instruction in the Early Childhood classroom/daycare supports our children's social and emotional, and academic development. By providing an integrated curriculum that focuses on improving the child's self-control, mental flexibility and citizenship we prepare our students and parents for a successful school experience.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Music class is offered twice weekly for students in kindergarten through fifth grade, culminating in two performances during the school year. Students go well beyond the basic act of singing, as they learn about, and test, on the various composers that have influenced modern music, as well as the various components of musical composition. Band is offered to students in fifth through eighth grades, which also includes two school-wide performances and the ability to complete at regional and state contests in the spring semester. Art is offered once per week to elementary students and as an elective to junior high students. Students work with a variety of mediums to create masterpieces of their own. Giant City School collaborates with Southern Illinois University to offer students after-school music, foreign language and art classes in both the fall and spring semesters. Junior high students also have the opportunity to participate in a drama production, which is performed on stage at Carbondale Community High School for two nights. French Club is offered as an after-school program for interested students. French Club meets weekly and often includes field trips.

The physical education program at Giant City School is a phenomenal asset. Students participate in the Coordinated Approach To Child Health (CATCH)! Program, as it pertains to physical activity and nutrition. All students, kindergarten through eighth grades, receive PE class five times per week. Classes are structured so that no student stops moving throughout the period. Traditional games are adjusted so that everyone participates the whole time. Health classes are taught by the PE teacher, quarterly for elementary students and weekly for junior high students.

Students in the elementary have access to a computer lab five days per week for an entire period. They work on reading and math skills, using a variety of both paid and free programs. Programs are geared toward reading and math intervention, as well as preparing students to meet the standards of science, social studies and technology. Students begin typing programs in kindergarten, and this continues each year through eighth grade. Junior high students have in-classroom Chrome books used for many assignments, including reports, science and history fair and daily work. All classrooms use Promethean (smart board) technology integration into lessons across the curriculum.

STEM opportunities are offered across all grades, but are targeted specifically in junior high. Students attending STEM classes explore materials and challenges prepared by the teacher to extend depth and complexity. Students work individually and collaboratively in teams during challenges featuring experimental design or investigation. Units and lessons nurture advanced academic thinking and problem solving abilities in a variety of disciplines.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

Giant City School instruction can be effective only if classroom assessments accurately reflect student achievement. Formal and Informal assessments are a systematic, multi-step process involving the collection and interpretation of educational data on student progress. Staff utilizes assessment on a daily, if not hourly

basis to interpret student learning and adapt curriculum as needed. Student performance guides what teachers should teach, reflects what students have learned, and indicates what students have yet to learn.

In the past, many teachers evaluated their students' understanding of curriculum concepts with a traditional, multiple-choice, pencil and paper test. Today, our teachers use a variety of classroom assessment methods to probe the extent and organization of their students' knowledge. Examples of teacher assessments include silent signals, Plickers, questioning, and conferencing which include observing students. Students also utilize self-assessment to determine the quality of a performance, product, or process he or she used. Students may also work collaboratively with the teacher to develop the rubric for a particular assignment. By developing the parameters, students must demonstrate a complete understanding of what is needed for successful completion of the final product. These methods allow students to keep track of their own progress through criteria established by the students and the teacher.

As Illinois moved into a new era of teacher evaluation, Giant City embraced these purposeful planning and outcome strategies to increase overall student learning. Professional development and collaboration activities helped teachers develop strong foundational skills to link standards, content delivery and assessment to determine student attainment. As we continue along this journey, staff has opportunities to become mentors, and foster new teachers along this road to discovery. Understanding the most important skills within a concept can greatly increase a teacher's competency, and then intrigue students' interests, likely increasing retention and comprehension of such concepts.

By maximizing our teachers' understanding of how students are learning and retaining, we can focus on differentiated instruction. By utilizing differentiated instruction Giant City School has addressed student needs and involvement while maintaining high academic rigor. This flexibility is not limited by grade levels or standards, and indeed supports creativity on the part of the teacher and the students. The GCS approach also allows our school to focus on below, at grade level, and above level students with individuality. Teachers at Giant City offer multiple levels of assignments, targeted tiered instruction in large and small group settings, and provide options/choices for student work completion. This intensity demonstrates itself through student buy in and established standardized test scores.

In this era of instantaneous data and analysis, Giant City consistently adapts processes to address gaps in learning. Although, African American students make up less than one percent of our population, an achievement gap of 14% does exist. We do not take this information lightly, and address these concerns through more intensive intervention and support. Strong parental contact sustains communication concerns from both ends. From 2016 to the 2017 data, Giant City has been able to decrease this gap from 29% to 15%. Again, although we are encouraged by this decrease, we will continue to strive to close the gap even farther. Another area of great concern is our Non-IEP to IEP student achievement gap, which rates at 55%. We continue to address this area by focusing on consistent leadership, goals and high expectations for all students. This is a complex task of analyzing testing problems, while balancing and promoting what students are capable of demonstrating, all of which may not be shown on a standardized test. Giant City is proud of the fact that over the course of time, several of our students can return to regular classrooms with support, and many achieve higher than average academics at the high school level.

To maintain this atmosphere of enhanced learning the school regularly evaluates the school culture and climate via multiple paper and online surveys. Staff reflection on the content, process and products created by students continue to address the diverse needs of our children. Utilizing our own "experts", teachers become leaders by sharing their knowledge and best practices to inspire ingenuity for instruction. Reinventing the class mood by considering lighting, furniture, classroom procedures, and rules all affect the possibility of maximized learning.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

Giant City School explores a multitude of ways to increase student intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and engagement for our children. Utilizing best practices for instruction fosters a sense of pride and responsibility when children have duties that help build instruction. Our staff are incredibly talented at using classroom or table “jobs” for students. These classroom management techniques also promote more instructional time as students pass out items, monitor time, and check each other's assignments, etc. By modeling high expectations for what students can handle in the classroom, an academic sense of trust emerges for students. Children begin to believe in themselves when a trusted adult helps to build their confidence.

Giant City School also incorporates P.R.I.D.E., a character and behavior program that provides emotional, social and behavior supports for students. The PRIDE (Be Polite. Show Respect. Be Independent. Be Dependable. And Encourage Others) program establishes a culture that engages students, provides a common framework and demonstrates flexibility to provide positive outcomes for children. The goals of this program align with our focus on engaging curriculum, promoting healthy lifestyles through learning social skills, and increasing parent participation throughout the school process.

Each of these engaging programs have been the result of some work “down in the trenches”. Like many schools, Giant City has traveled along a path of dysfunction and low morale about six years ago. Due to inept leadership both the teachers and students went astray. Discipline and respect were at an all-time low, and teacher morale was vicious and aggressive. The Board of Education went through the process of removing and replacing administration to move forward. Over the last few years the school has transformed through a process of professional development, team building and creating an environment of trust. Although this process has been cumbersome, the results were well worth it. The Board of Education and administration have worked together to help staff feel valued and appreciated. The best part of this process is the feelings that are rising out of the “ashes” so to speak. Adults and children alike are joyful!

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Giant City School is frequently referred to by parents as their own “Private-Public School”. Teachers and staff have personal relationships with parents, and children, which fosters a supportive environment for families to grow and explore in our district. GCS pursues a successful relationship with parents through outreach and opportunities. Communication with parents conveys the need for participation, emphasizing how the district reaps rewards from such involvement. Opportunities include volunteering in classrooms, career fairs, multicultural mini-camps, athletic and academic clubs, and the Advisory Committee which spearheads recommendations to the Board of Education, and a variety of other day to day activities.

Three years ago Giant City School moved from a traditional parent-teacher conference to student-led conferences. The inspiration for this change was to empower students about their own learning and progress. In kindergarten through 8th grades students work collaboratively with their teacher to set academic and personal goals. Students collect work samples demonstrating triumphs and challenges in each subject. A few days before the conference, the student sits down with the teacher and reviews how they will present their material to the parents. On the day of the conference the student attends with their parent to lead the session. Of course the teacher is on hand to supplement or answer questions. For students whose parent cannot or will not attend, a staff member meets with the student to go over their progress, and make a plan for the next quarter. This process has developed valuable ownership and collaboration with teachers for our students.

Engaging our community is developed past our immediate stakeholders by including area neighborhoods and businesses at large. The superintendent regularly shares a district newsletter with various community members and leaders. Collaboration with Southern Illinois University, John A. Logan Community College, Jackson County Health Department, Southern Illinois Healthcare, Department of Child and Family

Services, counseling services, Extension Office and a variety of other organizations builds many more opportunities for children and families. The coordination of events like the Turkey Trot 5K, Reading Night, Health Fair and Signs of Suicide Workshop offer experiences to enhance social/emotional growth, better health choices and foster high academic standards for enhanced life styles. GCS believes that family involvement is the key to academic success and happiness for our students.

3. Professional Development:

Giant City School places a high priority on professional development (PD) and the opportunities that it affords its certified and non-certified staff for improvement. The PD plan is continually evaluated, with staff input to focus on increasing student achievement and closing the attainment gap between groups of students. Our focus priorities are to reach short and long term goals of the district, which are administered through purposeful engagement. We want our professional development to model the best practices for classroom instruction.

Our approach to professional development has been to provide a balance of the critical elements needed for successful classrooms. This includes learning about behaviors and the causes behind them. Integrating successful strategies in the classroom and continuing on the playground to effect change. Incorporating classroom management to include students and valuing that contribution, to extend teaching minutes and minimize disruptions. Modeling teaching strategies and giving participants time to discuss the successes and challenges of such practices.

Collaboration time, collaboration time, collaboration time! Teachers crave common planning time and learn so much from talking with their colleagues about what works and what doesn't. Although we know that our teachers love and want collaboration this is a challenge for our small rural district. Providing only one teacher per grade creates its own set of obstacles. We overcome these barriers by incorporating "educational families". These families meet in groups of three or four to plan, discuss, and investigate new curriculum, assessment, or strategies. Utilizing this process for small and large group professional development has been extremely successful. Learning quality strategies for Response to Intervention, increasing minutes in reading, and embracing new styles of teaching math have elevated our scores over the last few years.

As we move ahead into the future, we plan to align our writing curriculum, invest in instructional coaches and continue to provide professional development days where teachers have time to discuss, plan and explore new and exciting ways to stay in the growth mindset. As a school committed to building the best learning environment for its students, we must embrace all the facets of quality education. We will continue to expand our student growth objectives and align them with rigorous assessments, while learning new strategies of engagement.

4. School Leadership:

Giant City School Leadership is a working collaboration between the superintendent, board of education and of course the staff. Considering our small size, each person plays a critical role in establishing the guidelines, standards and supports to develop short and long term goals. "Inspiring Our Students" isn't just a slogan, it's a quest. Striving for a quality learning environment is best described by the three main focuses of this leadership team: Service, Perseverance, and Creativity.

Giant City's current superintendent also serves as the principal. In both capacities the school leader's service is focused on providing support to staff and children, being mindful of decisions, and creating opportunities that build a sense of excitement about learning. Through tireless efforts the leadership has helped to reorganize and foster a sense of success for staff and students. Examining past practices and affecting change to increase achievement builds upon the team atmosphere. Although, the school leader must provide the definition, standards and ethics to build trust, the school staff form the basis of the foundation.

As stated earlier in the school culture section, Giant City has not been without its growing pains. However,

the sheer perseverance of the board of education, the principal/superintendent and the staff itself has prevailed. The people in this building have a passion for education and throughout the turmoil each wanted to improve. If our staff hadn't been looking for opportunities to improve, then it wouldn't have mattered how many chances we provided. People are finding their niche and leading the way. Whether it's volunteering to supervise a ballgame, leading an exercise in best small group practices, or serving mashed potatoes in the lunch line for someone who is ill, each act makes a difference.

The perfect demonstration of the benefits of perseverance is the Media Center Makerspaces. In December of the 2017 the staff embarked on a team building exercise to transform our current library into a Makerspaces. The superintendent had been gathering donations of materials, machines, and various items for the transformation. Groups of teachers worked together with a pile of materials to devise challenges, some instructions, and simple evaluations for children. Other staff members worked together to classify and arrange materials for optimum student usage. A final team designed a schedule for classroom and individual usage before and after school. The basic premise of this space is for exploration, success and failures. We know that creativity must be free to make mistakes, learn and try again. Although we are just beginning, the sewing classes, circuit building, free French classes, and art activities are very exciting to students. Again, this freedom of expression and support for exploration leads our children to believe they can succeed!

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

For Giant City School the one practice that has led to the most academic success is our Response to Intervention Program (which includes the Multi-Tiered System of Support). This MTSS collaborative model utilizes a scientific approach to identify student academic and social emotional needs, set measurable goals, plan and monitor scientifically based interventions and provide a context for data-based decision-making resulting in maximum student achievement. However, the largest factor in the program success is staff attitudes and commitment.

Over the past several years, Giant City School has reviewed and used several different types of baseline assessment to find a program that best fits our district's academic needs. After the dust settled, we realized that using Renaissance was the best fit for the district and our students. The Renaissance (STAR) online program is taken by students three times per year to set benchmark scores in reading and mathematics. Once students have taken the test, GCS incorporates these scores into a rubric. Four factors including last quarter scores, current grade level status, teacher recommendation and benchmarks are combined to identify students below, and above, grade level for both reading and mathematics.

Academic intersession for students scoring below grade level starts with ensuring that our base curriculum is strong with foundational supports for basic skills. Core instructional interventions are designed to be proactive and preventative for ALL students. The focus for GCS is on improving school culture and core classroom instruction, addressing the needs of the majority of students through flexible grouping, ongoing assessment, and targeting specific skills within the classroom.

Giant City School also observes the rules and expectations in the PRIDE Matrix for social emotional health, which are based upon the 5 Traits of PRIDE Behavior (We will be POLITE, SHOW RESPECT, BE INDEPENDENT, BE DEPENDABLE, AND ENCOURAGE OTHERS!) At the beginning of the year staff discuss which students may be struggling with crisis or other social emotional factors. Each staff member takes a couple of students (even the custodians) to check-in with on a weekly basis. We feel that this individual attention helps students develop a strong connection to school. Student behavior infractions are redirected at the teacher/staff level with three types of interventions (discussion, parent email/phone call, peer intervention), before disciplinary action is taken. Appropriate referrals are made for students struggling with social emotional issues as needed. For repeated behavior problems teachers/staff meet with parents and develop an intervention plan through a Student Action Plan meeting. If all of these interventions cannot improve problem behaviors, then a referral for further testing is completed.

If the student continues to struggle (homework completion, grades on tests, fails Fall Benchmark) then the student begins to receive extra instruction as provided in any multi-tiered system of support system. The MTSS/RtI provides increasing levels of support if students do not make academic progress. However, the most important part of this program is staff commitment. Once our staff understood how much improvement we can make with struggling students, we were able to move towards success for every student. It is our teachers and paraprofessionals that track down students, give up their lunch periods, plan intensive lessons, and work in small groups to improve those basic skills or social connections. When the staff focus this much attention on intervention, students realize that people care about them. As an instructional leader, the principal values the small school setting. The principal feels that she understands who to connect with on a daily basis, just by individually knowing each student!

For Giant City School to provide this intensive academic support a financial commitment must be made by administration and the Board of Education. Providing rigorous, high quality instruction is a priority in the district. By hiring a progressive RtI Coordinator dedicated to communications with teachers and students, and providing intensive differentiated instruction, Giant City is proud to demonstrate almost all students with passing grades. The process of identification and instruction is never ending, however the results are quite rewarding.

The final piece to a successful system of tiered supports is quality professional development. The training of

staff, and changing attitudes, towards true progress in academic development does not come without distinctive guidance.