

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):
- 8 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 2 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 1 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 11 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	0	0	0
K	26	28	54
1	26	23	49
2	26	20	46
3	23	26	49
4	28	28	56
5	30	26	56
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	159	151	310

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 2 % Asian
 - 8 % Black or African American
 - 22 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 65 % White
 - 3 % 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: 9%

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	12
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	15
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	27
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2016	304
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.09
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	9

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 11 %
35 Total number ELL

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

Spanish, Arabic, Chinese

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 50 %
Total number students who qualify: 155

8. Students receiving special education services: 20 %
63 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>6</u> Autism | <u>14</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>2</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>14</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>1</u> Developmentally Delayed | <u>12</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>4</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>42</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>0</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>1</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.	12
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	10
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	9
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 26:1

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%	97%	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 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.

We are dedicated to building a safe and caring environment that promotes and inspires each student's character development, academic growth, and love of learning.

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

Thomas Jefferson Elementary is part of the Valparaiso Community Schools Corporation, which consists of eight elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school. Our corporation serves the 6,000 students living in Center Township. Center Township has a population of 38,000. At the center of the township is the city of Valparaiso. Valparaiso is the county seat and a middle-class community with a population of 31,730. The median family income is \$47,361. The percent of families under the poverty level is 10.4 percent with a 7.7 percent unemployment rate. About 91 percent of our adults have a high school diploma, and 25 percent have a college degree. Therefore, most of the income generated is by two-income families with a mix of blue-collar occupations and white-collar professionals. Fifty-five percent of our 115,360 homes are owner occupied, and 53 percent of them have changed ownership within the past five years. (City and township data is from 2010 census.)

Thomas Jefferson Elementary School (TJE) was built in 1964. TJE has always been proud of the teacher relationships and their ability to work together. The staff is a family, taking care of each other and truly valuing one another's company. This tradition is true for students as well. The students have conflicts as all people do from time to time, but they are generally kind and caring toward each other, something the adults in the building work daily to encourage. Another tradition is the history of extra-curricular activities. Some examples include after-school sports, student council, K-kids, Team LEAD, math bowl, spell bowl, science bowl, choir, robotics, and mini-decathlon. Finally, perhaps the proudest tradition is the connection that the staff builds with the students. Each adult works hard to forge personal relationships with the young people in the building. The students know that they are in a place where people care about them and are looking out for their best interests. This culture of TJE has encouraged students to develop to their full potential academically, emotionally, physically, socially, and culturally by making all students feel welcomed and cared for, and teaching students to believe in themselves. TJE was named a National Distinguished Title I School in 2017, has been named a Four-Star School for three of the last four years, and has been identified as an A School for the last five years.

TJE supports students by being culturally responsive. The principal, teachers, and staff at TJE understand that students come from different backgrounds with different traditions and expectations. TJE does not expect all students to fit into one mold. Rather, each child is accepted as they are. The school helps develop each child's full potential academic, emotional, physical, social, and cultural character by providing curricular programs at TJE designed to meet the needs of the whole child. Students receive the core instruction of English language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, and health. In addition to the core curriculum, students receive instruction in art; music; physical education; and science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). Technology is integrated into the curriculum and classrooms to enhance student learning. Full-time special education, English Learners (EL) teachers, and instructional aides provide services to the students with individualized education plans (IEPs) or individualized language plans (ILPs). TJE is fortunate to employ two Title I teachers and two Title I aides. The Title I teachers have been integral in implementing an effective and rigorous Response to Intervention (RTI) program. Differentiated instruction is provided by highly effective classroom teachers and instructional aides to benefit students of all abilities. The entire staff at TJE participates in a professional learning community to collaborate in order to promote a positive learning environment for academics, social, and emotional success.

Students are not the only learners at TJE. The staff participates in a variety of professional development (PD) programs. Staff members have received on-site CLEAR training through Purdue University, as well as attending Kristina Smekens 6 + 1 Traits of Writing, Simple Six Writing, and Pearson math and science curriculum training. Staff-led PD occurs frequently at TJE. For example, the Title I teachers often provide PD to the staff about the RTI process, teachers provide PD about digital citizenship, and the technology integration coach provides training to large and small groups, and to individual teachers.

The school has fostered excellent working relationships between the university and local community organizations. These relationships have demonstrated the importance of education to students. First through fifth grade students visit the Valparaiso University Campus to routinely meet with mentors after school. Pre-service teachers from Valparaiso University complete coursework at TJE. Through a partnership with a

local church, mentors from Kids Hope USA meet with students during the school day. Another generous collaboration with the community sends food home with students in need through the Backpacks and Snacks program. These positive relationships contribute to the success of TJE.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

Thomas Jefferson Elementary School follows the Indiana Academic Standards for all academic areas including math, science, social studies, English/language Arts. The TJE family recognizes the importance of having a curriculum that clearly defines what we want our teachers to teach and our students to learn. Valparaiso Community School Curriculum maps are available digitally through the district website. Our mission supports a curriculum that stresses the development of strong basic skills in all academic areas. It also expresses our commitment to provide opportunities for growth in responsibility, confidence, and discovering the excitement that produces a love of learning. Our goal is to teach our curriculum in a safe, caring environment where children value their own uniqueness while respecting and appreciating the differences of others. We find that the elements of rigor and relevance foster the climate, collaboration, and curriculum goals expressed in our mission.

Benchmark Universe, our core reading/English language arts curriculum, encompasses literature, reading, and writing instruction. Students are immersed in an integrated program aligned with state standards and guided reading best practices. Benchmark also mirrors the school and district philosophy of individualized, targeted reading instruction across all grade levels. Through whole group mini-lessons, small group guided reading, and anecdotal records, teachers are able to create personalized learning paths for students. They gain valuable knowledge of their students' skill sets and are able to address individual reading needs on a daily basis. Curriculum is also supplemented with print rich materials, such as educational magazines, that address current events while incorporating reading skills and strategies. Students then benefit from consistent and efficient reinforcement of good reading behaviors to ensure mastery of foundational skills. Primary grade levels also integrate programs such as Jolly Phonics and Heggerty Phonics to ensure mastery of early literacy skills. These programs incorporate multi-sensory methods of teaching through a synthetic phonics approach, which is developmentally appropriate and addresses multiple learning styles.

The mathematics curriculum, Pearson Envision, closely follows guidelines mandated by the state standards as well as our district guiding principles. Envision was chosen because it encompasses math topics, such as computational understanding, geometry, measurement, and problem solving. This program offers flexibility in print and digital resources for blended instruction, but more importantly, supports the school's mission of providing differentiated math instruction. It also reinforces specific skills that teachers deem necessary for student growth at each grade level. Teachers present a math skill or concept, check in using targeted assessment, and then assign individualized class work based on student need. Students are better equipped to apply math skills to the real world and are encouraged to ask questions during the learning process. This approach also encourages higher order thinking and allows for more student collaboration, discussion, and investigation.

Pearson Interactive science provides inquiry-based modules for students K-5, which are experiences designed to actively involve students in the scientific process. This approach was chosen because of its strong focus on interpreting data, writing about science, and drawing conclusions. Another key factor addressed is the connection between nonfiction reading skills and the application of literacy skills within the context of science. Students are engaged in hands-on learning experiences that lead them to discover big ideas. Through investigation, students also have the opportunity to analyze, notate, and discuss their findings. This aids in bridging the gap between language arts and its connection to nonfiction topics and ideas. Students acquire foundational learning skills and real-world knowledge that will follow them through their school career.

The Social Studies curriculum at TJE is designed with the State of Indiana Social Studies Academic Standards in mind. Each grade level chose to adopt programs that best suited their individual academic goals, including McGraw Hill and Pearson. Within each program, students are helped to gain knowledge, process information, consider the importance of values and beliefs, and learn how to actively participate in a democratic society. As with science, there is a strong connection between social studies and nonfiction literature in order to support students' navigation through content. This connection is also supported

through materials like Time for Kids in the intermediate grades. Students are engrossed in hands-on activities that promote an awareness of civic responsibility and engagement in their communities.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

The art curriculum at TJE uses the Valparaiso Community Schools elementary art curriculum developed by the system's art staff. This curriculum utilizes the Discover Art textbook series as the primary resource for classroom instruction. The textbook is used from kindergarten through grade five and has a developmental format for each grade level. Student performance in art is assessed in the following areas: willingness to experiment and try new ideas, effort and enthusiasm, and responsibility and use of time. All K-5 students attend art class once a week for one hour with a licensed art teacher. The elementary art curriculum, based on the Discipline-based Art Education (DBAE) method of teaching art, uses a developmental format that builds learning on previously taught art concepts and vocabulary. The elementary art department bases curriculum planning on the Indiana State Proficiency Guide. The Art Appreciation Program, presented by parent volunteers, provides additional art exposure to students in their classrooms.

At TJE, music education is designed to introduce and develop individual enjoyment, interest, and appreciation of the art of making music. Student performance is assessed in the areas of participation, skill development, and behavior. All K-5 students attend music class once a week for one hour with a licensed music teacher. The curriculum addresses the needs of students as outlined in the Indiana music standards. Students are exposed to all elements of music theory; music from various ethnicities, time periods, and styles; and the major composers. Students attend various concerts, ballets, and demonstrations to increase their knowledge and exposure to musical culture.

At TJE, physical education is designed to help students develop an enjoyment and appreciation for engaging regularly in physical activity, an understanding of how regular physical activity contributes to a healthy lifestyle, the skills needed to perform a variety of physical activities, and an appreciation for the importance of maintaining physical fitness. The children at TJE Elementary are assessed in the following areas: behavior, skills, sportsmanship, and knowledge. The methods used to evaluate student performance in these areas are written tests, oral tests, teacher observations, and performance of skills. The curriculum addresses the needs of the students as outlined in the state elementary physical education standards. The curriculum is based on the commitment of the physical educator to provide students with experiences, information, and knowledge needed to become physically active participants in life.. All K-5 students attend physical education class once a week for one hour with a licensed PE teacher.

The health curriculum at TJE consists of the Body Works textbooks along with a wealth of special programs and supplementary materials designed to develop health and safety concerns, habits, and attitudes in children from kindergarten through fifth grade. Teacher observation and evaluation of classroom discussions and projects are used as means of assessment. The health curriculum provides many opportunities for active student participation. Special programs for health help promote personal well-being. The health curriculum adequately covers all state standards.

The TJE staff recognizes that it is essential for our students to become proficient, competent readers; consequently, our library contains wonderful literature for children. Library time is scheduled for all grade levels, and a child may check out books any time during the school day. Students may also select books from our paperback collections in each classroom. Children may check out books apart from scheduled library time. The automated library provides easy access to library materials. A large variety of AR books are available for all grade levels and interests. Students have access to books online.

The STEM curriculum, Project Lead the Way (PLTW), started in the school year 2016-2017. Each student is given the opportunity to: Create, plan and collaborate with peers to solve problems, Learn and practice coding using a variety of apps and websites, Evaluate and improve a project until students are satisfied with the end product, Use Science and Math skills in the process of creating solutions to problems, Kids are educated in the STEM fields starting in kindergarten all the way through high school to encourage them to

pursue careers in the STEM fields. All K-5 students attend STEM class once a week for one hour with a licensed STEM teacher.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

Thomas Jefferson Elementary uses a variety of instructional approaches, interventions, and assessments to meet the diverse needs of students and achieve instructional goals. At the beginning of the year, students are formally assessed in grades K-5 in both math and reading. Specific assessments are used to provide data for both the classroom teacher and Title One staff to determine students' levels of need and to form intervention groups. This is an important piece for all staff members because they truly get to know their students and areas of need rather quickly. Teachers clearly understand the data, use it to drive their instruction, and identify specific skills in need of remediation.

Formal assessments used at the beginning, middle, and end of year include Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment Systems, ISTEP, NWEA, ESGI, and AIMSweb math probes. These assessments were chosen because they are highly individualized and helpful in tracking student growth. Teachers can pinpoint students' needs almost instantly, create personalized learning paths, and narrow in on standards-based reinforcements and remediation for individual students, small groups, and entire classes. Some assessments, including NWEA, allow teachers the ability to use standards-based content above and below grade level. NWEA data also provides learning statements for areas in which students are ready to develop, which is extremely useful for support staff who work one-on-one with students. The use of the Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System gives teachers the ability to understand their students as readers. Teachers are able to observe student reading behaviors one-on-one, engage them in comprehension conversations that go beyond retelling, and make informed decisions that connect assessment to instruction. Teachers are then able to plan instruction that target student's individual needs, whether it be by level or skill.

Various instructional approaches and intervention methods are used throughout the building including: tiered intervention, differentiated strategies, and technology-based support. Flexible intervention groups are created and planned for using formal data from the beginning of the year. They are continuously monitored using a variety of instructional practices and informal assessments to ensure efficacy. Progress is monitored through the use of running records, student interviews, anecdotal notes, math quick checks, and the program Fast ForWord. Student success and growth is also ensured through consistent collaboration between Title One staff and classroom teachers.

Within the classroom, teachers use various practices to ensure differentiated instruction in response to assessment data. They plan lessons to meet individual student need and focus on preparing activities that will address multiple learning styles. Teachers utilize movement, song, multimedia resources, and student choice whenever possible. Lessons may include: explicit instruction, teacher modeling, questioning strategies, group collaboration, and opportunities for applying skills independently. Through this method of teaching, teachers are able to use observation and informal assessment in real-time to create groups based on need. Support staff are also utilized during this time to provide remediation with students and challenge those that have mastered the skill. Informal observations are ongoing and teachers adjust instruction and grouping as needed.

Technology-based tools are used in the classroom to collect data, drive instruction, create learning opportunities, and engage students. Tools include Canvas, Kahoot!, Quizizz, and more. Canvas is a platform that teachers use to supplement their instruction, generate informal assessments, communicate information, and create a home-school connection. Teachers are able to create quizzes and assignments where students can respond through the use of various multimedia resources. Students can also participate in guided discussions with their peers and teachers, creating meaningful online collaboration. Groups can be created to deliver specific content and differentiate instruction. Teachers can also use video and audio for students needing accommodations and provide ongoing individual feedback through the use of rubrics and comments. Kahoot! and Quizizz are game format sites used to review or teach content. Kahoot! allows teachers to use premade quizzes or create their own, assess students' prior knowledge on a topic, teach missed concepts, and reassess at the end of a lesson. Students compete against each other in real-time and are motivated to improve their score the second time around. Quizizz follows the same format but allows

students to move at their own pace using their own device. Because of the game format, students are engaged, excited, and motivated to learn.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

At Thomas Jefferson Elementary School, practices that promote student motivation and engagement are embedded naturally within the school day. Knowing that students come in with different needs, learning styles, backgrounds, and ability levels, teachers approach students' needs through Class Dojo, Mind Up, and Team Lead.

Class Dojo aligns with our mission of building an environment that promotes and inspires each student's character and love of learning. It's a powerful tool used school-wide that reinforces positive behavior, responsibility, and respect between students, staff, and families. While initially extrinsic in nature, the approach motivates students to make intrinsically positive choices. Class Dojo sets a positive tone that connects school and home, allowing students to share their work with families in real time. This idea of an audience increases motivation and improves student engagement.

The MindUP practice supplies students with social and emotional support embedded into daily classroom routines. These lessons teach students multiple strategies to help focus, improve self-regulation, build resilience to stress, and develop a growth mindset. Students are engaged in learning activities that are meant to bring joy into the classroom, while benefiting their academic and personal well-being.

Team Lead is a district-wide initiative that promotes safer social climates. It addresses all forms of peer aggression at all levels of education. Its goal is to bring together a community of caring adults and students who work together to improve the school's social climate. Team Lead empowers older students as trained mentors to their younger classmates. These mentors model positive social interactions and courageous interventions. Students are given the opportunity to mediate peer interactions, encourage meaningful conversations, and model positive conflict resolution.

In order to support a school culture where teachers feel valued and supported, the principal has developed various practices. He maintains an open-door policy where trust has been built amongst the staff to openly communicate their thoughts, ideas, and feedback. Teacher input is highly valued in decision making processes. Teachers are also given the autonomy to be creative, inventive, and explorative in their daily teaching practices. Individual strengths are promoted and there is room for personal growth. Common times have been developed to foster peer and cross curricular collaboration as well. Faculty meetings are designed to promote open discussion and bring all staff together to problem solve, create, and share ideas to promote learning for all children.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Thomas Jefferson Elementary uses various strategies in working with family and community members for student success and school improvement. Parents are encouraged to have an active role in their child's education. An app called ClassDojo is used by teachers for individual parent communication as well as a school and class news feed of activities and student achievement. This allows parents to stay connected with their child as well as the happenings in the classroom and the school. There are also several opportunities within the school that encourage parents to participate. During the school day, parents are welcomed to volunteer in their child's classroom and participate in field trips. Curriculum nights, musical performances, art exhibits, and other grade-level activities are held in the evening throughout the year. Other opportunities include, but are not limited to, Back-to-School Night, field day, award day, academic bowl competitions, PTO family events, informational parent meetings, Love and Logic Parent Sessions, Around the Table, mystery readers, and reading group volunteers. TJE also engages in ongoing communication with parents through school-wide newsletters, classroom newsletters, email, and informational phone calls.

Additionally, the school's Title I Program provides parents with opportunities to participate in their child's education. Each year an informational parent meeting is held that provides parents with various resources and information pertaining to the program. Resources provided include: Title I Parent Compacts, Title I Parent Policy, Valparaiso Community School's FROG/Title I brochures, as well as program and intervention information. They are also provided with tools to reinforce concepts at home. Parents are notified of their student's academic progress through report cards, online grade books, Canvas, communication of ISTEP+ results, and NWEA reports. Parents are also involved in the revision of the school improvement plan.

TJE has partnered with many community organizations and institutes of higher education as well. The school is empowered by a civic obligation mentality that focuses on giving back to the community and also providing opportunities for the community to serve within the school. TJE partners with Valparaiso University (VU) in several ways. Students from VU come to TJE for field experiences and student teaching. TJE students visit the university's music, engineering, science, and athletic department in order to envision themselves as college students. VU students have also volunteered with the TJE robotics team to referee competitions. The school also partners with Kiwanis, which provides children an opportunity to participate every other week in a K-Kids community service program before school. Students are empowered to become leaders in service for the school and the community.

3. Professional Development:

Thomas Jefferson Elementary School recognizes the importance of ongoing professional development programs for all staff members in order to maintain and increase the effectiveness of their education practices. In order to plan professional development, the school determines areas of greatest need and chose activities that matched teacher's knowledge level.

To begin, TJE reached out to Purdue University's Center for Literacy Education and Research (CLEAR) to assist teachers in developing strong foundations in the area of reading instruction. A team of specialists provided site visits for three consecutive years and focused on best practices in guided reading aligned with the newly adopted reading series. Teachers learned how to correctly take anecdotal notes, administer running records, and efficiently schedule guided reading groups within the reading block. Staff gained an improved exposure to nonfiction, vocabulary, and written response. Time was spent debriefing with the principal, working alongside him on walk-through approach, and making meaningful observations. The principal also learned how to adjust PD based on what was observed. The process of having CLEAR gave the school a significant advantage of aligning reading curriculum with academic standards, as shown by student growth and achievement.

In addition, the district provided continuous training on the newly adopted reading series. This training introduced teachers to the concept of reader's workshop and its components. It provided staff with knowledge about the series' materials and how to best utilize them within this context. Staff were shown both print and digital leveled libraries, vocabulary resources, word study units, and more. Along with materials, the training supplied teachers and administrators with experiences that enhanced their existing knowledge of reading instruction. Because of this approach, teachers felt more comfortable employing practical and purposeful strategies in their classrooms. Students continued to show growth in multiple areas of reading.

In the fall of 2018, Valparaiso Community Schools integrated the use of technology coaches at all schools. TJE currently embeds professional development opportunities through the tech coach, incorporating

individual needs and school-wide initiatives. PD is also chosen based on what will have the greatest impact on student learning. The tech coach collaborates with the principal in order to provide on-demand assistance through coaching and co-teaching as teachers are learning to use new technology or skills. Teachers can set goals with the tech coach, utilize their help in finding resources to engage students, and learn how to meaningfully integrate technology into the classroom.

4. School Leadership:

The leadership at Thomas Jefferson Elementary School supports the idea that all students should be provided the same opportunity to learn and are capable of fulfilling their unique potential. The administrator's philosophy follows these basic principles: students deserve to be in a safe and comfortable school environment, to feel support and guidance from school staff, and to engage in a climate that puts learning at the center of their daily activities.

The principal plays a crucial role in carrying out this philosophy. He works to continuously improve instruction through collaborative processes. He promotes shared leadership throughout the staff by encouraging individuals to take on roles that play on their strengths. The leadership team and stakeholders work directly with the principal to ensure policies and programs focus on student achievement. This is done through effective training, professional development, and modeling. Decision making involves the entire staff, as the principal understands and respects teachers' opinions as fellow stakeholders. For example, the principal often asks staff members to weigh in on important decisions regarding scheduling, instructional materials, teaching strategies, and building goals.

Parents are also respected as vital stakeholders and their involvement is important to students' success. The principal encourages collaboration, shared decision making, and teamwork with parents and families. He believes that student learning flourishes with strong home-school connections, and maintains that a dedicated school community is essential to student success. In order to strengthen this connection, the principal encourages parents to be in the building and involved in school activities. Parent volunteers are often seen working with students throughout the school day, whether it be providing remediation, giving assessments, and reading with students.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Thomas Jefferson Elementary (TJE) is grounded in the principle that if you can get a child to believe, you can get a child to achieve. Building successful, long-lasting relationships with families, children, and the community has been the cornerstone of the school's success. TJE takes time to get to know their families and children, and to adapt to each child's learning style. TJE shows each child that he or she matters. Although TJE is proud of its academic success, what they are most proud of is how children treat their peers and the adults with kindness and respect.

Developing a child's character is a priority at TJE. Students and staff are constantly engaged in opportunities to give back to the community. Despite being a fifty percent free/reduced-priced-lunch school, the students and staff give generously to those in need. Their value on serving, respecting all people, and giving your personal best every day has naturally led to the exemplary progress year after year at TJE. Children become part of a family at TJE. They know that they are cared for, which leads to positive beliefs toward achievement. Because of the culture at TJE, the school is not only a 4-Star School with an A letter grade but was also awarded the Nationally Distinguished School of the Year in the State of Indiana and nominated as a Blue Ribbon School.

This is just one example of how TJE changed the life of a child. A little girl entered first grade at TJE in the fall of 2015. She has albinism and is legally blind. In kindergarten she attended a different elementary school and struggled greatly. Her teacher's proudest moment was that in the fourth quarter, the little girl finally talked. She had no friends and was shy and scared. However, in the fall of 2015 things changed drastically for this little girl. Her parents enrolled her at TJE. Within weeks, she began to blossom. She came home each day with a smile on her face. For the first time, she wanted to go to school. About four weeks later, her father was driving her home and asked her, "How do you like school?" The little girl replied, "I love school Daddy. I have friends, my teacher loves me and I love my teacher." Tears came to her father's eyes. He realized at that moment that his little girl was going to be okay. She finally felt like she belonged. This same little girl is now in third grade. She is thriving and was even nominated by her peers to be the student council representative for her class. This is just one of many TJE success stories.

At its core, Thomas Jefferson Elementary's approach to getting the children to believe and understand their value has been the cornerstone to the school's success. If children believe, they can achieve.