



## **Part I – Eligibility Certification**

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The signatures on the first page of this application (cover page) certify that each of the statements below, concerning the school's eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education and National Blue Ribbon Schools requirements, are true and correct.

1. The school configuration includes one or more of grades K-12. (Schools on the same campus with one principal, even a K-12 school, must apply as an entire school.)
2. All nominated public schools must meet the state's performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group and all subgroups, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
3. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 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

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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)
  - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 1 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 3 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>	6	10	16
<b>K</b>	17	17	34
<b>1</b>	16	20	36
<b>2</b>	20	18	38
<b>3</b>	23	14	37
<b>4</b>	17	20	37
<b>5</b>	16	20	36
<b>6</b>	21	18	39
<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>	136	137	273

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 1 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 0 % Asian
  - 1 % Black or African American
  - 4 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 91 % 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: 7%

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	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	14
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	21
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2016	284
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.07
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	7

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):

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 48 %  
Total number students who qualify: 132

8. Students receiving special education services: 23 %  
62 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>0</u> Autism                   | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                 | <u>1</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness           | <u>4</u> Other Health Impaired                 |
| <u>14</u> Developmentally Delayed | <u>9</u> Specific Learning Disability          |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance    | <u>20</u> Speech or Language Impairment        |
| <u>2</u> Hearing Impairment       | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>2</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: 15
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	17
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	9
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	13
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	4

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 191:1

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%	97%	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.

<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.

To help students become lifelong learners and productive citizens.

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

Not applicable

## **PART III – SUMMARY**

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Sterling Grade School serves the community of Sterling, Kansas, a rural community of approximately 2,500 people. Sterling is located in Central Kansas, approximately 70 miles northwest of Wichita. Settled in 1872, the town first served as a railroad and agricultural center. Sterling Grade School was part of the first school district in Rice County, Kansas. The first grade school in Sterling was organized in the Green Mountain House Hotel. The first school house was built where the present grade school still stands to this day. The original school building was replaced in 1878, by a larger building on the same block. In 1927, a new brick school was built at a cost of \$109,000. That school served the students of Sterling until 2010, when a new 62,000 square foot, \$9.6 million grade school was built directly behind the previous building. Sterling Grade School has remained on the same location since the 1870's and has a long history of helping to provide a strong educational foundation the children of our community. Currently, Sterling Grade School serves 287 students in grades preschool through sixth grade. Sterling Grade School is part of the Sterling school district that also includes one junior high and one high school.

Today, the community consists of both professional and blue-collar workers. This includes many who work in the field of education. Sterling is also home to Sterling College, a private 4-year college that adds about 700 people from 36 states and 16 foreign countries to the community population each year. The local economy is based largely on the college commerce, agriculture-related businesses, oil and gas production, small private manufacturing industries, farming, and livestock production. Despite various local economic opportunities, the community is susceptible to the influences of the global economy, and stresses on the agricultural and oil markets have contributed to a challenging local economic situation for our rural community. Currently, the percentage of students that qualify for free and/or reduced lunches is at 48.4%. However, the families of Sterling are resilient in the face of these challenges and recognize the importance of a quality education. Sterling Grade School benefits from strong community support and enjoys solid relationships with the families that we serve. Our positive relationship with our community is evident in the approval of a \$20 million dollar school facility bond issue, volunteers that regularly assist the school in a variety ways, and a 100% parent-teacher conference attendance rate, just to name a few.

There are several strategies that Sterling Grade school employs to encourage and challenge all students to develop their full potential. Specific programs are utilized to help students grow in all areas of life. Academically, Sterling Grade School offers several programs that both challenge and support students. One enrichment program that our students participate in is Science Olympiad competitions. These academic competitions allow students to develop real world skills like problem solving, analytical thinking, creativity, and team building. Our 6th grade students compete against 7th, 8th, and 9th graders from other schools around the state. We have consistently placed high at regional competitions, and have qualified again to compete in the State Science Olympiad Championship.

We also offer academic support programs. In addition to summer school, students that need extra support can attend a program named Sterling Helpful Academic Support Tutorial Assistance or SHASTA. The SHASTA program allows students to stay after school up to four days a week for 45 minutes with their classroom teacher for extra support and enrichment in the areas of math and reading. Teachers use specific interventions to reinforce concepts that are based upon individual needs.

Physically, our students participate in after-school activities that are held in our gym and our playground. Activities, such as soccer, basketball, and flag football are held on our school grounds and are supervised by school personnel.

We offer music enrichment programs as well. Students work during and after school to prepare for school and community performances as well as special invitation performances at the Kansas Music Educators Association Conference. Our students consistently compete at a high level at the state Music Memory competition each year. In 2014, we took first place in this prestigious music competition.

It is also worth noting we have a veteran staff and benefit from extremely low teacher turnover. For example, we have hired only 2 teachers in the last 13 years. By harnessing the experience and dedication of

our staff and utilizing quality programs, our school is committed to helping each student reach their full potential.

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

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

Reading and Language Arts are taught throughout the curriculum. Writing is incorporated into every subject area and each subject emphasizes reading skills. The pre-K-6 reading curriculum is largely based upon the state standards and includes an emphasis on phonemic skills. Foundational skills such as reading fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and literary elements are taught using a variety of instructional strategies. Instruction is adjusted based in response to student needs. Students are instructed in the areas of narrative, expository, technical, and persuasive reading and writing through the use of different types of high quality literary resources. A variety of high interest literature is also carefully selected and utilized to address each standard and exposes students to different genres and styles of literature.

Our math curriculum was selected based upon an analysis of student assessment data. Our data indicated that our students struggled with applying mathematical concepts. Student comprehension skills were good, but we felt like we needed a math curriculum to help our students develop better mathematical understanding and reasoning skills. We also wanted our students to be able to apply the skills that they acquire. We have since utilized a curriculum that helps us to better meet the state standards especially in the area of application. The goal of our math curriculum is to provide our students with research-based instruction that will enable them to develop problem solving skills and apply mathematical reasoning. To this end, our curriculum builds foundational skills by using meaningful real-life examples as a way to introduce and reinforce key mathematical concepts. The major concepts that our curriculum encompasses includes: money and time, number and numeration skills, operations and computation, data and chance, measurement and reference frames, geometry patterns and concepts, functions, and algebra concepts. Repeated exposure to these mathematical concepts and skills helps to develop students' ability to recall knowledge from long-term memory. We also frequently practice basic computation skills to build our mastery of mathematical procedures and quick recall of math facts. This is done through the use of learning games and storytelling. Students are also exposed to the use of a variety of mathematical methods and problem-solving strategies in order to build proficiency and to accommodate different learning styles.

Our science curriculum seeks to develop skills across the various fields of science, using a hands-on, project-based, scientific inquiry format. Students are instructed in a variety of sciences including physical, life, earth, space, technology, environmental, and natural sciences. These areas of science are taught using high interest topics that expose our students to different scientific areas. Topics of study include: plants, animals, air and weather, earth materials, the human body, the water cycle, electricity, magnets, energy, levers and pulleys, the solar system, variables, mixtures and solutions, rocket science, and robotics. The study of these topics utilizes the Engineering by Design model and STEAM activities. Our program culminates in 6th grade with the participation and competition of various Science Olympiad projects that cover all areas of science. The Science Olympiad Program supports our curriculum while allowing students of all academic levels to expand their individual skills in a scientific area of interest. Throughout our curriculum, scientific skills such as inferring, predicting, forming hypotheses, identifying and controlling variables, collecting and interpreting data, and experimentation are introduced and reinforced.

The social studies curriculum at Sterling Grade School includes the study of history, geography, and civics. It is designed to prepare our students to become productive citizens who can make well-informed and reasoned decisions. Teachers use several resources to teach foundational skills throughout the social studies curriculum. These skills include: locating information using different sources, story retelling, creating and using timelines, map reading, collecting, organizing, presenting data, recognizing historical perspectives, and using primary and secondary resources. Students study the traditions, cultures, continuity, and change in the history of our community, state, nation, and world. A study of the political processes and structures of government and the Constitution are also included. This study is accompanied by the practice of weighing evidence and drawing reasonable conclusions. Foundational skills, such as understanding, analysis, and application are emphasized over memorization. Classroom instruction goes beyond the facts to include research, interpretation, and communication skills. It is the goal of our social studies curriculum to develop these foundational skills in our students so that they may become informed productive citizens.

In our three and four-year old preschool program we use a variety of materials to address the learning of our students. Particularly we use the Get Set For School Math, Language and Literacy, and Handwriting Without Tears Curriculum. We address the common core standards of Physical Health & Development, Social-Emotional development, Communication and Literacy, Math, Science, Social Studies, and Creative Arts. These are addressed in the Kansas Early Learning Standards which align with the K- 3rd grade Common Core Standards. We use educational software for guided instruction to progress monitor the students. Students show significant improvement during the school year as evidenced by their progress monitored with AIMSweb.

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

Students in grades K-6 receive Art education once a week for 40 minutes. Lessons incorporate cross-curricular elements, including reading, poetry, math, and science. Nearly all lessons ask students to make decisions about elements of color choice, shape, and symbolism. Students learn how those choices can be used to create meaning or stir emotions. Art lessons incorporate math skills and vocabulary that include using geometric shapes, measuring, and creating complicated tessellations. Students learn creative decision making and problem-solving skills when creating their artwork, critical thinking skills upon reflecting on their work, and collaboration skills when working on group projects. When viewing other's work, students learn how to empathize. Students are asked higher order thinking questions such as, "What do you think the artist was trying to convey?" or "How did the artist use color, shape, or symbolism to create feeling?" Our curriculum works to increase a student's ability to observe, evaluate, draw conclusions, and increase appreciation of other cultures. One of the most valuable benefits that we see is increased student confidence. Students learn to take risks and try new things. Sometimes they succeed, other times they must try again, but the art room provides a safe environment for this experimentation and acquisition of these essential skills.

Sterling Grade School offers music classes for students in grades K-6 for an average of 90 minutes of instruction per week. The curriculum is built on the national standards for music education. The implementation of these standards aligns with the academics taught in the core curriculum. A closer examination of these standards reveals that in the unit on pitch, the students are taught the science of pitch production in both instruments and the human body, reinforcement of the alphabet, reading/singing poetry and literature, rhyming words, syllabic stress of words, creating melodies with instruments, and singing in other languages. In the units on rhythm and meter, the students are taught to read and count rhythms and different meters using both syllables and numbers. This includes the reinforcement of the numeric functions of addition, division, and fractions. In the unit on tone color, the students reinforce listening skills by reading, creating, and performing stories and music in different moods. Students learn how music is designed and patterned and also learn about different genres and time periods. In the unit on movement, the students study the cultures and history of our country and other countries through folk dance and folk music. The music curriculum is an integral part of the learning process.

The goal of our physical education curriculum is to teach students to be healthy and active by emphasizing lifelong fitness skills. Students in grades K-6 grades receive physical education on average about 90 minutes per week. Motor skills and eye/hand coordination activities are taught while individual and team activities give students a variety of fitness skills.

As part of our physical education curriculum, we utilize a program called Bal-A-Vis-X. Specific exercises assist with muscle memory, eye/hand coordination, and with the academic skills of reading and math. Identified students are given additional Bal-A-Vis-X three days a week for 10 minutes a day. In physical education classes, eye/hand coordination and the ability to follow multiple step directions are assessed. Eye, ear, hand, and foot dominance are also determined. A series of occipital tracking assessments looks for skips and glitches in the student's visual tracking. We then incorporate a variety of memory and physical activities to provide all students with improved balance, auditory, and vision capabilities.

Our library curriculum goals are to provide books, technology, and other tools to support academic and recreational learning, to teach information literacy and digital citizenship skills, and to provide enrichment activities and programs to encourage lifelong learning, collaboration, and problem solving. Annual

circulation tops 30,000 checkouts, and our collection features high-quality, engaging books that are aligned to the curriculum. Each month, grades K-5 students have two library skills lessons and two story time sessions, and students have daily access to check out books. The library curriculum includes topics such as: library use, digital citizenship, research skills, ebook and audiobook access, and technology. Our website of online resources is available year round and is promoted to students and parents. Special programs include student voting in our state reader's choice award, Battle of the Books competition, Read Across America activities, author visits, and book fairs. Our library has started a STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, math) makerspace program featuring hands-on materials. The library regularly collaborates with community groups such as the Sterling College Education Department and the public library.

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

Sterling Grade School provides a variety of research based instructional methods and strategies that are designed to meet the needs of each learner. Whenever possible, instructional strategies incorporate hands-on, project-based, learning activities that include STEAM projects, Engineering By Design lessons, robotics units, scientific experimentation, and participation in academic competitions. Teachers also use instructional strategies such as storytelling and musical/rhythmical jingles to help students remember key ideas. By personalizing the information, it allows students to conceptualize essential skills and knowledge. The main benefit is that the student interest level increases and students are able to remember the concept better when they have a story as a reference point.

Experiential learning is fundamental to the instructional approaches that we utilize. For example, when we talk about civics and the structure of governments, we take students to city hall where students visit with our city manager about the jobs of the city employees and the commissioners. The students then get to assume roles and work through a high interest problem as council members, mayor, and city managers. This year they solved the problem of needing new slides at the city pool which led to other discussions like where we get our water for the pool and what happens to our water when we flush the toilet. Students enjoy participating in these learning simulations because they are meaningful and relevant to their lives.

Another example of experiential learning is when we study the branches of government and learn about the legislative process. Students learn how to debate an issue and then write a bill for things that could improve our school. If the class votes to approve a bill it is submitted for approval by the president (or school principal). Past "bills" that have been signed by the principal and enacted include; lines painted on the basketball court, addition of playground equipment, strawberry milk for lunch, and a recess ball cart. When our students study early American History, they put on a "living wax museum" complete with authentic costumes and are on display, coming to "life" to tell their story when another student stops by for a visit. In other words, we use hands-on, high-interest, activities to bring foundational skills to life.

To help motivate and maintain high levels of student achievement, students participate in various academic competitions such as Battle of the Books, Music Memory, and Science Olympiad. By incorporating these competitive activities, it challenges students that are high performing to further develop their skills to compete against each other and against students across the state.

There are several interventions that are used to help ensure that each student receives the instruction that they need to be successful. Teachers and administration meet regularly to review student data and determine appropriate strategies and interventions. One intervention is that we provide small group instruction for our students, especially in the areas of math and reading. Being a school-wide Title I school allows us to serve all students. We use our Title I and resource teachers to provide additional classroom support and small, ability grouped, instruction for all students, both those above grade level those below. Students are identified and grouped using data from different assessments. The Measurement of Academic Progress test, or MAP test data is used along with the AIMSweb progress monitoring data and data from the Standardized Test for the Assessment of Reading, or STAR.

Another intervention is the use of our reading academy within the instructional day. Students are progress monitored using AIMSweb to ensure that they are making adequate academic growth. Those students that are not on grade level receive additional reading instructional time. This additional instruction is also

provided in a small group setting with about a 6:1 teacher student ratio. This ensures that struggling students (tier 2 students) not only receive small group instruction for their regular reading instructional time, but also additional instructional time each day.

Other interventions include our Sterling Helpful Academic Support Tutorial Assistance program (SHASTA) as mentioned in our school summary and our summer school program where our students are able to attend for an extra three weeks of small group intensive instruction to develop and strengthen their math and reading skills. Our student growth data indicates that students that receive these interventions improve in their academic skills.

## PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

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### **1. School Climate/Culture:**

Positive student engagement is critical to motivating our students to succeed. Some time ago our district facilitated a Ruby Payne training on dealing with students that come from backgrounds of poverty. One of the things that we learned is that for students that come from backgrounds of poverty, their primary motivation for school success is in their relationship with their teacher. We understand the importance of building authentic relationships with our students and their families. We have a saying that is repeated at our school that “it’s not the programs, it’s the people.” This summarizes our belief that if we don’t build relationships with our students, we will struggle to be successful as a school. It also means that if we don’t have good teachers, then the best programs won’t be successful either.

We know that we have the power to influence our students and make a difference in their lives. Simply put, relationships matter. How we interact with our students each day is critical to the success of our kids. To this end we seek to promote school wide social skills training through our counseling and other programs. We also deliberately celebrate the success of our students in positive and meaningful ways at assemblies we call Friday Focus. Our school mascot is the black bears and we have different character traits that we call the Bear Necessities. These “necessities” include traits such as respect, empathy, and perseverance. We talk about how these traits can help us become better people. We brag on our students in front of other students and teachers. Students are recognized for academic achievement, good citizenship, for demonstrating the “Bear Necessities,” for having good attendance, for meeting academic goals, and for any other reason we can find to celebrate student success. Our assemblies seek to unite the entire school and build moral as we celebrate both student and teacher success.

However, the daily work of establishing a positive climate is done by the staff to make sure students feel cared for and valued. Teachers and staff know students by name and know their likes, dislikes, talents and weaknesses. Each child is valued as a person, and the emphasis is not just teaching academics, but also interpersonal and socio-emotional skills to create a good citizen. It is a priority for our students to feel like family and to know that we care about their joys, successes, and struggles.

### **2. Engaging Families and Community:**

Our students benefit by strong community relationships. To promote family and community engagement we instituted student led parent teacher conferences where the students present to their parent(s) and/or families their accomplishments and challenges for the year. Student presentations demonstrate to families what they know, understand, or can perform and give students an opportunity to share and celebrate their achievements. Parents also get involved in their students learning by attending one of our family activity nights where students and parents play games together that help promote the benefits of physical activity. We also strive to engage families and our community by bringing in parent and community volunteers to read to classes for library story times, and help with our school book fairs. We also utilize local Sterling College students to provide extra help in our classrooms and extra assistance for our students. Community partnerships also are evident in our after school club called Kids Cove. This non-profit organization partners with the school to provide child care after school and during the summer months at the grade school.

Students are also given opportunities to make community connections between what they learn in school and how it applies to their community. For example, students learn about various conflicts throughout our nation’s history and then participate and perform at Veterans Day and Patriots Day programs given for local Veterans that served in those events. Students also design a button each year that is used for our local 4th of July community celebration.

Students are taught the importance of helping others and are given opportunities to engage our community. Each year students visit the local nursing home and perform programs for the residents and for the local retired teachers association. Once a month our students collect food for our local food bank and at

Christmas time students bring in various items to help out families that are in need, often helping out our very own students' families. Furthermore, our students rake leaves in the fall and use the money they earn as a class to purchase gifts for our Angel tree program to benefit those who are in need. We also collect plastic shopping bags for a community member that makes the bags into sleeping mats for people who are homeless. Students also do yard work for community members that have special needs or circumstances. Recently, students voluntarily donated money (over \$400) to help out one of our families as they travel back and forth to visit one of their children in the hospital.

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

Professional learning consists of Professional Learning Communities and district professional development days within the framework provided by the District Professional Development Plan. The Sterling Grade School Building Leadership Team (BLT) conducts needs assessment utilizing student performance data to identify gaps in curriculum and practice. Based upon the needs assessment data, the BLT develops a Results Based Staff Development Plan. This dynamic document helps direct professional learning. The Results Based Staff Development Plan is continually evaluated and refined by the BLT as new data becomes available, with the goal of meeting student needs as they change.

District professional development focuses on helping all educators improve the educational experiences that we provide for our students. The goal is to help improve instruction and in the past we have been able to bring in local and national consultants to help us sharpen our instructional skills. Recently, our staff attended a professional development day with Dr. Marsha Tate, author of *Worksheets Don't Grow Dendrites* and have plans next year to have Dr. Ruby Payne lead our staff in her work on teaching students that come from a background of poverty.

Professional learning communities at Sterling Grade School are led by both teachers and the building principal and meet during early dismissal days. These professional learning communities help teachers meet the learning standards and needs of their students. Teachers share current practices, new programs, or ideas and strategies they might have learned at a professional conference or from another teacher. These professional learning communities provide opportunities for teachers to collaborate, design lessons, and improve instruction that is specific to the needs of their students. Teachers also submit a professional development plan at the beginning of the year that includes professional learning goals. These plans are reviewed together by the teacher and principal and discussions are held on how those goals can be met. Teachers are encouraged to attend professional workshops and conferences that address their professional development goals. Teachers are also encouraged to observe and collaborate with other teachers, both within and outside the school as well.

Finally, administrators within the school district also submit professional development plans and are encouraged and allowed to attend professional workshops and conferences throughout the year. Currently, the administrative team is reviewing the book, *Professional Learning Communities at Work* by Richard DuFour in an effort to re-examine how we structure our learning communities in order to maximize their benefits.

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

At Sterling Grade School, we have a philosophy that every staff member is a leader in their area because we are all responsible for student success. We believe that everyone has the ability and power to make a positive difference in the lives of those around us. We trust our staff and strive to treat them like professionals in their field, because they are. Each staff member is encouraged to make improvements in their individual area of influence. This philosophy applies to everyone including cooks, custodians, bus drivers, secretaries, and teachers. Procedures and practices are encouraged to be analyzed and each person has the authority to make suggestions for improvement.

The formal leadership structure consists of a building principal, a building leadership team, and the building site council. The building site council is an advisory board made up of faculty representatives, parents, and community members, and local business leaders. The role of the principal is dynamic

depending upon the needs of the students and staff. Formally the building principal at Sterling Grade School is responsible for being the instructional leader, overseeing the curricula, assessing teaching methods, monitoring student achievement, encouraging parent involvement, enforcing policies and procedures, administering the building budget, hiring and evaluating staff, and supervising school facilities and events. However, in a small school like ours the building principal might also act as a secretary, custodian, school nurse, substitute teacher, provide technical support, and supervise the playground and lunchroom. Often these roles are carried out all in the same day.

The building leadership team consists of staff representatives from different departments within the school. Meetings are held to discuss a variety of things that are specific to our building and faculty. The duty of each building leadership team member is to provide input and guidance in order to improve the educational experience of our students. Some of the responsibilities of building leadership team members include analyzing student data, provide input and recommendations on curriculum, identify staff development needs, assist in the interview process of new staff, provide input on the building budget, assist in our school accreditation process, help set building goals, provide faculty representation at site council and school board meetings, and provide feedback and dialogue between administration and faculty. The building leadership team has had a direct impact on helping determine student resources and establish school procedures. This has helped to create a positive student learning environment.

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

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It is impossible to identify the one practice that makes Sterling Grade School successful. It is a combination of many great things: a strong dedication to student achievement, a highly qualified staff, consistent leadership, a kind and loving school environment, and high academic expectations. However, if called to identify one practice, it would be how we utilize our classroom and Title I teachers.

Sterling Grade School is a school-wide Title I school that employs 2.5 Title I teachers that help provide additional intensive instructional support for our students in reading and math. It is one of the major resources that we use to meet the diverse and individual needs of our students. Being a school wide Title I school allows us to use our Title I teachers to help any student needing assistance and to provide additional instruction and interventions. We currently have a classroom student to teacher ratio of 19:1. However, by utilizing Title I teachers whenever we are teaching math or reading, that ratio drops to about 9:1. This allows students to receive more individualized instruction and more direct instructional contact with a highly qualified teacher. When we are able to incorporate a special education teacher within the classroom to help with instruction, this ratio is reduced even further to about 6:1. By utilizing additional para and volunteer support, at times we are able to reduce our student to teacher ratio even further to as low as 2:1. By ensuring that small group instruction takes place with our reading and math classes, our students benefit from highly individualized instruction. This allows our teachers to better identify the strengths and weaknesses of each student and then make responsive adjustments in their instruction in order to specifically meet the learning needs of each student; both those that struggle and those that have high levels of achievement. These teachers work with students both inside and outside the regular classroom in literature groups, small math and reading groups, and provide after school tutorial assistance as well.

Our Title I program has been key to our academic success and last year Sterling Grade School was recognized as a 2016 National Title I Distinguished School for our continuous high achievement. Sterling Grade School had the highest average Assessment Performance Index (API) of all Title I schools on the 2015 and 2016 Kansas Assessments. Our API ranked Sterling Grade School in first place out of 667 Title I schools in Kansas.