

U.S. Department of Education
2018 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

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

Official School Name Vacherie Elementary School
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 13440 Highway 644
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

Vacherie LA 70090-3105
City State Zip Code+4 (9 digits total)

County__

Telephone (225) 258-5250 Fax

Web site/URL http://stjamesves.sharpschool.net E-mail jdauzat@stjames.k12.la.us

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

Date _____

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent*Dr. Edward Cancienne
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other) E-mail ecancienne@stjames.k12.la.us

District Name St. James Parish School Board Tel. (225) 258-4500

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

Date _____

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board
President/Chairperson Mr. George Nassar
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

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

Date _____

(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

The original signed cover sheet only should be converted to a PDF file and uploaded via the online portal.

*Non-public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, write N/A in the space.

Part I – Eligibility Certification

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

1. The school configuration includes one or more of grades K-12. (Schools on the same campus with one principal, even a K-12 school, must apply as an entire school.)
2. All nominated public schools must meet the state's performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group and all subgroups, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
3. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2018 in order to meet all eligibility requirements. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
4. If the school includes grades 7 or higher, the school must have foreign language as a part of its curriculum.
5. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2012 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
6. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, or 2017.
7. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's application and/or rescind a school's award if irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state.
8. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as "persistently dangerous" within the last two years.
9. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
10. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
11. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution's equal protection clause.
12. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Data should be provided for the most recent school year (2017-2018) unless otherwise stated.

DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 6 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 0 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 2 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 8 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	16	15	31
K	20	16	36
1	14	19	33
2	22	17	39
3	27	21	48
4	20	23	43
5	24	19	43
6	21	23	44
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	164	153	317

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 0 % Asian
 - 48 % Black or African American
 - 5 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 47 % White
 - 0 % Two or more races
 - 100 % Total**

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

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2016 – 2017 school year: 8%

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	10
(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)]	24
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2016	313
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.08
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	8

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 3 %
9 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: 153

8. Students receiving special education services: 24 %
76 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>5</u> Autism | <u>1</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>1</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>10</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>8</u> Developmentally Delayed | <u>20</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>27</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>4</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: 10
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	Number of Staff
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	15
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.	8
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	8

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 21:1

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.

All students at Vacherie Elementary School will achieve academic success prepared to enter high school college and career ready.

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

Vacherie Elementary School (VES) is comprised of Pre - K to sixth graders and is located in St. James Parish, created in 1807. Rich soil is great for growing sugarcane and soybeans, making this parish remarkable in history, culture, and people. The abundance of family- owned businesses and industries keep this parish flourishing. We are centrally located between Louisiana's two biggest cities, New Orleans and Baton Rouge. The Mississippi River divides the parish into the West and East Bank, which gives many the opportunity for employment all along the river.

There is a large percentage of student population comprised of lower socio-economic backgrounds. Few parents have attended secondary education, or obtained college degrees. The vast majority of these parents choose to send their child to the magnet school within the district or private schools in or around our community. The remaining population of parents are blue collar workers who have earned a High School diploma, being in the middle to lower class working families. Students reside with parents, family members, or guardians. A large percentage of students are latch-key because both parents work outside of the home. Because of this situation, students are usually receiving little to no assistance with academics at home. The parents who are not employed are unable to assist due to their lack of education or ability.

Vacherie Elementary School was established in 1967 as an all girls school educating 1st – 7th grade students. From 1968 through 1974 this site housed both boys and girls from K-3rd grade and only girls from 4th-8th. The boys attended Shellmound School in grades 4th-8th. In 1974 the schools were restructured. Vacherie Primary was opened to service students in grades K – 3rd (later adding PK students) and Vacherie Elementary now housed 4th – 8th grade boys and girls. Later, the 7th and 8th grade students transitioned to our local high school. In the 2011-2012 school year, PK – 3rd merged to VES with 4th – 6th grade students.

Traditionally, St. James Parish is known for its hospitality around the holidays and sporting events. Around the Christmas holidays, families open up their homes to welcome others when lighting the “Bonfires on the Levee” for Papa Noel on Christmas Eve. Another holiday tradition involves Mardi Gras which is celebrated annually involving our students. The Pre-K students, along with parents, enjoy decorating floats and throwing beads and goodies to older students, visitors, and parents. Another huge tradition in South Louisiana is sports. Students participate in sporting activities including football, basketball, and baseball sponsored by St. James Parish Recreation Department. Parents are supportive of these outside school events, as well as, the school’s basketball team, which competes with schools throughout the district.

Within the last five years, VES has been challenged with adversity due to a Magnet School opening on the East Bank of St. James Parish. Many of the parents of our higher achieving students chose to take advantage of this opportunity, due to the appeal of this Performing Arts School. Although there has been a change in student population, VES has managed to sustain its School Performance Score, which rates how well students are performing in the areas of math, language arts, science and social studies. By incorporating strategies to meet the needs of students, the achievement gap has been closed. We are proud of this tremendous milestone we have been able to overcome. Within our school district, VES has the highest number of English Limited Language Students (ELL), majority speaking Spanish. In order to achieve this milestone, data was collected to determine if intervention was necessary. After school tutoring has been embedded immediately to assist students when not mastering grade level skills.

Several key strategies are embedded within the school to encourage and challenge all students to develop their full potential academically, emotionally, physically, socially, and culturally. Prior to the school day beginning, we are able to serve free breakfast and lunch in order to ensure the basic needs of individual students are addressed. Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) team developed a plan to reward students for appropriate behavior, which appealed to the students’ emotional needs. Students were also able to speak to the Social Worker on an as needed basis to address social and cultural skills to ensure students were in a positive frame of mind for learning to take place.

Academically, several instructional changes attributed to the success of Vacherie Elementary meeting its goal of increasing student achievement. Teachers modeled their thinking by incorporating “think alouds”

within daily instruction. Questioning techniques were also studied, teaching students to engage in meaningful discussions. After administering weekly cumulative assessments, teachers and paraprofessionals implemented small group instruction to remediate and accelerate students.

Regular education and special education teachers collaborated to target skills not yet mastered and provided remediation, scaffolding instruction necessary to work towards mastery of state standards. High performing students were challenged through the use of various computerized programs. At VES, we recognize the need for educating the “whole” child.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

The new Louisiana Student Standards provided the framework our district and school used to make instructional and curricular decisions. The district adopted Eureka for math and the Louisiana Guidebooks for ELA. In social studies, the decision was to follow the state department's scope and sequence, which is divided into units and includes topics and tasks along with assessments. Since science standards were the last to be revamped, the school wrote and received a grant for FOSS (Full Option Science System) kits since the kits follow the National Science Standards. There are a few instructional shifts that went into effect across all content areas.

The St. James Parish School District has adopted the English Language Arts Tier I curriculum, Louisiana Guidebooks; therefore, it was utilized by teachers at Vacherie Elementary School (VES). Louisiana teachers were afforded the opportunity to design these guidebooks to ensure all students read, understand, and express their understanding of more complex, grade-level text. The curriculum is centered around theme collections, including texts and novels, engaging students with text to build knowledge and tackle big ideas. At VES, grade level teachers met with the leadership team to develop a scope and sequence to ensure students were exposed to a variety of fiction and nonfiction texts. During Professional Learning Communities, different strategies were introduced and perfected to ensure students were able to comprehend rigorous text and also respond to text in writing, providing text based evidence within their responses. In Louisiana, the state assessment includes research, expository and narrative texts. The strategy PEELS (Point, Evidence, Explain, Link, Style) was selected because it ensured students were able to earn all possible points, according to the state rubric. It provided a framework for students when responding to research and expository text. For narrative writing, teachers and the curriculum coach periodically met with a professor from our local university, to receive professional development in the Step Up to Writing Process. Throughout the school year, the team tweaked the process to better meet the needs of our students. Teachers also utilized the writing strategies when responding to text within the other subject areas including mathematics, social studies, and science.

The Eureka Math Curriculum was implemented at VES because the ultimate goal of the program is to teach students to become critical thinkers, while developing conceptual understanding. Students were introduced to various strategies to utilize when solving problems, including mental math and multi-step processes. All students were encouraged to focus on the process; therefore, teachers expected students to show their work on a daily basis. When data was analyzed, it was determined that students were unable to quickly recall basic math applications; therefore, fluency was embedded into daily lessons. In time, students' ability to be successful in solving multi step problems was improved due to fluency sprint drills, requiring students to solve as many math problems as possible within a certain time limit. The modules, within the Eureka Math Curriculum, also include rigorous classroom reasoning, extended classroom time devoted to practice and reflection through extensive problem sets, and high expectations for mastery. In addition to Eureka, the school purchased ZEARN (a math program based on Eureka Math) that was designed as designed as a tool for teachers to deepen, extend, and/or remediate as needed in their classroom. Teachers had the autonomy to use ZEARN as a way to remediate skills that students struggled with or to accelerate students who were ready for the challenge. In addition, the district purchased iReady, an adaptive diagnostic tool, to pinpoint areas of weakness. Teachers were encouraged to follow the scope and sequence of Eureka, making adjustments as needed to ensure mastery of standards prior to state testing.

Science teachers utilized the FOSS Kits after reviewing several book adoptions because they incorporate the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), along with integrating the three dimensions: the Disciplinary Core Ideas, the Science and Engineering Practices, and the Crosscutting Concepts. The NGSS kits also engage and pique students' interest, ensuring a deeper conceptual understanding. The principal was accompanied by a male Science teacher, traveling to Los Angeles to attend a STEM training. He was hired as a STEM teacher to model lessons for science teachers. All teachers were required to create and deliver future STEM lessons to ensure students were emerged in inquiry learning. As a result, the students enjoyed

the hands on approach and scores also improved.

The text used throughout many of the Guidebooks correlated to the social studies standards. Guidebooks introduced students through literature to many of the social studies standards in a seamless manner. A couple of teachers from our school were also afforded the opportunity to serve on the social studies state assessment team. They were given the opportunity to provide feedback and hear first hand some strategies and suggestions to help our students succeed. Our district liaison from the state also shared some information they learned from working with other districts as well as his experience from working on the assessment writing team. Based on the information provided by our teachers and district liaison, we adjusted our scope and sequence. Since our reading teachers were also our social studies teachers, responding to text in social studies helped students master many important writing skills.

The VES Pre-K teachers use the D.I.G. curriculum [Develop, Inspire, Grow] to encompass all core curriculum areas: Math, ELA (Reading), Science, and Social Studies. D.I.G. features thematic, integrated instruction centered around key science and social studies concepts with weekly focus questions for inquiry-based learning. It also integrates daily robust math instruction, active meaningful literacy learning, explicit oral language development, and purposeful differentiation.

The D.I.G. curriculum is aligned to the Teaching Strategies Gold (TS Gold) that encompasses objectives for Development & Learning: Birth Through Third Grade using the common core standards.

Our early childhood program impacts our students by preparing them with foundations in social/emotional skills, cognitive skills, numeracy skills (pre-math), literacy skills (pre-reading), science inquiry, social studies, and fine/gross motor skills.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Our school utilizes two certified arts specialists to provide instruction in music and visual arts. All students in kindergarten through sixth grade participate in each program ninety minutes per week for eighteen weeks. Our visual arts program supports classroom experiences that encourage students in kindergarten through sixth to create art and reflect upon what they have made, seek and construct meaning through encounters with art, create narratives about artworks, understand the historical and cultural contexts of works of art, and discover the significance and value of art in their lives. Student work is displayed throughout our school and they are presented with many opportunities that give them a venue to feel like an artist.

Students learn many skills in the music program. Our music lessons are comprised of a balanced and sequential program of singing, playing instruments, listening to music, improvising and composing, and moving to music. Also included are learning experiences designed to develop the ability to read music, use the notation and terminology of music, analyze and describe music, make informed evaluations concerning music, and understand music and music practices in relation to history and culture and to other disciplines in the curriculum. When students enter the sixth grade, they can choose to play an instrument. Instruction is offered on flute, clarinet, alto saxophone, trumpet, French horn, trombone, baritone and percussion. The Talented Music Program is offered on a district level to our students. We have one gifted music student and a certified gifted music teacher services her.

We cultivate our music and arts programs by allowing each department to produce our annual Christmas performance. The families of our students, the surrounding communities, and stakeholders witness these productions.

Our school's physical education curriculum provides our students with the skills and knowledge necessary to live healthy and active lifestyles. Our certified physical education teacher places an emphasis on student learning, personal success, fair play, and personal health. The lessons are well planned, incorporate a wide range of activities, and meet provincial curriculum learning outcomes. The activities are appropriate to the age and stage of development for each student and their opportunities to be physically active beyond the physical education time (intramurals, extracurricular, and school wide initiatives such as daily physical activity).

Technology is an essential part of the education of our students. St. James Parish School District is one of the leading technology rich school districts in the state of Louisiana. Our pre-kindergarten through first grade classes are equipped with five desktop computers (Apple) and 10 iPads. All students in grades second through sixth have a one on one MacBook Air laptop. The MacBook is equipped with applications that help to enhance learning experiences and the technology/library/media curriculum helps to prepare students utilize the technology bestowed upon them. All curricular areas are dependent upon library media services for the support necessary to meet many outcomes in various disciplines. The purpose of our curriculum is to act as a framework for instructing students to be seekers and users of information and ideas. By integrating classroom objectives and collaborating with classroom teachers, the technology/library/media curriculum provides a basis for a library program that can meet the needs of each student population. The technology/library/media curriculum provides opportunities for students and staff to become life-long learners who can independently access, evaluate, and use information. The curriculum also promotes literacy and reading, provides instruction in the use of information technology and search strategies, and extends the classroom curriculum through an educational partnership between teachers and the library media specialist. All students in kindergarten through sixth grade attend a library session once a week for forty-five minutes for the full academic school year. Students are also given other opportunities to visit the library daily. The Accelerated Reader (AR) Program is implemented for students in grades three to six and students are allowed to check out books and complete their Accelerated Reader (AR) tests.

Our 6th grade students are offered a drug abuse resistance education program. The D.A.R.E. (drug abuse resistance education program) curriculum is designed to be delivered sequentially to sixth grade and is taught for one hour a week for eighteen weeks. The D.A.R.E. program is a collaborative program in which our local law enforcement educates students about the personal and social consequences of substance abuse violence.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

The faculty and staff at Vacherie Elementary School utilize a variety of instructional approaches and strategies to meet the divergent needs of the student population. These educators attend many Professional Learning Communities throughout the year to work toward a greater level of excellence in their instruction. The teachers study the Louisiana Student Standards and released assessment guides to ensure rigorous instruction is presented to the students. Numerous data points are analyzed to determine weaknesses and strengths of the student body and then further dissected for individual students. These data points are the results of the LEAP 360 and iReady assessments, State Interim Tests, DIBELS, weekly cumulative tests, and individual teacher's RTI tracking data for students needing intervention. This process occurs at the start and periodically throughout the school year to adjust instructional groups and approaches and methods to teach toward mastery of the standards.

Tiered instruction and differentiation are required to close the achievement gap of two sub groups whose proficiency levels were more than 10 percentage points lower than the total student population. The two groups are regular education students with 504 plans (23 percentage points) and students with disabilities (13 percentage points). Many strategies are incorporated into daily instruction to remediate these students, as well as all students, to reach proficiency. Differentiation can be observed in all classes through varied ability level small group instruction, heterogeneous cooperative groups for peer assistance, and individual interventions. Direct instruction programs, Reading Mastery and the Linda Ferrell Phonics Series, are taught to struggling readers on the primary level. The students are grouped accordingly for intervention and are instructed by different members of the faculty. These small groups of students are remediated on basic foundational reading skills, assessed, and progress tracked until mastery. Title 1 funds are used to employ a retired teacher to tutor small groups of students in grades three through six, remediating them on skills needed to meet grade level standards. This tutor also works with students who are high achieving in order to accelerate their growth. All personnel in the school, through a pull out or push-in model, intervene with small groups of students to reduce the number of non-proficient students in all subgroups with the goal of all achieving their growth targets. Tier II, III, and IV interventions are implemented to target skills not yet mastered, provide remediation, and scaffold instruction necessary to master the grade level standards. Students are placed in homogeneous groups after analyzing several different data points and are instructed

on deficient skills utilizing a variety of methods, strategies, and programs. As stated earlier, the Linda Ferrell Phonics Series is utilized with the primary students, Kindergarten through second grade, to remediate deficits in basic foundational reading skills. Students in Kindergarten and first grade who are struggling with sight words are taught using images with sight words on note cards. All students in grades Kindergarten through sixth are tested three times a year in ELA and Math on the computer program iReady. This program produces reports stating the specific skills each student has not mastered and creates individual prescriptions providing practice on deficient skills. The math computer program Zearn differentiates instruction for each student with remediation and acceleration of skills on prior, present, and future Eureka lessons.

Due to a tremendous increase in the number of students with disabilities, the special education teachers must work collaboratively with the regular education teachers to produce the greatest impact on the achievement levels of these students. The special education teachers scaffold instruction and ensure mastery of grade level standards through inclusion and pull out models. Parent meetings with the IEP team are held throughout the school year to revise IEPs and adjust goals based on students' progress or lack of progress. The School Building Level Committee meets twice a week to review the status of the RTI students' tracking to determine if the interventions are showing progress or the methods of instruction need to be adjusted. All 504 students are carefully monitored and parents attend these meetings regularly.

The efforts of the Vacherie Elementary School's faculty and leadership have resulted in specific groups of students performing better than all schools in Louisiana in the following areas: Economically Disadvantaged (64% of student population) scored 67% better, Students with Disabilities (21% of student population) scored 84% better, African Americans (52% of student population) scored 75% better, and Whites (38% of student population) scored 41% better.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

Vacherie Elementary Schools faculty and staff believe an inviting climate and culture that creates a feeling of acceptance, belonging, and safety is conducive for learning. Incentives are available for students to earn for exhibiting good behavior as well as effort and achievement on state testing. The school-wide PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention Support) encourages and rewards students for following all rules and procedures. The students have opportunities to earn “Rocket Bucks” weekly for meeting behavior expectations. These “Bucks” are exchanged for items sold in the “Rocket Room” which is managed by community volunteers. Every grading quarter offers the students additional incentives to earn. Examples of these incentives are: field trips to the movie theater, fifties dance parties, horse and buggy rides, and activity games days. Students who struggle with abiding by the rules and procedures are encouraged with a mentor as well as participate in Restorative Circles, an aspect of Restorative Practices that is implemented school-wide to build and restore relationships. The students are encouraged to perform at their maximum ability on the state LEAP360 assessment. A motivational pep rally is held the week before testing. The teachers participate in a cheer and a motivational speaker talks to the students on the importance of striving for a level of excellence to become successful in life. T-shirts are presented to all faculty and staff as well as the students who are the highest scoring or have made the most progress toward achieving their growth targets from the prior year. All students are awarded small incentives daily during testing weeks for being present, putting forth effort, and exhibiting good behavior. Meeting these daily criteria affords students an opportunity to win a shopping spree. There has been a marked improvement in student achievement and behavior as a result of these incentives.

The mutual respect among faculty and leadership is the foundation that builds strong relationships among all stakeholders. All teachers and staff members are reminded that each and every one are a valuable part of raising student achievement. Teachers are provided with all instructional materials in addition to professional development to make learning relevant and meaningful. Teachers exhibiting leadership qualities are afforded opportunities to attend professional development off campus with the goal of redelivering the training to their coworkers. Additional appreciation is shown to the teachers during “Teacher Appreciation Week” such as duty free lunch, t-shirts, coupons for meals at local restaurants, school calendars, to name just a few. The entire Vacherie Elementary School “family” is a vital component of having our students feel loved and safe which results in students who develop the self-confidence to achieve beyond their own expectations.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Families are invited to be actively involved in their child’s education. Instructional materials and student assignments are distributed in the classroom and posted on the website. Because of the rigor of the LA Student Standards, multiple educational websites are linked for families to utilize when assisting students with assignments. Parents are able to view students’ grades daily and communicate with teachers and administration by use of the parish parent portal website, PowerSchool. In January, student- led conferences are scheduled to allow students to inform parents or guardians of their progress.

Because we firmly believe in educating the “whole” child, it is necessary for a relationship to develop between parents, guardians, students, and all faculty and staff members. We encourage the relationship to begin prior to the school year. Phone calls are made and flyers are posted encouraging all stakeholders to informally gather at “Meet and Greet.” During this time, parents bring supplies and materials to the classroom and get a chance to meet the teachers as well as other school employees. Parents are also informed of VES’ open door policy, welcoming them to visit, observe, or volunteer at any time during the year. In addition, families are also encouraged to attend and participate in annual Title 1 parental involvement activities, book fair, Fall Fest, Christmas Program, award ceremonies, BETA and 4-H club activities.

Community members, including retired teachers, volunteer to assist teachers and tutor struggling students.

Local pastors visit students mentoring them to develop relationships outside of the church to encourage academics and positive behavior. One of the local chemical plants, Noranda Alumina, has partnered with us, providing monetary donations and personnel to assist at the Fall Fest. Additional plants in the parish also provide judges for the science fair and allow students the opportunity to take part in the Pillowcase Project, teaching them how to prepare for an emergency evacuation.

Students are also taught the importance of giving back to the community through clubs and organizations. During the holiday season, HOPE students enjoy Christmas caroling in the local community and delivering goody bags to the less fortunate. The BETA students organized a “Breakfast with Santa” on a Saturday for all members of the community. 4-H members collected items for those losing homes due to a tornado hitting the Convent area. The old phrase, “It takes a village to raise a child,” is evidenced at Vacherie Elementary School.

3. Professional Development:

Prior to the beginning of the school year, the St. James Parish School District provides two days of professional development on academic focus areas aligned to standards. Teachers and other members of the teaching profession are trained on curriculum programs and strategies to embed within classroom instruction directly impacting student achievement. All educators are provided the opportunity to network with other professionals according to the grade level and content areas taught. Teachers continue the networking process throughout the school year, creating strong professional learning opportunities.

It is the responsibility of each school within the district to continue providing support to educators on the district’s focuses for the school year. In addition, the instructional specialist and teacher leaders are required to model lessons utilizing strategies learned. The leadership team, comprised of the principal, assistant principal, instructional specialist, and media specialist, holds content area and grade level meetings. Through Professional Learning Communities (PLC’s), teachers study assessment guides to ensure depth of knowledge of rigorous grade level standards and test structure. Standards are unwrapped to determine prerequisite skills to ensure teachers plan for remediation and scaffold instruction to meet the needs of lower performing students. In addition, while unwrapping standards, teachers are able to identify the more complex, higher-level thinking skills challenging students scoring mastery and advanced. Delivery of instruction is planned, and tests are designed according to guidance provided from the state. To ensure mastery of standards, teachers continued to design cumulative tests within all subject areas incorporating previously taught skills.

Annually in the state of Louisiana, schools are required to complete a School Improvement Plan that is written by the leadership team, faculty members, along with community members. The leadership team and faculty analyze data from LEAP standardized tests according to content areas, grade levels, and subgroups. Based on the data triangulation results, research based strategies are embedded into daily instruction to increase students’ performance. Individual student results are also studied to pinpoint areas of need to guide intervention in small groups. During PLC’s, teachers provide feedback on the effectiveness of the strategies based on results indicated on summative and formative assessments. Students’ academic progress has been noted as a result of the school and district initiatives put into place.

4. School Leadership:

In order for the school to be successful, all stakeholders must feel a sense of acceptance, belonging, and appreciation, which is the leadership philosophy. The principal believes in leading by example! The school is structured where respect is demonstrated to all; therefore, it is expected in return. All faculty and staff members are required to treat all stakeholders with dignity and respect. Students are always reminded that life is about choices, and every mistake made allows them to learn and grow from the experience. We practice restorative justice at VES to encourage students to resolve issues throughout their adolescent years learning how to make better choices in their futures. By creating a positive atmosphere for students, they are able to learn in a stress free environment to reach their ultimate potential.

Members of the leadership team supported teachers in the core subject areas. In order to better meet

individual needs, the principal worked with Math, instructional strategist worked with English Language Arts, assistant principal worked with Science, and media specialist worked with Social Studies. During Professional Learning Communities, strategies taught were embedded into daily instruction. The Instructional Specialist taught teachers how to demonstrate annotating text while reading, which could be practiced within all subject areas. Resources were purchased to enhance instruction in the classroom to raise student achievement. Technology was utilized throughout the school year to provide individualized remediation for students in need, helping to close the achievement gap.

The leadership team also completed ten-minute walk through classroom visits to observe teachers. A feedback form was developed with the teachers, and it was designed to purposefully check for implementation of all focus initiatives for the school year. Upon completion of walk through visits, the team discusses areas of strengths as well as weaknesses to determine which teachers are highly effective and which are in need of additional support. Model teachers are identified based on feedback collected during observations, along with test results indicating a high number of students proficient and above. These professionals are utilized to benefit struggling teachers. Peer observations are conducted to have co-workers benefit from witnessing what instruction should “look like” and “sound like.” Once the observations are completed, the instructional coach and model teachers continue to work with the struggling teachers by developing lesson plans, modeling lessons, team teaching, and providing additional feedback.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Vacherie Elementary School has been successful in closing the achievement gap through small group individualized instruction, focusing on each student's academic needs. In order to individualize instruction, it is necessary to analyze different data points three times a year. After analyzing the results of the first Linda Ferrell screener, Kindergarten through second grade students are grouped according to their instructional levels. Regular and special education teachers, along with Speech Pathologists collaborate with to plan instruction to intervene according to phonological weaknesses. Students are serviced within small groups through a pull out model to ensure all needs are met. Grandparents volunteer to drill high frequency words through the use of manipulatives to improve reading fluency.

The iReady computerized program prescribes an individualized learning path for all students in grades Kindergarten through sixth. During Professional Learning Communities, results are analyzed to develop ability level groups to target skills not yet mastered. Tiers I, II, III, and IV interventions are implemented based on areas of weaknesses conducted through computer labs, regular education instruction, and special education teachers.

In addition, state interims and weekly cumulative tests are analyzed, and students' progress is tracked through the collection of Response to Intervention. Regular education, special education, leadership team members, and the Title I employed former teacher remediate and scaffold instruction to ensure students work toward mastery of grade level standard. Paraprofessionals also provide remediation in small groups to differentiate instruction.

Since the demographics of the Vacherie Elementary School has changed to include an increased percentage of subgroups, our instructional models have shifted to meet the needs of our current population. Our present student population consists of 58% minorities, 21% students with disabilities, and 64% economically disadvantaged. Research indicates small group instruction is successful in advancing the achievement levels of struggling students. It is evident that all stakeholders including the regular and special education teachers, paraprofessionals, speech pathologists, a Title I tutor, grandparent volunteers, and leadership team members working together as a team has been instrumental in continuing to close the achievement gap!