



## **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

- Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
  - 109 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 29 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 28 High schools
  - 3 K-12 schools

169 TOTAL

### SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

- Category that best describes the area where the school is located:
  - Urban or large central city
  - Suburban
  - Rural or small city/town
- 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>	0	0	0
<b>K</b>	42	33	75
<b>1</b>	50	42	92
<b>2</b>	47	35	82
<b>3</b>	45	41	86
<b>4</b>	39	37	76
<b>5</b>	35	57	92
<b>6</b>	0	0	0
<b>7</b>	0	0	0
<b>8</b>	0	0	0
<b>9</b>	0	0	0
<b>10</b>	0	0	0
<b>11</b>	0	0	0
<b>12 or higher</b>	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	258	245	503

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 10 % Asian
  - 5 % Black or African American
  - 4 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 73 % White
  - 7 % 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.

<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	30
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	13
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	43
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2016	517
(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: 5%  
26 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):  
Spanish, Chinese, Turkish, Hindi, Vietnamese, Arabic, Japanese, Mandarin

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 6%  
Total number students who qualify: 29

8. Students receiving special education services: 8 %  
40 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>0</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                 | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness           | <u>3</u> Other Health Impaired                 |
| <u>10</u> Developmentally Delayed | <u>5</u> Specific Learning Disability          |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance    | <u>17</u> Speech or Language Impairment        |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment       | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>0</u> Intellectual Disability  | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 8
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	23
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	12
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	2
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 22:1

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%	97%	97%	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.

The West Towson community will collaborate to empower and inspire all students to reach their greatest potential. Through a safe, authentic, and engaging learning environment, the West Towson learners will become insightful, compassionate leaders equipped to make a positive impact on our world.

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**

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When West Towson Elementary School opened its doors to students in 2010, the community was presented with a school that looked and felt different from other schools in the district. The design of the building was driven by the location and a focus upon environmental sustainability. The three-story building was constructed on a site containing another school, thus demanding a small footprint to provide space for playgrounds, ball fields, and storm water management bioswags. The school is capped with a green roof, offering students and staff a unique outdoor learning space. Inviting common areas provide students and staff members with a variety of instructional environments. Classrooms are filled with sunlight, ergonomic furniture, and technology to support learning. The building design was one important factor which drove the vision and mission of the school, both of which focus upon preparing the students to be successful 21st century learners and responsible citizens.

West Towson is a suburban school located in Towson, Maryland. The school services students from several communities including West Towson, parts of the Rodgers' Forge, and homes along the Falls Road Corridor. West Towson's current enrollment of 497 includes students in kindergarten through grade five. The school's minority population is 27%. Five percent of students are English language learners, speaking eight different languages. The percentage of low income and disadvantaged students is 6%. Nearly 8% of students at the school receive special education services.

West Towson provides all students with a high-quality education through consistently high academic expectations, rigorous and relevant instruction, and engaging teaching/learning activities. Student performance on the PARCC Assessment reflects scores which have improved consistently for the past three years. In 2017, 76.8% of students taking the math test and 81.5% of students taking the reading test met or exceeded expectations. Customizing instruction to address students' individual needs has led to strong performance for all students including those receiving special education services, ELL services, as well as disadvantaged students. Classroom teachers differentiate their lessons by supporting their students with data-driven flexible grouping and small group instruction. Support staff members meet with students to implement targeted intervention programs designed to accelerate learning.

Staff members at West Towson understand the important impact that a positive school climate has on student learning. The staff ensures that the students have a safe and orderly learning environment, a focus on character development, and numerous opportunities to connect to their school. Students demonstrate leadership skills through participation in the student government, the school safety program, the Character Crew, the broadcast studio, green school activities, fifth grade jobs, and advanced art.

To provide the students with a well-balanced education, a variety of initiatives supplement the school's strong academic program. West Towson students receive recognition in STEM fairs, Safe Racer competitions, math challenges, and writing contests. Student artwork is displayed in the public library, local museums, and the school system headquarters. Students have showcased their dance, vocal and instrumental talents beyond the school house walls. West Towson is a Maryland Green School, and students have worked with their teachers to design and implement projects and programs to extend their knowledge of environmental science and outdoor education. In 2014 West Towson was one of ten Baltimore County Public Schools initiating the school system's Spanish language instruction known as the "Passport Program". The program has grown and now reaches all West Towson students in grades four and five.

Families applaud West Towson for the quality of the education, opportunities to become involved in the school, and the staff members' genuine concern for each child. The school has an active and involved PTA and parent body. The PTA works collaboratively with the school to support programs which build strong home school connections. The annual Generations Day Program attracts grandparents and other special friends. The PTA's Fall Picnic and Movie Nights bring families together for social activities. The school and PTA coordinate the school's strong cultural arts program featuring the talents of artists, authors, actors, dancers, and scientists for our students. Parents volunteer in many other capacities to support learning and various school activities.

The West Towson community values the importance of caring and compassion. Each year, the school participates in holiday food and toy drives. To emphasize the importance of giving back, West Towson implements the WAGS Program. The WAGS (Westies Always Give and Share) Program selects a focus country and provides activities to teach the students about the country's geography, culture, and language. Funds are raised to support one aspect of a school in the focus country. West Towson also demonstrates civic awareness through programs including the Patriot and Defender Program and Pinwheels for Peace. West Towson lives by the words "Team WTES: Every Child, Every Day". The school community collaborates to support all students to achieve academic excellence and become contributing citizens, prepared to make a difference in the global community.

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

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

West Towson’s educational program is based upon the Common Core Standards, Next Generation Science Standards, the Maryland Curriculum Frameworks, and the Baltimore County Public Schools’ curriculum. To customize instruction, teachers apply what they know about students’ levels of motivation, learning strengths and needs, background knowledge, and interests to provide appropriate challenge for each student. This knowledge of each learner flows into planning for small group instruction. Literacy plays an essential role in all content areas as students think about, listen to, talk about, read about, and write about what they are learning in all subject areas.

All students participate in a daily language arts block providing a balanced literacy program. Lessons include whole class, shared learning activities to teach grade level standards-based skills, strategies, and concepts. Small group instruction is differentiated to meet various needs. Several times a week, teachers meet with small groups to provide the students with scaffolded, enriched, or accelerated pathways to the curriculum. The pathways address grade level skills but adjust the text level, approach to learning, and products to meet the needs of the group. At other times, small group instruction addresses the need to reteach, reinforce, or extend specific skills. Guided reading, lessons focusing on strategic reading practices, close reading, and literature circles are examples of the work accomplished in small groups. Resources used to implement the program include the reading anthology, leveled readers, novels, digital print, and trade books. Leveled classroom libraries offer students opportunity for self-selected, independent reading. Students reading well below grade level receive additional support from special educators or the reading specialist. Students reading well above grade level participate in novel studies. All students build their writing skills through the writers’ workshop format. They write on a regular basis, and teachers meet individually or in small groups to provide mini-lessons addressing specific skills. The interactive nature of the language arts program builds students’ listening skills and their ability to verbally discuss and share their knowledge and understanding. Overall, the balanced literacy framework affords teachers numerous opportunities to respond to students needs through whole group, small group, and individual instruction.

West Towson’s mathematics program focuses on problem solving, communication, and critical thinking to provide a strong foundation for future mathematics learning. Math teachers focus on a specific bank of skills at each grade level in a manner that ensures that the students develop conceptual understanding and skill proficiency. Lessons challenge students to actively make meaning, connect their prior knowledge with new learning, and construct/adjust understanding through discourse and feedback. Math instruction encourages students to problem solve, reason, and think critically. Students are taught to use tools to make sense of mathematics and solve problems in different ways. In the primary grades, math workshops focus on building a strong foundation of number sense. Students facing significant challenges in mathematics receive math intervention support before school. These students may also receive support from special education staff to address gaps in skill development or to learn mathematics through a different approach. Advanced math students work in small groups to receive daily enrichment, accelerated programming, and for students working significantly above grade level, itinerant math instruction.

West Towson’s students study four domains of science; the physical sciences; the life sciences; the earth and space sciences; and engineering, technology and applications of science. Each unit presents a real-world, locally relevant problem for the students to solve. As students begin their work in the unit, they develop a solution to the problem and share their related content knowledge. This information is used by teachers to form instructional plans for the unit. Lessons which help students to improve their initial solutions to the problem follow. At the end of the unit, students are given the opportunity to revise their original solutions. Throughout the unit students are presented with scientific skills and practices.

West Towson’s social studies program is designed to prepare students to be productive citizens in local, national and global communities. As the students move through grade levels, they apply their understanding of geography, economics, political science, culture, and history to their community, state, country and the world. Lessons promote critical thinking and problem-solving teaching students to think, read, write, speak

and view like social scientists. Teachers supplement the curriculum with field trips, speakers, and research projects.

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

The West Towson Elementary School community is resolute in the belief that students should leave elementary school with a strong foundation of knowledge, skills, and experience in all disciplines. This includes the special area subjects. Each week students in kindergarten through fifth grade participate in five fifty-minute periods of art, dance, library–media, vocal music, and physical education. In addition, fourth grade students receive instruction in exploratory music while fifth graders may choose to participate in instrumental music lessons. Health is taught by classroom teachers throughout the year. Technology instruction is provided in all disciplines. Fourth and fifth grade students receive direct instruction in Spanish once a week. Classroom teachers provide special area teachers with long range plans to strengthen the connection between special area subjects and classroom instruction.

Art flows out of the studio and onto surfaces throughout West Towson Elementary School. Environmental art created by students can be found on the sidewalk in front of the school. Walls are filled with the students' murals, paintings, drawings, and collages. Showcases display student sculptures and other creations. Students engage in learning to appreciate art, create using a variety of tools and materials, analyze and critique their work, and build understanding of art's historical and cultural influences. Field trips to local art museums provide opportunities for students to study artwork displayed. Fourth graders work with resident artists for a unit of study. Fifth graders conclude their study of drawing with an opportunity to sketch animals visiting from the Baltimore Zoo. The outstanding art program at West Towson earned the teacher the Novice Art Teacher of the Year award in 2017.

West Towson is one of four Baltimore County elementary schools offering dance as a special area subject. The focus of the program is three-fold, using dance to learn and reinforce concepts taught in the classroom, learning to be an audience member, and teaching children to use their bodies and movement to create. Students connect movement with literacy, dancing their way through stories, songs, and poems. Teaching content, such as the water cycle, through dance builds deep and rich understanding. Students also engage in the study of dance as an art, developing an appreciation of dancers, choreographers and others involved in this discipline. West Towson students perform during school events as well as in other venues. In 2017, the teacher received the Outstanding Leadership in Dance Education Award.

Enhancing learning in all disciplines, West Towson's Library Media program supports instruction in literacy, research, technology, and library science. Students build their knowledge of the organization of the library as they travel through elementary school. They learn to explore a variety of authors and literary genres, engage in meaningful research, evaluate books, and develop productive digital citizenship habits. Each week during library, in addition to borrowing library books, students engage in Maker Space activities, peruse primary and secondary sources, and learn to use a variety of technology tools for locating information and presenting their knowledge and understanding.

West Towson's music program is comprehensive, balanced, and sequential. The program offers students an appreciation of music and opportunities to perform and create. Students also build foundational skills and explore music from a variety of cultures. All intermediate grade students participate in the chorus which performs not only during the two annual music programs, but also at special school events including the Memorial Day Program. A spring choral program features the voices of students in the second and third grades. Nearly ninety percent of fifth graders choose to participate in West Towson's instrumental music program. Offering lessons in a wide variety of instruments, the teacher meets with students each week to build their skills and prepare them to be musicians in the band or orchestra.

The important roles that fitness and health play in the lives of the students are emphasized in the physical education and health programs at West Towson. During physical education class students develop locomotor, object control, fitness, and personal/social skills. Students engage in group and individual tasks involving games, dance and rhythm activities, rope jumping, ball handling, and gymnastics. Special programs such as Ballroom Dancing lessons, Whittle, Table Tennis, Turkey Trot, and the Heart Adventure

offer the students engaging opportunities to apply the skills and knowledge learned in class.

In 2014, West Towson joined nine other elementary schools selected to pilot Baltimore County's Passport Program, a program introducing Spanish instruction at the elementary level. The blended program combines weekly face-to face instruction with an online self-paced component. Fourth graders receive instruction for 30 minutes each week, and fifth graders receive a weekly 50 minute period of instruction. Students in both grades engage in the online program for a total of 60 minutes a week. The knowledge and use of conversational Spanish has extended well beyond the intermediate grades. Throughout the day, students in all grade levels may be heard reciting the school's Code of Conduct, greeting one another, counting, or stating color words in Spanish.

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

As knowledgeable and compassionate educators, West Towson teachers engage their students in meaningful and appropriately challenging instruction. Ongoing assessment plays an important role in planning and implementing this instruction. Information is collected before, during, and after teaching in order to direct instructional decisions, support customized lesson planning, and determine student growth and achievement. Each year, West Towson's Leadership Team develops and implements an assessment plan. The assessments on the plan include school system requirements as well as customized assessments aligned with the school's unique needs. This enables West Towson to monitor school improvement and to drive increased student achievement.

West Towson teachers meet for monthly CIA (Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment) meetings in grade or vertical teams. During the meetings, teachers use specially designed protocols to engage in data dialogues to review and analyze the results collected. Lagging and leading indicators are used to monitor student growth, achievement, and progress toward meeting standards and other grade-based expectations. Teacher leaders and administrators collaboratively facilitate these discussions to synthesize data from multiple sources including unit assessments, MAP and DIBELS assessments, teacher-made assessments, culminating activities, anecdotal records, and informal measures. After triangulating the data, teachers identify instructional methods and interventions to accelerate the learning of all students.

Lagging data is reviewed to determine student achievement after the teaching has been completed. West Towson teachers analyze data from the PARCC assessment to measure the knowledge, skills, and practices that students in grades 3-5 demonstrate related to grade level standards and expectations in reading and mathematics. Data gleaned from the assessment reveals performance trends of the school, grade levels, subgroups, and individuals.

The Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment is administered at least twice a year to all students to determine student growth and achievement in reading and mathematics. West Towson has found this assessment especially valuable in monitoring and ensuring the growth of high performing students. Using the growth data provided, teachers can identify students working at or above grade level who are not making growth and adjust their instructional programs and or groupings to provide greater challenge. Teachers select resources and strategies including project-based learning tasks, complex texts, independent research, and grade acceleration to further engage these learners.

Using a variety of diagnostic assessments, teachers collect data to identify individual student strengths and needs. These assessments include i-Ready, Dreambox, reading records, Benchmark Assessments, exit tickets, and various informal measures to provide real-time data that help teachers understand the causes of learning struggles, the need for additional instruction or practice, and the importance of offering enrichment and extension opportunities.

Teachers apply their understanding of data to adjust their daily instruction in mathematics. To reflect the level of student learning during whole group instruction and related practice tasks, formative measures are employed. This information is used to provide flexible and differentiated small group instruction. Students who struggle with the skill may be presented with the new learning in a different manner. Students who have begun to grasp the concept will receive additional practice and feedback. Students showing strong

understanding of the skill will engage in extension activities. Students with significant gaps in their math skill development are supported by resource teachers during math intervention sessions. These sessions pre-teach new skills, reteach prerequisite skills, and/or address individual students' math goals.

All students at West Towson receive a balanced literacy program to ensure their success as skilled readers and writers as they move into middle school. Teachers use diagnostic information collected to develop reading profiles of their students. Students are given significant time to read and write throughout each day. During the language arts block, students receive direct and explicit instruction preparing them to master grade level standards. They participate in multilevel, multimethod small group instruction to meet their needs in one or more of the literacy strands. Students also engage in meaningful independent work during the block; self-selecting books on their levels to read, responding to reading, practicing word work, and expanding their writing. Targeted intervention is provided by classroom teachers and resource staff to accelerate the progress of identified students. These interventions are customized to meet their specific needs and include research-based programs such as Systematic Instruction in Phoneme Awareness, Phonics, and Sight Words (SIPPS), Foundations, Wilson Reading System, LLI (Leveled Literacy Intervention), and Orton Gillingham.

A review of West Towson's subgroup performance reveals a small number of students in the subgroups with achievement gaps. All students in these subgroups are carefully monitored to ensure that they are receiving appropriate supports provided by classroom teachers, special educators, the reading specialist, and the ESOL teacher to accelerate their learning. Special education students are showing the greatest gap in both reading and math. In response, their performance is monitored monthly during the CIA meetings and the supports adjusted as needed.

## PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

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### 1. School Climate/Culture:

When entering West Towson, a visitor knows that this is a special place of learning. The school's mission is posted in the entrance vestibule, children's books fill a shelf next to student-sized chairs in the office, and student artwork is displayed behind the receptionist's desk. Hallways are filled with young artists' creations, young writers' stories, and the sounds of young musicians and dancers. It is immediately clear that this is a school community deeply committed to the students and their learning.

Classrooms at West Towson are alive with student centered learning. The learning spaces belong to the children, as noted by the birthday charts hanging in the rooms, student-created anchor charts posted on walls, the different seating and working area choices provided. Teachers create learning experiences that motivate their students to make meaningful connections to the information taught, accept ownership for learning, and actively participate in the teaching/learning process. The teaching staff know their students well and engage them in instruction that supports their learning styles and is differentiated to meet their various levels of performance. Lessons emphasize metacognition through facilitation of concrete learning experiences, collaborative discourse, and reflection.

Students strive to be "Wise Westies" by following the school's Code of Conduct and by putting forth their best effort. The adults in the building provide caring, warmth, and support; modeling polite and respectful interactions. Each morning on the announcements, the Character Crew, a group of student leaders, presents daily lessons on positive virtues and character traits. Teachers "catch" students demonstrating these traits, providing recognition to them through daily shout outs. The principal celebrates acts of kindness through her distribution of the Kindness Award. Each student receives a hand-written note from the administration on his or her report card providing either congratulations or encouragement as they progress toward their learning goals. The whole school gathers to celebrate the Black Saga Teams' successes, acknowledge students who have met the requirements of the Patriots and Defenders Programs, and announce West Towson's selection as a Maryland Blue Ribbon School.

West Towson's teachers work in an environment where they are valued, empowered, and supported. They are the backbone of TEAM WTES. Their successes are celebrated on the announcements, through Kudos in the staff bulletin, and the weekly Paw Award. The administration encourages and celebrates risk taking, creative problem-solving, and innovation. Teachers are provided with opportunities to participate in conversations that drive school improvement, procedures, and purchasing decisions. Teachers also provide input for hiring decisions. To foster communication, the principal maintains an open-door policy. She models vulnerability and embraces the possibility of failure as well as providing teachers with strategies for resilience, persistence, and growth. This supportive, trusting, and respectful working environment contributes to a highly motivated staff and strong school spirit.

### 2. Engaging Families and Community:

School improvement and student achievement at West Towson benefit from strong and positive relations between the school staff, families, and members of the community. The school has an active PTA which supports school initiatives and facilitates parent involvement. Each month, the administration and staff liaisons meet to review progress on PTA and student achievement initiatives. PTA members serve on school committees with staff members providing both leadership and resources. These collaborations result in school wide programs such as Generations Day, cultural arts events, School Wellness Week, and the annual Taste-off.

Parents and community members volunteer in many capacities at West Towson. Residents from a local retirement home have served as mentors for students, meeting with them on a regular basis to support their learning. Parents, grandparents, and community members assist in many ways: working with students in classrooms, chaperoning field trips, creating instructional materials, helping in the office and cafeteria, shelving books in the library, and supervising the fourth graders running the school store. Parent

volunteers coordinate the school's Patriots and Defenders Program, a program which enhances student learning about our country's geography, history, and government. Parent volunteers coordinate the annual Westy's Walk, a fund raiser which finances school initiatives including purchasing classroom seating and furniture to promote student-centered classrooms and refreshing the school's technology resources. Parent volunteers have been major players in the implementation of the school's environmental literacy program. For several years, parents directed the Greener Cleaner program, teaching the students to recycle and upcycle during their lunch periods. These volunteers have also been instrumental in working with teachers and students to create gardens and a salad table on the school's green roof.

West Towson has developed several important community partnerships. In 2012, the school became a Professional Development School working with the department of early childhood education at Towson University. The interns in kindergarten through grade three learn from and are supervised by highly effective teachers at West Towson. West Towson also partners with Greater Baltimore Medical Center, a local hospital, providing the school community with health fairs, after school exercise clubs, and other wellness resources.

The home/school connection is enhanced by West Towson's strong communication strategies. The PTA and school maintain websites, which are updated on a regular basis to keep families well-informed. The school generates a monthly newsletter sent home through email and uploaded to the website, containing calendars, information about upcoming events, and other school and community related items. The automated phone system provided through the school system is activated to inform and remind parents of important information. All West Towson classroom teachers send newsletters home on a regular basis; keeping parents informed about upcoming units of study, and school, grade, and class activities.

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

Each year the administration, leadership team, and faculty at West Towson collaborate to create a professional development plan. The plan is multi-faceted as it includes system-wide as well as school-based initiatives aligned to the School Progress Plan. The school-based initiatives are selected after a careful analysis of school-wide data, leading to the identification of key actions for the year. In addition, the administrative team uses informal and formal observations, self-assessment processes, and needs assessment surveys to identify the needs of the faculty. Teacher goal setting in the beginning of each year also provides direction for personalized professional development and coaching. Professional development takes many different forms at West Towson. It is through grade level meetings, vertical team meetings, special education workshops, lesson studies, co-teaching, modeling within classrooms, observing co-workers, teacher led presentations, and/or book studies, that professional knowledge is shared by and with teachers.

The importance of knowing the students as learners is a top priority for the administration, faculty, and support staff at West Towson. The professional development provided for teachers is focused upon using the clear understanding of student learners to build teacher capacity for personalizing and customizing instruction. Monthly Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment (CIA) meetings are designed to aid teachers in expanding their repertoire of highly effective instructional strategies. This year the need to improve the use of targeted small group instruction in English language arts was one of the school-based initiatives identified in the School Progress Plan. Teachers received training on the initiative during CIA meetings, followed by individual sessions with the reading specialist and instructional coach to identify each teacher's level of understanding and skill base. Additional instruction, modeling, and co-planning were then offered by the reading specialist and instructional coach.

Teachers recognize the power of collaboration to build their skills and practices. As a result, grade and content teams meet on a regular basis to plan and share their ideas and expertise with one another. Teachers and teacher leaders work together to "Backward Map" units of study to support the instructional staff in their efforts to customize their lessons to meet student needs. Teachers often initiate their own learning through coursework or other experiences. Their expertise is shared through presentations to the entire faculty or small groups. This year teacher-led presentations have covered various topics from Makerspace to Hands on Equations. Many teachers voluntarily take advantage of book studies and

technology mini-workshops offered.

At West Towson Elementary teachers, administrators, and support staff are learners as well as teachers. They seek opportunities to learn and grow in order to improve the students' achievement. The administrators and teachers collaborate to make adult learning a priority.

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

During the summer of 2010, as West Towson prepared to open its doors to students, the faculty, staff, parents, and students gathered for a week of collaborative planning and team building. It was during those days that a shared belief system and a set of common goals came to life for West Towson., The belief system and goals continue to drive the important work in the school eight years later. This work is centered around the school's commitment to students and their learning. It is the responsibility of the school's leadership to ensure that this work is done well.

The role of the principal at West Towson is multifaceted. She understands the importance of creating a safe and secure learning environment for the students and staff. By overseeing a carefully prepared safety plan, scheduling regular practice drills to ensure familiarity with the protocols, and monitoring visitor procedures, she provides a sense of security throughout the building. The principal believes that positive relationships form the foundation of a school. Therefore, she serves as an advocate for the students, teachers, and families. She knows the students and meets with them to deliver additional instruction, to comfort and support, and to monitor growth and achievement. She makes sure that she is accessible to families and staff members. She values and supports the important role that each member of the staff plays in the school, reaching out to each to develop trusting relationships. The most important, impactful, and rewarding role of the principal is that of instructional leader. Her zeal for teaching and learning is clearly visible to the staff, students, and families. She models high expectations, optimism, risk taking, challenging the status quo, and persistence in meeting the needs of all students. The principal remains true to her passion and the belief that education can and will make an important difference in the lives of her students.

Shared leadership is an important part of the culture at West Towson. Teachers demonstrating positive leadership skills serve as grade or team chairs, members of the Leadership Corp and Math Cadre, and committee chairs. Input and suggestions for decision making are actively sought and valued. Over the years, teachers and staff have led efforts to become a Maryland Green School, A Healthy Generations School, a Passport School, and a professional development school. They have also reached out to partner with a neighboring special education school for cultural events, recycling activities, and safety initiatives. Staff members accepting or initiating leadership roles and greater responsibility are recognized and celebrated. At West Towson, growing leaders is seen as an essential part of planning for the future of education.

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

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The key to West Towson’s academic success is the investment that the school community has made in knowing their learners from a holistic perspective. With a goal of customizing instruction, teachers realized the need to have a better understanding of each student. Initially the focus was on knowing the students as readers and then expanded to include other subject areas. The importance of knowing the students extended to their interests, talents, health, and social and emotional skills. In response to this knowledge, West Towson embarked on a journey that has led the faculty and staff to a place where they are better able to educate the whole child.

At West Towson, the goal of customized instruction is to plan for and provide lessons which meet the specific needs of each student, allowing the students some input and choice in the process. Teachers use a variety of assessments to determine their students’ learning profiles. In reading, they use guided reading benchmark assessments and reading records to track student progress and identify reading levels and areas of strength and need. Formative assessment tools are used during the learning process to guide and adjust instruction. Implementing the writers’ workshop differentiates instruction and includes opportunities to teach mini-lessons based on data gathered from individual student conferences. In math and the content areas, teachers have moved away from whole group instruction to brief shared learning activities followed by small group, flexible, targeted instruction. When teachers identify the need to provide additional support or challenge for students in any of the subject areas, their clear understanding of the students point to decisions such as the implementation of intervention programs, accelerated group work, the use of alternative texts, and independent study.

Teachers quickly realized the power of engaging their students in learning by reaching beyond academics. They began to use interest inventories and lunch bunch discussions to explore their students’ experiences, passions, challenges, and fears. With this information, teachers direct students to try new literary genres, leadership roles, social skills groups, recycling or gardening activities, or working in the broadcast studio. They recommend mentors to provide support or encouragement. Teachers ensure that the child who needs to move never misses recess, has access to alternative seating, and has movement breaks throughout the day. They encourage students to plan community action projects such as food and toy drives or interacting with the special education students at a neighboring school.

West Towson embraces the responsibility of preparing students for the future and meeting high expectations by educating the whole child. The benefits of this holistic approach extend beyond academics impacting student behavior, student well-being, students’ global perspective, and overall school climate.