

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):
- 3 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 1 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 5 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	28	10	38
K	42	47	89
1	30	37	67
2	47	37	84
3	33	26	59
4	38	40	78
5	0	0	0
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	218	197	415

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 1 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 1 % Asian
 - 2 % Black or African American
 - 1 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 95 % 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: 5%

If the mobility rate is above 15%, please explain.

This rate should be calculated using the grid below. The answer to (6) is the mobility rate.

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	16
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	5
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	21
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2016	407
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.05
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	5

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 0 %
0 Total number ELL

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 24 %
Total number students who qualify: 100

8. Students receiving special education services: 18 %
75 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>14</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>1</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>1</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>7</u> Developmentally Delayed | <u>6</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>41</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>2</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>3</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 6
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	Number of Staff
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	22
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	8
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	15
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	5

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 18:1

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	96%	97%	96%	97%	94%
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.

Educating and inspiring each student to live, learn, and lead with excellence.

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

Jeffers Elementary School and Spring Lake Public Schools participate in the State of Michigan's Schools of Choice program. As such, the school lists vacancies by grade level in the spring and parents may then apply for enrollment. If the number of applicants exceeds the number of vacancies, a lottery type selection process is utilized to select students. Once accepted under Michigan's schools of choice program, students continue at Spring Lake Public Schools through graduation.

PART III – SUMMARY

Jeffers Elementary school is nestled in the quiet, semi-rural town of Spring Lake, Michigan. Spring Lake is divided into a village, which has approximately 2300 residents, and a township, which has approximately 13,000 residents. Jeffers Elementary is one of two elementary schools in Spring Lake and we are located in the township and the other elementary school is in the village. The town of Spring Lake is situated on beautiful Spring Lake with easy access to Lake Michigan. The per capita income of Spring Lake township is approximately \$27,500 and about 4% of the population is below the poverty line.

Jeffers Elementary School began as a rural, one room school house back in 1868 when the main road leading into town was just a dirt path. As the current principal of Jeffers Elementary School, the history of the building holds a special place in my heart as my grandfather attended the school back in the 1930's. Because the family home was just down the street, it was his job every morning when he was nine years old, to walk to school and start the fire before the teacher arrived each morning. Since that time, four generations of my family has attended Jeffers Elementary School and we are proud of the heritage it holds for us and many other families in the community.

Today Jeffers Elementary School houses approximately 400 students ranging from preschool through fourth grade. We offer preschool programs such as Great Start Readiness Program and an Autistic Preschool program. We also have an Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) room and an Autistic Kindergarten program. All of these programs are inclusive to the general education classrooms and we welcome the diversity in learning that this brings to our building.

Jeffers Elementary is a thriving school that is focused on families and student success. Our curriculum director oversees both elementary buildings and has put into place a solid, research-based curriculum that is available to every classroom teacher. Having two of the same elementary buildings can be tricky to maneuver but we do an excellent job of collaborating and communicating to ensure that students in Spring Lake, regardless of the elementary school they attend, receive similar quality experiences. Implementation to quality curriculum has been a key to our success. Programs are carefully selected and ample professional development is given to teachers so they can learn the curriculum. One example of this is over the past 3 years we have sent the majority of our Kindergarten through 4th grade teachers to New York to The Teacher's College to be trained in our reading and writing curriculum. We worked to secure grants to fund the training for teachers and are proud to say that the majority have been able to attend.

Aside from the given curriculum we offer students many other opportunities to expand their knowledge and expose them to new experiences and opportunities. Some of those take place before or after school such as: Honors Choir, yoga, Chess Club, basketball, volleyball, Girls on the Run, and Green Team. While other activities take place during the school day like, Power of Peer Support (POPS) Groups, Student Council, and School Store. These things offer students new experiences and the ability to explore new things that they may not have done before.

Community involvement is the next key to our success at Jeffers Elementary School. Our mission is to educate the whole child and in doing so we reach out to our community. We are fortunate to be a part of a community that holds education in the highest regards and answers the call for assistance when we need it. We regularly have over 98% attendance at Open House, conferences, and our end of the year celebration picnic. School is important to our community and it shows through their involvement. In addition, we have a very active Jeffers Parent Organization (JPO), a Kids' Hope Program which mentor students once a week on a 1-1 basis, Watch D.O.G.S which has dads volunteering in the school for an entire day, Lunch Bunch where volunteers help out in the cafeteria during lunch time, and daily classroom volunteers.

To further address the needs of the whole child we partner with our local counseling agency to offer support with individual or group counseling, both on-site and off. Depending on the needs of the families each year, we also offer education sessions for parents ranging from Parenting with Love and Logic to recognizing the warning signs of suicide in children.

All of these things bring us together to make us who we are today. We are a family oriented community that

supports education, it's schools, and the children.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

Beginning with the preschool Great Start Readiness Program, we assure an astute curriculum is in place for the students. To do this with GSRP we work in partnership with our Intermediate School District who oversees the curriculum that is selected for the program, that it is research based, align to preschool standards, and robust. That said, the program we use is Creative Curriculum which encourages discovery and exploration as the main tool for learning. Along with this curriculum is the Teaching Strategies Gold that allows teachers to observe and record student growth throughout the school year.

Jeffers Elementary and its staff stays current and in step with all district decisions that are made in terms of curriculum. Staff attends all professional development and important meetings to make sure they are using the programs to their fullest extent and that they are providing children with all avenues to access.

In terms of reading and writing instruction, Spring Lake schools has adopted the workshop model as its foundational/philosophical avenue of program delivery. In order to give all students the best content, staff are using the Lucy Calkins Units of Study in both reading and writing. The lessons are well laid out and provide staff with a mini-lesson, independent reading/writing, mid-workshop teaching points and a share time at the end of the session. A large focus during both reading and writing workshop is the independent work time.

Students can work at their level and pace during this time and teachers can then come alongside them to support them in their struggles and/or push them to try something new or stretch in a way they did not know they could do. Our classroom libraries are full of leveled, high interest text, so that we know students are reading quality and quantity when they begin their independent time of reading. Grade level teams between both Jeffers and Holmes work together in grade level meetings to determine pacing and the rate at which students should be exposed to the lessons. They also discuss assessment and best ways to determine interventions in terms of reading and writing.

Another large portion of the day, especially in early elementary is on foundational skills in reading and writing. This happens through word study instruction. Teachers are able to teach, practice, and review concepts within vocabulary, phonics, phonemic awareness, and spelling. The upper grades can then add on to these skills by helping students see where to embed these strategies in their spelling, reading, and writing. It is critical that the alignment in this area is well thought out and planned.

Both elementary schools just went through a recent math program change. This came due to data analysis over time and determining that in order to reach the needs of all students, a change needed to be made. After much deliberation, vendors visits, and feedback from other districts, the elementary buildings decided on Envision 2.0. This program provides students with all the Common Core standards and engages them in a multi-faceted way.

There are components that utilize technology and keeps students moving through the content in a kid-friendly way. Jeffers has had the opportunity to get professional development before starting the program and then once things were underway, another round of professional development in order to get a deeper understanding of the program and have questions answered. At this time, our data shows that students are gaining an understanding of the math standards, engaged in math, and it was the right choice.

The science curriculum used at Jeffers comes to us from Battle Creek Science. This hands on program allows students to be exposed to science terms and concepts, and see them in an up close way. Students interact with teachers in a variety of whole group lessons that motivate them to understand the “why” behind a concept, but then as partnerships, small groups, or individually, they get to make those connections by digging in deeper with hands on experiences.

As we know, another important area for elementary students to learn about is social students and civic learning and engagement. All elementary students go through units of study at their grade level that allow them to see and learn about their community and the greater world around them. There are also building

wide activities that students engage in that bring the world to them or trips that allow them to see the world around them. Third graders learn all about Michigan History. The staff at Jeffers brings in different speakers to share parts of history like mining and the lumber era with students. All of these things are brought to life through visual, hands on, and auditory activities.

The curriculum at Jeffers is robust and student centered. It is well thought out and contains all the state standards students should be exposed to and learn as they go through their elementary years. Staff then use their “art” of teaching to make concepts come alive and engage students along their journey.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Students at Jeffers Elementary School are offered a wide array of other curriculum areas that enhance and support their general education instruction.

During the school day students attend Physical Education/ Health, Music, Art, and STEM on a four day rotation. They spend about fifty minutes in each class one time per day. Most students attend these classes with their regular classroom mates but some grade levels opt to mix them all up so they have more exposure to other students in other classes within the grade level.

These four programs work tirelessly to provide a relevant and meaningful instructional experience to the students. PE/ Health teaches the students about a healthy lifestyle while getting them active and moving each day. Students learn about the importance of physical activity and are encouraged to stay active outside of the classroom time. Music class teaches students the early skills of reading music and learning beats. With an interactive computer based curriculum, students are then able to practice their skills at home by logging into the program. This practice culminates in the students learning to play the recorder in fourth grade and attending a live performance at our local theater, The Frauenthal Center. Throughout the year students practice playing the recorder and as an incentive they can earn “Recorder Karate Belts” as they graduate up the levels by playing various songs. The music teacher integrates technology into this practice by having students record their playing and sending it to her via Schoology, a learning management system.

Collaboration is a key among many of the enrichment teachers. The music and PE teacher collaborate together to implement music and motion. Students are taught dance moves to certain pieces of music and play the ball drums to a synchronized melody. At the end of the year they perform this piece for the entire school, including parents who would like to attend.

Art and STEM have joined forces in the past several years to create STEAM. They too work tirelessly to create relevant and meaningful projects that are closely aligned with grade level science standards. They collaborate with each grade level to create a Project Based Learning experience for the students where they are exploring and solving a real world problem right within our community or our school. One example of this is for the upcoming year they are working with the second grade teachers and teaming with our local township department to design and participate in a local community project that will help others.

They are working with Rycenga Park to create signage for the park about the various species within the park to create an interactive trail that others can use to learn from. While participating in this project they will listen to guest speakers from Grand Valley State University, talk with a park ranger, and the local DNR to enhance their learning. The culminating project will be signs with QR codes linking visitors to the park about the wildlife they might see at various parts of the park. Students will create posters and videos to share this information.

All of the enrichment teachers work hard to create real-life, meaningful experiences for our students.

Technology plays a big part in our enrichment instruction. All students are issued an iPad at the beginning of the school year that they use not only in their regular classrooms, but within the enrichment classes also. Students bring their iPad with them to STEM to do research and create projects; they bring it to music to practice playing notes, pull up the curriculum, and record videos of themselves singing; they use it in ART to pull off works of art from an artist they are studying or to take a picture of the work they did and share it with the teacher via Schoology; PE/ Health uses the iPad to record fitness times, to research healthy eating

and healthy lifestyles. With the introduction of iPad into our enrichment curriculum over the past several years our teachers have been able to reach students in new ways to connect with them and peak their interest in other areas.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

Jeffers elementary is a data driven, high performing school. There are many different avenues used to learn about each child's successes, needs, and how to help them reach their maximum potential for growth. The district starts with quality, common core standard based curriculum and training for all staff to make sure that they have what they need to expose all children to intentional, explicit, important content at the Tier 1 instructional level. Teachers will do most of these lessons whole group and then determine next steps for exposure of content based on some sort of assessment. The workshop model is used in reading and writing. Math instruction has a technology support in terms of instructional video lessons that can help visually and some online homework and assessments as well.

In order to determine where students are performing academically and what their needs are, Jeffers has different types of assessments that are used. During the school year, there are three assessments given to students three times a year. These give student growth and long term information about students in the fall, winter, and end of the year. Jeffers uses i-Ready, which is an online, adaptive assessment tool for both reading and math, Fountas and Pinnell Running Record Assessment, which is given one-on-one with each student by the classroom teacher, and the Words Their Way Spelling Inventory is also given to each student to determine word study needs and growth. At the lower grades, kindergarten and first grade students are given the Fountas and Pinnell Phonemic Awareness assessment.

This allows teachers to see additional foundational needs and growth at an early age. This data is then disseminated by the classroom teacher and grade level groups, along with special education providers and interventionists to determine next steps and appropriate groups of students that could receive Tier 2 interventions. This time to discuss grade level data and student data in order to determine what is needed for students and who will provide it has become critical in looking at the big picture, but also keeping our eyes on the needs of individual students. It allows important uninterrupted time, which can be difficult within busy school days. We have these meetings three times a year. During these data meetings, there is also time to discuss interventions, progress monitoring, and Tier 3 instructional groups that might need to take place. The data that is used in these meetings and the types of assessments provided to our teachers is deep with information and is both in written form and has technology components that allow for deeper "digging". Once interventions or ideas for challenging students are determined, the group will decide on what research based materials to use and how to progress monitor. The interventionists and classroom teachers work closely together and the interventions unfold to determine growth or other needs.

The comprehensive programs that the district has adopted for the content areas also has assessment pieces that are helpful in determining student success, need, and areas of growth. In reading, teachers use a majority of the independent time each day to sit along a child, listen to them read, and talk to them about what it is that they are reading. This provides valuable data that can be used to help a student progress in their reading. In math, there are small, formative assessments online or on paper to help determine next steps and the help a child may need. This help can be provided on the spot or groups can be created to address the need. Teachers use formative assessment daily to get feedback and determine next steps in terms of instruction. It has become a part of what we do each day.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

The climate of Jeffers Elementary School is something that is of utmost importance to us and we work diligently to create atmosphere where students can thrive and succeed. The climate of our school is so important to us as a building that we include it as one of our annual school improvement goals. In that way we are continuously adapting, implementing, and modifying the plan to fit the needs of our students.

We have a Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) system in place as a way to proactively engage and encourage positive behavior in our students. We use a system call “On Target” tickets that students are given when they are seen demonstrating the behaviors we identified in our plan. We teach students what it means to be respectful, responsible, and safe in all the different areas of our school such as in the lunchroom, hallways, bathrooms, playground, and classrooms. At the beginning of the school year we hold an all school assembly to talk about the behaviors with students, we role play different scenarios, and talk through how they should be handled.

In regards to motivating students toward academic growth, we teach our students how to set and write personal goals for themselves. We teach them how to monitor their goals, encourage them to celebrate their successes, and to reach forward to set new goals. Some teachers display this on a bulletin board that says “By the end of this week I hope to…” and the student writes in their weekly goal. Other classrooms do it in the form of journaling.

Either way, we are teaching our students the importance of setting personal goals and helping them to achieve success that is just right for them. In the same way, the administration uses a similar approach with the teaching staff. At the beginning of the year each staff member writes personal goals that they hope to achieve this year. It is unique to each individual and not tied to evaluation so teachers are given the freedom to try, sometimes fail, and try again. We celebrate the risks they take in their own growth and encourage them to persevere. Celebration is a key to keeping this positive and seeing the possibility in the growth that is before all of us and we use that in various forms to motivate us throughout the year.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Spring Lake is a small community that prides itself on its schools and educational system. Success comes from a lot of hard work on the part of the school, families, and the community. It is important that we work together to ensure student success. This is done in a variety of ways. At Jeffers we expect that all families will be involved with our school in one way or another. We have many opportunities for parents to engage with school work at home with their children, volunteer opportunities for parents and the community to come in, and extend opportunities to all when we have special events or activities happening. We have parent-teacher conferences, report cards, weekly notes, emails, and social media for parents to use to connect. The teachers have also adopted a program, Seesaw, that lets parents view their child’s work in real time. Similar to Facebook, the parents can see what their child is working on and also receive communication from the teacher on ways they can help their child if needed. Outside of the school day, we offer programs of interest to all students that would like to sign up. Some of these include: Girls on the Run, volleyball, basketball, running clubs, and chess clubs. Jeffers has a strong, active parent club that will plan and run activities for the staff and students, and families. This is run completely by parents and they partner with the school to add another layer of community in and around the school.

Jeffers has a close relationship with the local paper, The Grand Haven Tribune. They will come multiple times a year to take pictures and report out on the exciting happenings at Jeffers. These articles provide a close up look at the students, staff, and activities that are happening.

One other Jeffers source of pride in terms of community engagement and involvement is the WATCH

D.O.G.S (Dads of Great Students) program that runs daily. This is a national program that sets up fathers or significant males to come spend a day working at Jeffers. The D.O.G.S are in classrooms, on the playground, in the specials, and just really meet a need for male bonding during the day. They are an incredible addition to each day. We get to learn from them and they get to learn from us.

We believe in building and maintaining a strong community because we know it only benefits the students that are a part of that community.

3. Professional Development:

Spring Lake School district is dedicated to continued growth of their staff. Research shows that without strong Tier 1 instructional practices, there will not be continued growth. The district is constantly listening to staff and administrators about what it is that they need to continue to be the best they can be for kids. We also look closely to our district strategic plan and our school improvement plan as our guide to decision making about where we are headed in terms of instruction.

One way to find what staff feel they need in terms of professional development is through surveys. Staff are given surveys throughout the year to provide feedback as to areas they would like training in and areas they see the district and/or their building needing continued work.

Professional development has been provided in a variety of ways to staff. We have had large group training, grade level specific training, content area training, online training, book studies, and more. All of these different avenues allow the district to tap into the types of learning and the interest levels of staff. This is no easy task, but an important one. Another way that teachers were provided professional development was through “modeling sessions”. Staff were given substitutes of their classrooms in order to develop a lesson with their colleagues, participate and observe as that lesson was taught, and then some debrief time to reflect on what went well and how to continue to improve the Tier 1 instruction we give to students.

Staff are also encouraged to look for areas of opportunity they see as a way to get further training in what they would like to grow in. These training opportunities are discussed with colleagues and will often lead to others being interested in the same professional development. One way we have seen this unfold is through our reading coach writing local grants to provide each teacher K-4 to attend Teachers College in New York for a week in the summer. Teachers apply and when they get in, they have their expenses paid to go learn from the best. A group of teachers goes together with the reading coach in order to work together and discuss what they learn each day. They are always back with excitement about how to make instruction better in their classroom.

Growth is constant...and necessary.

4. School Leadership:

Leadership is a contiguous thing. Beginning at the top of an organization, it sets the tone for all parts involved in its structure. Therefore, the leadership at Jeffers would not be what it is without the influence of the leadership among the members of our central office staff. Trust is a key among that leadership and also that which lends itself to building leadership and being able to flourish as a result.

The leadership philosophy, beginning with our superintendent and curriculum director, is all about being relational. Relationships are at the heart of everything we do, even when things get tricky. The principal holds relationships in the highest regard when it comes to staff, students, and parents while knowing that student success and achievement is our most important outcome. That being said, decisions are made based on what is best for students and by keeping that the focus it helps to guide and determine our path. When

dealing with staff, a strengths-based approach is used to determine if everyone is in their right place when it comes to grade level assignments. We look at each person for the gifts they bring to their profession, not necessarily the deficits that we all have. In that regard we are able to appreciate and utilize staff in a way that makes everyone most effective. And we stick to the mantra that “It’s not always going to be easy, but it’s going to be worth it.”

At Jeffers Elementary we have a reading coach that works with grade levels to increase their knowledge about curriculum and instruction. The reading coach also employs this mindset about building relationships with the staff she is working with by making herself available to them, offering to co-teach lessons, and work with students that may be struggling. It’s an approach that says “We’re in this together” and she creates a relational partnership with the teachers to maximize her influence.

Each grade level has an identified leader that is integral in the decisions that are made for their teams. The grade level chairs meet together as a district committee to discuss issues, concerns, and to problem solve with other colleagues. This communication is vital to the success of our teams as well as the teams of the other elementary school in our district. By unifying ourselves and sharing a mission and vision for our students we are able to achieve more.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

While it is difficult to name the ONE thing that has brought us such great success for our students, when asked, I would say it has been our focus on using data to drive our instruction. Our students have always performed well but over the past several years we are able to really name the strategies that we have used to make that success happen.

It starts with a solid, research based curriculum. We are not a district that grabs “the next best thing” and rides that wave until it ends. We are deliberate about researching what works and what has proven to be effective. Slow and steady would be the best way to describe our approach. We adopt that curriculum and then provide the teachers with the necessary training and time to learn it, practice it, and reflect on it. And then we look at our data, multiple pieces of data, to see if we are getting the results we would expect. If we are not, then we tweak our teaching. It is a continuous cycle of teaching, assessing, adjusting instruction, assessing, etc.

It is a process that has brought us the most success with our achievement mostly because we are intentional in our instruction. Our data points us in the direction we need to go and with the skilled and gifted teachers we have who have all the necessary resources at their fingertips, we are able to make success a reality for our students. We give teachers the time they need to learn the curriculum, collaborate with colleagues, and reflect upon their practice and their results.

Finally we keep our data in perspective and do not allow it to take over our knowledge of doing what is best for kids nor do we conform to ‘teaching to the test’. We stay true to the mindset that if we are using our curriculum with fidelity we will see results. So we use our data as a tool, as a piece of information that prompts us and encourages us to ask questions and to be curious about our students. Why are certain students struggling? Why are others excelling? What strategies is this teacher implementing that is showing such great results?

These questions get at the heart of teaching and learning and we would not be led to them as clearly as we are without using our data. Therefore, as we have continued to see the achievement scores of our students soar we can attribute that to multiple things but in summary it all points us back to using data to influence our instruction.