

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):
- 7 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 2 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 2 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools

11 TOTAL

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located:
- Urban or large central city
 - Suburban
 - Rural or small city/town
3. Number of students as of October 1, 2017 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	13	9	22
K	26	25	51
1	28	25	53
2	20	21	41
3	18	20	38
4	22	29	51
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	127	129	256

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 1 % Asian
 - 9 % Black or African American
 - 6 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 79 % White
 - 5 % 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: 11%

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	18
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	10
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	28
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2016	263
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.11
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	11

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 2%
5 Total number ELL

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 57%
Total number students who qualify: 147

8. Students receiving special education services: 13 %
33 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>1</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>5</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>2</u> Developmentally Delayed | <u>8</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: 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.	13
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.	3
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	2

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.

Required Information	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013
Daily student attendance	96%	97%	96%	94%	95%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

13. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**

Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2017.

Post-Secondary Status	
Graduating class size	0
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	0%
Enrolled in a community college	0%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	0%
Joined the military or other public service	0%
Other	0%

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.

Yes No

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award.

15. In a couple of sentences, provide the school’s mission or vision statement.

We are committed to offering experiences and creating opportunities that ensure all students will learn. We empower students to become responsible, respectful, and safe citizens.

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

Lake Hills Elementary School is one of seven elementary schools that serve students of the Grand Haven Area Public Schools District. Our school was built in 1972 with a unique design and intentional open concept in mind that remains part of our success story today. Large classrooms can be divided into smaller spaces, with a “centrium” connecting the rooms in each of the upper and lower “pods”. A large open community area connects the pods and provides more interactive learning space. The open concept encouraged team teaching from the beginning and not a lot has changed in that respect since 1972. Today, we pride ourselves on a strong culture of staff collaboration and commitment to growth and improvement as professionals to ensure the success of all students.

At the original dedication ceremony, the Superintendent of Schools explained that Lake Hills was the most outstanding example of beauty, function, and environmental setting to be found anywhere in Michigan. Lake Hills provides a natural forested setting among the dunes of Lake Michigan for preschool through fourth grade learners, and on-campus child care to support families before and after school.

Lake Hills was identified as a Focus school by the State of Michigan during the 2012-2013 school year, a designation given to the ten percent of schools with the largest achievement gaps between its top 30 percent and bottom 30 percent of students, based on an average scale score. With critical analysis and solution-based efforts, professional changes and focus, and intentional interventions and improvements, we are so proud to have turned the Focus School label to Reward School status by the 2015-16 school year. A Reward school is one that has achieved one or more of the following distinctions: top 5% of schools on the Top-to-Bottom School Rankings, top 5% of schools making the greatest gains in achievement (improvement metric), or “Beating the Odds” by outperforming the school’s predicted ranking and/or by similar schools. Lake Hills qualified in all three categories. Additionally, our school is outperforming most schools in Michigan with similar demographics.

The highly-qualified and dedicated staff provides instruction in reading, mathematics, science, social studies, physical education, performing arts, and visual arts. Additional student support includes media-enriched classrooms, 1-1 technology, reading assistance, math assistance, speech and language services, foreign language, and special education. After-school enrichment includes academic competitions and a variety of athletic activities.

Our core instruction is aligned with the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Mathematics and the Michigan Science Standards. We use the MC3 curriculum for Social Studies in kindergarten through second grade designed by Oakland RESA and it is aligned to the Common Core State Standards. In third and fourth grade we are now using GIANTS developed by Ottawa ISD aligned to Common Core State Standards. The resource is Mi Open Book, and assessments are also aligned. Throughout the year, teachers use formative and summative assessment data across all subject areas to drive instruction in their classrooms. Teachers, specialists, interventionists, and our principal meet in Professional Learning Communities every six weeks to work collaboratively and share the responsibility for every child’s growth and success. Together we analyze relevant student data noting strengths and areas for growth. From the noted strengths we set student growth goals and discuss and select learning strategies that will help students reach their goals. We have designed systems and supports for all of our learners, whether they are ready for additional challenges to stretch their success further or they need greater support to move forward.

In collaboration, our teachers analyze student performance data on state, school, and classroom assessments. Two key focus areas have been in math and reading. As a result of their data-drive discussions, strategies were developed and implemented to both close achievements gaps and accelerate student learning.

The Lake Hills School Improvement Team met weekly to discuss the Reading Now Network’s (RNN) five essential findings. The RNN is a collective effort to improve early literacy and, ultimately, student achievement across all grade levels. This effort was headed up by Superintendents, school boards, and school districts in 20 West Michigan counties. Lake Hills also led a focused professional development with other stakeholders in the district surrounding student goal setting and strategies for success. As a staff, we

developed and continue to revisit priorities based on the Reading Now Networks findings to increase student achievement.

Our school has identified essential math standards and participated in weekly data meetings around the standards. Staff evaluates these questions when looking at student data.

How will we respond when students have learned?

How will we respond when students do not learn what is essential?

A math interventionist works with kindergarten through fourth grade students during the day, in addition to their core classroom math instruction. The goal is for all students to be challenged, whether it's providing further learning or offering greater support based on the needs of each child.

Everyone on staff, from playground supervisors and support staff, to teachers and administrators, rally around our motto: Whatever it Takes! We truly believe that education is life or death for some of our students. We are aware of the obstacles and traumatic circumstances many of our students face and look for ways to support their families. But we can only control the extent to which we hold ourselves and our students accountable to high expectations and do everything possible to ensure they are hitting year-end targets. At Lake Hills, we could make the challenges our excuse OR make it our story. We have chosen to stand on the challenges and make it our story!

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

Lake Hills utilizes a multitude of research based curricula to support balanced literacy across all grade levels. We are currently transitioning to the Units Of Study, written by Lucy Calkins and other authors at Teachers College, for our reading curriculum. Teachers are exploring the Units Of Study and are using the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) reading curriculum as a supplementary resource. Not only are the Units of Study more closely aligned with Common Core State Standards (CCSS), this curriculum provides support for teachers and students across the reader's workshop: each lesson provides multiple opportunities for instruction for the whole class, small groups, and individuals while providing students with exposure to increasingly more challenging skills. Students are given the opportunity to practice the skills they are learning during independent reading time, teachers conferring with students to coach them towards mastery. Teachers empower young readers to choose appropriate books, respond to text in writing, and discuss their reading in multiple settings.

Similarly to reading, teachers use the MAISA writing curriculum, which is aligned with CCSS, for writing instruction. This curriculum includes instruction in three specific genres: narrative, persuasive, and expository texts. Students continue to work in these three areas from kindergarten through fourth grade, practicing more complex skills and growing more sophisticated as authors in each grade. Again, teachers support students in a workshop format. Writing instruction is scaffolded using interactive writing, teacher modeling, and shared writing.

In order to address students' needs for explicit instruction in phonics and spelling, teachers use the Words Their Way word study program along with other phonics resources. Lake Hills teachers recognize the need for students to explore words as they develop phonological and phonemic awareness. Word study instruction, which occurs primarily in small groups, includes discussions around letter sounds, spelling patterns, grammar, and syntax. Word study is built into literacy instruction at each grade level, with a heavier focus on phonics in kindergarten and first grade and decoding multisyllabic words in second through fourth.

For mathematics instruction, Lake Hills uses the Math Expression curriculum, which has embedded instruction in the eight mathematical practices aligned with CCSS. The cornerstone of Math Expression is targeted assessments which provide teachers with formative assessment data throughout each unit. Teachers use this data to create flexible small groups during core math instruction and to plan interventions for all students.

Young students begin their study of mathematics by learning and developing number sense, exploring relationships between tens and ones, and learning the basic structure of addition and subtraction situations. Students then move towards a more sophisticated understanding of place value, base ten operations, and story problem structure. By third and fourth grade, students work towards mathematical reasoning, developing an understanding of pre-algebraic relationships, and building fluency with several operations. Teachers plan lessons that include math talk, facilitating rich conversations around student driven math solutions.

Science instruction at Lake Hills is centered around inquiry. Teachers work to provide students with exposure to science concepts in three main areas: life sciences, earth science, and physical science. Lessons include work around investigating science concepts, sometimes presented as a driving question; learning new vocabulary, engaging in scientific observations, evaluating evidence, and discussions. Teachers also work hard to include a literacy connection through both reading and writing during science instruction.

Social Studies instruction also includes literacy connections throughout lessons. Students are exposed to several different genres as they read to discover more about how Michigan was established and developed over time. Social Studies curriculum includes words around civic engagement, community involvement, government, and economics.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Music: Young Fives through fourth grade participate in music class two times per week for 50 minutes. In music class, students learn musical basics and fundamental understandings of how music works. Each weekly lesson features activities that focus on rhythm and melody in music. These activities engage students kinesthetically with movement around the room. Props such as scarves, giant scrunchies, shakers, and sticks ensure that students are able to internalize and experience the music they are hearing. Songs are taught in a whole-part-whole method. This means that students are taught the whole song and the teacher breaks the song apart into smaller musical patterns and students are able to see how those patterns fit into a song. Students are given opportunities to use their natural singing voices as a group and individually. Listening to music and understanding musical form is another area of focus.

Arts: Young Fives through fourth grade participate in art class two times per week for 50 minutes. Visual arts are taught and include, drawing and design, painting, ceramics, mixed media, fibers and art history. Whenever possible, the art curriculum is integrated with the district's core curricular areas. For example, students do art activities that involve symmetry at the same time they are learning about symmetry in math. When working with clay, fourth graders are taught about the physical and chemical changes that occur when clay is fired in the kiln. The connections between arts and math, science and social studies provide many opportunities to teach students problem-solving skills, strengthen their fine motor skills and develop their creativity as they learn to draw, paint, sculpt clay, and learn about famous artists in history. Learning targets are implemented into each lesson. Students use their iPad to create a digital portfolio of their work.

Physical Education: Young Fives through fourth grade participate in physical education class two times per week for 50 minutes.

Our physical education (P.E.) program is based on national, state and district standards, and it is intentionally designed to motivate student learning and achievement. Motor skills are the main focus of our P.E. classes; however, social skill development and the integration of academics are an important part of our focus as well. It is our belief that students do their best when they have clear expectations, a consistent routine, and when students receive feedback and support for achieving movement competency, social skills, and academic integration. We begin each class by explaining and demonstrating the learning target. Throughout the class, students receive specific feedback in order to improve their movement skills. Class concludes with student reflection of their own progress. Students also share the "good" things that happened during class: i.e. positive sportsmanship and skill development witnessed during class. As students learn new motor and social skills, their confidence level and enthusiasm grow across curriculum areas. Recently, we have had the opportunity to pilot and incorporate the use of heart rate monitor bands. Our cardio fitness program uses three zones for different ranges of intensity blue, yellow, and red. The heart rate bands provide real-time feedback motivating students to stay within his or her target heart rate zone. The bands also provide the opportunity for objective assessment and personalized programs. We have noticed positive results and we are happy to see students participate and enjoy physical education in a new and exciting way!

Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (S.T.E.M.): Young Fives through fourth grade participate in S.T.E.M. class two times per week for 50 minutes.

Our S.T.E.M. program provides an additional relevant context for applying science, technology, engineering, and math, and often art. It encourages curiosity and thinking in these areas, which could translate into higher student interest and ultimately achievement. Our Young Fives-fourth grade students have S.T.E.M. for fifty minutes two times per week over the school year. It is offered in all of our elementary schools as part of the specials rotation with physical education, art, music, and Spanish. This academic special supports thinking, creativity, and problem solving. It encourages curiosity and wonder. All of these are important elements of learning.

Technology/media: Young Fives through fourth grade participate in technology class 1-2 times per month for 50 minutes.

Curriculum for technology was developed to address our student's need to be computer and technology literate. Classes focus on cyber safety and digital citizenship. Both of these concepts develops safe, appropriate, and responsible technology use. It is essential that our students recognize technology as being the venue that allows them to be creative, innovative, communicators, and collaborators.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

Teachers at Lake Hills are focused intently on delivering strong core instruction with embedded differentiation in core academic areas. Instruction in a workshop format for reading and writing allows for flexible grouping for intervention and extension activities within the workshop. Lessons include support for all students, with anchor charts as a visual reference, time for talking with partners, and physical gestures to help in learning complicated vocabulary. Students and staff are expected to hold each other accountable for high academic achievement. Teachers hold weekly Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings to talk about student data. These meetings include an evaluation of both informal and formal assessment data. For example, during a discussion about reading, teachers might spend time discussing running records, observations of their readers, or even writing samples in a student's reading notebook.

Teachers also employ a myriad of assessments during math instruction. These include short lesson checks, quizzes, performance tasks, unit tests, and interim tests, in addition to informal observations. Some assessment items on lesson checks and quizzes might include basic computation, solve $6 + 4$, find the product of 17×22 ; as well as story problems that require students to apply the math skills they have been learning. Unit tests often include more rigorous test items: apply a mathematical property, such as the commutative property, to compare different equations; use prior knowledge to write a story problem with a given structure, use a strategy to solve a problem with several operations. Finally, performance tasks are designed to assess students' ability to apply their mathematical skills to a real world problem. For an assessment around area and perimeter, a third grade skill, students are asked to design a petting zoo that requires certain dimensions. Then, students must use this design to answer questions related to this skill: what is the area of the petting zoo, how many feet of fencing would you need to fence in the zoo, etc.

In order to assess student learning in social studies and science, teachers rely on similar strategies. Assessments are given to test basic knowledge of different concepts as well as how well students can apply what they have been learning. Some assessments in social studies are designed like a performance task in math. Students are asked to examine a real world issue and use their social studies knowledge to propose possible solutions. Similar assessments are made for science as well. In addition, teacher informally assess student learning in science by observing them while they complete a specific investigation or task.

Teachers use data from all subject areas to create homogeneous and heterogeneous intervention groups to both support and extend student learning of grade level standards. Each grade level has a specific intervention block dedicated to supporting all students. For students who are performing below benchmark, this time is dedicated targeted tier 2 instruction in small groups. Students who are at or above benchmark also work with a teacher to practice and extend their skills. For grades kindergarten through second, this intervention block is dedicated to literacy, while third and fourth grades focus on math.

The staff at Lake Hills believes that academic achievement is directly linked to the growth of our own teaching practices. Staff meetings are dedicated to ongoing professional development. Staff members participate in professional book clubs, learning labs, and weekly data driven meetings to foster an environment of continuous professional growth. We are inspired by British educationalist Dylan Wiliam who said, "If we can create a culture where every teacher believes they need to improve, not because they are not good enough but because they can be even better, there is no limit to what we can achieve."

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

Lake Hills Elementary motivates and engages its students by creating a welcoming, safe, and loving environment. We want our students and families to know we have high expectations, believe in Success For All, and are dedicated to making sure ALL students feel inspired and successful. We hold all students to high academic as well as behavioral expectations. We foster a safe and supporting climate while challenging our students, as well as teachers, to strive to be their best.

At Lake Hills Elementary we strive to create a positive environment that cultivates high expectations for academic growth and behavior. Students begin their day with a personal greeting as they enter their classrooms. Morning announcements include celebrations of success as well as reminders of weekly behavior goals. Positive Behavior Intervention System is used to help promote good behavior. Our school uses the acronym R.O.A.R. (Respectful, On task, Always Safe, Responsible) to reinforce expectations. Staff and students create a “Social Contract” for their classrooms and refer to this contract daily to remind students what is expected of them. Students are also held accountable for positive behavior through monthly behavior celebrations to acknowledge their behavioral success. Students are motivated to work hard through positive reinforcement from staff as well as receiving special positive behavior tickets. In addition to R.O.A.R. celebrations school families have been created by pairing students from each grade level to one teacher. During “Family Time” teachers do activities to promote life skills such as empathy, compassion, kindness, self control, and respect. Older students are encouraged to take on a leadership role. They are invited to be school safeties, book buddies, hallway monitors, and playground helpers for younger students. This too creates a sense of school family for all.

Teachers use engaging and motivating lessons to help foster the love of learning. Teachers have an attitude that all students are lifelong learners and we instill this thought within our classrooms. Growth mindset is a term that all students know and use frequently when school work is hard. They use this term to remind themselves to persevere through their struggles. Every member of this school community is valued and appreciated. Everyone supports each other and cheers each other on along the path of academic success.

Lake Hills is lucky to have such a supportive Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). Our PTO has been very gracious and their number one goal is to support the teachers and students. They provide money to support classroom libraries. They encourage teachers to ask for help when they are in need of school supplies, and want to help out and support in whatever way they can.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

It can be challenging to bring all staff members onboard with a “Whatever It Takes” philosophy; it can seem downright impossible to convince families and community members that they have a stake and role in that approach as well! Our goals for family engagement are to strengthen partnerships and encourage collaboration among our staff, families, and community. The success of our students in school and moving forward will be greater and more enduring the better we can mobilize and utilize the strengths of our families and community. Everyone has a contribution to make, whether that be with time, skills, or resources. In time, everyone will be in need. We will all be stronger for coming together, supporting one another, and uplifting our children.

Our staff makes intentional efforts to develop and nurture strong relationships, which include being aware of and working to support the challenges and obstacles facing our families. From the principal to the playground - we work to create a welcoming and safe environment for students and families. Communication is vital to increase awareness of how and why the family is so crucial and to provide ideas to support their children’s success. Teachers utilize texting and mobile apps to keep families informed and engaged. Weekly family emails from the principal provide info, updates, and resources.

The needs are not only educational. We have an ongoing warm clothing/winter gear collection to have

items to lend or, more frequently, give as needed. In Michigan, these are essential yet expensive items. Our PTO utilizes social media to both keep families and community members informed AND seek help when items are needed. This program relies heavily on sharing resources. Our donation bins are an acknowledgement that we will help families in need and offers an opportunity for families to share with others. It is common for the same ones who receive items to come in the next day with a bag of clothing to be shared.

We know that our families are hard working and one size does not fit all. Our PTO is fully invested in supporting “Whatever it Takes” - all resources are focused on providing support for that mission. Activities for families are offered at different times in a variety of ways. Sometimes, parents are leading and providing their time, skills, and resources. Other times, it is staff directed and families are engaged participants. Our goal is to empower them to be active collaborators in our students’/their children’s educational success - at Lake Hills and throughout life. Our school is only one part of their journey, but it can become a strong foundation to build on for future success, when we all work together for our children.

3. Professional Development:

Lake Hills Elementary staff values adult learning. Teachers cannot serve students well if they do not know best practices. The principals, teachers, and support staff at Lake Hills know we are part of a learning community. Therefore, we learn together, continuously.

Professional development is based on a comprehensive needs assessment (CNA) of our demographic, academic achievement, process, and perception data. The CNA reveals areas of strength and growth. Recently, a data dive revealed the need to learn about teaching children in poverty, math achievement, and professional learning communities. First, Lake Hills collaborated with central office and the intermediate school district in order to look at factors leading to a FOCUS school label. Together, they found best practices for professional development that led to school improvement. Lake Hills sent staff to Turning High Poverty into High Performing Schools, then engaged staff in a book study. We compared our work to the work of the high performing schools featured in the book. An action plan was created for the biggest impact. The list of ideas was categorized into NOW, SOON, LATER, so we could be realistic about our capacity. Central office and building administration attended planning meetings to support the work.

Triangulated academic data determined where professional development was needed. Math needed attention. Intense focus of time and resources was given to analyzing math standards, implementing balanced assessments, and using professional learning communities. Teachers attended a conference on professional learning communities. Learning was implemented with staff. The process of professional collaboration was woven into the training on math assessments. Despite all the imperfections of starting something new, it made a difference to student success.

There is an open invitation to all staff to be on the school improvement team. Nearly all staff participate with focused efforts. The informed group drives decisions for professional learning. Additional training has included cognitive coaching, adaptive schools, and balanced literacy. Simultaneously, the staff works on using balanced assessments in math, using data for professional learning communities, and teaching students in poverty. The professional learning is closely related and strongly represented in the school improvement plan.

Additionally, professional development is the heart of staff meetings. While this may be true for many faculty meetings, this staff elects to meet more frequently than required to learn together. The capacity of teachers to learn has grown with the evolving culture of the school with administrative support. Together they optimize time, remove barriers and create focus for impact.

4. School Leadership:

At Lake Hills, the philosophy for leadership is structured around professional collaboration and high expectations for learning - as a staff and for our students. This approach ensures that administrators are visible and involved, teachers are not isolated in their classrooms, support staff are not relegated to

secondary status, and specialists are valued beyond their area of expertise; all staff work together, sharing best practices, and setting priorities as a team, for the best interest of every student.

The importance and impact of the school climate and culture are not buzzwords at Lake Hills, but built into everyday principles, practices, and decisions. We know that many of our students enter school facing obstacles or already falling behind. We do not lower our standards for students who struggle; we all jump in to lift them up. Leadership decisions are student-centered and there are clear structures to ensure all stakeholders are unified in mutual support and accountability to impact student achievement.

The principal views his role as a servant leader, exemplifying “Whatever it takes” to support the staff, motivate students, and encourage family involvement. On a daily basis, the principal engages with every classroom and teacher, works with small groups of students during intervention blocks, and talks with families at dismissal time. Being visible and involved by example, the principal sets the tone for collaboration, cooperation, and high expectations among all the school’s stakeholders.

Student learning is progress monitored and systematically reviewed by grade level teams and other staff. Classroom Learning Labs offer a unique method of learning from each other and strengthening our pedagogical practices. Teachers meet with their grade level partners in Professional Learning Communities, utilizing that time to analyze student data, discuss strategies, and weigh in on decisions that directly impact student learning. Collaborative planning time allows teachers to utilize their professional and personal strengths; they have objective data to consider and their subjective experiences to support their decisions.

Support staff are encouraged to utilize their strengths and actively participate in classrooms and the programs for which they were hired, yet are never left on their own. The principal assigns new hires to work with mentor teachers who consistently demonstrate effective skills and want to share their passion. Instructional tools and supports are utilized to challenge students every day, whether that means pushing them further or strengthening needed skills. Families are seen as vital contributors to student success, and staff looks for ways to strengthen the school and family partnerships.

We know our students will go further when we collaborate and complement each other’s strengths. No one alone has everything every student needs. It takes all of us working together for each to succeed.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

To describe the one practice most instrumental to the success of Lake Hills is to capture in words the spirit and action inspired with a “Whatever it Takes” philosophy. Our staff embodies this philosophy in their day to day commitment to strengthening the relationships among and within our staff, student, family, and community partnerships; these relationships are built on mutual respect and positive regard, a spirit of collaboration and accountability, and high expectations for ourselves and our students. Whatever it takes begins in the heart, mind, and passion of every professional; it is shared with and encouraged in every student and stakeholder in our school community.

We know that as professional educators, we are first always learning within ourselves and from each other, from constant efforts to grow, improve, and reach higher. Everyday we open our doors to embrace and encourage this same growth mindset in our students; in this place, every person is valuable, has a contribution to make, learning is an interactive and ongoing journey. Mistakes are embraced for the knowledge that is gained, the only failure is to give up... and no one is left alone with that option. Our students know we believe in the value they intrinsically hold, the incredible potential for growth they have within, and the effort they bring will be embraced. The challenges and adversity our students face in their daily lives are not allowed to be a wall preventing them from success, nor do we lower the bar so they meet the minimum standard. As professionals, we are committed to setting high the expectations and then doing together whatever it takes to lift ourselves, each other, our students, our families, our community to the needed heights to reach that bar.

There is not a magic bullet, secret formula, failsafe program or any other one strategy for success. Whatever it takes is practiced every day - in every classroom and office, in our homes, in our community. Does it work every day, for every student, in every situation? No. We recognize there will be obstacles, challenges, backtracking. There have been difficult decisions, implementing changes and making choices, always student centered and forward-focused, but not easy to undertake. We work together, support each other, and find strength in the process when those situations arise; it is in those moments, those spaces, even that darkness, that we see the light bulbs go on, the relationships strengthen, the learning happens, the growth occurs, the mountains climbed, in big ways and small moments. We celebrate with each other. Then we do it again the next day. And the next day. Whatever it Takes.