

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):
- 13 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 4 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 6 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 23 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	0	0	0
K	55	42	97
1	45	43	88
2	35	53	88
3	43	49	92
4	52	44	96
5	53	57	110
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	283	288	571

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 3 % Asian
 - 5 % Black or African American
 - 7 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 81 % White
 - 4 % 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	10
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	17
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	27
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2016	553
(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: 4 %
22 Total number ELL

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

Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Cambodian, Arabic

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 27 %
Total number students who qualify: 154

8. Students receiving special education services: 9 %
50 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>7</u> Autism | <u>3</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>7</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>4</u> Developmentally Delayed | <u>15</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>2</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>8</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>1</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>3</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>1</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 4
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.	26
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.	11
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 21:1

12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

Required Information	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013
Daily student attendance	96%	96%	97%	96%	97%
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.

Providing all an opportunity to learn in an emerging, safe environment. Together, family and community, we respect the individual, nurturing the potential of each child.

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

Glenn C. Marlow Elementary School (GMES) serves students in K through fifth grade and is located in the northern part of Henderson County, NC. Marlow is fortunate to have strong support from parents and the surrounding community as evidenced by an active Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO), and ongoing business partnerships. Our namesake, Mr. Glenn Marlow, stood for student-centered education with a strong emphasis on citizenship. Our school respects his legacy by embracing a set of core values we call the “Marlow High Five” (responsible, respectful, kind, safe and mindful). We expect all members of our school community to have the same purpose in mind. All we do address our school motto, which we believe wholeheartedly: “Each child will achieve success.”

GMES is a rural public school located next to a working dairy farm in Mills River, NC, south of Asheville, NC. Our community consists of primarily middle income families, employed in the health care industry. Henderson County Public Schools (HCPS) is composed of 23 schools and over 13,000 students. The school system is the largest, single employer in the county. GMES was built 19 years ago to address overcrowding. We had to come together from multiple schools to create a new staff and community. This gave GMES the opportunity to combine best practices and traditions from across the county to create a culture of excellence.

We are beginning to see demographic changes in our community, experiencing tremendous growth in neighborhoods that feed into our school. Historically, there is a high number of out-of-district requests to attend our school. Parents state that they have moved to our district for the specific purpose of attending GMES, and overall, our high academic achievements have resulted in GMES being one of the most sought after elementary schools in Western NC. From 1999 until 2013, GMES was rated a “School of Distinction” or a “School of Excellence” each year by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI). When the school accountability model changed to school performance grades, GMES received the highest letter grade possible (A and A+) for three consecutive years, placing us in the top 5% of all elementary schools in the state.

One key strategy that has strengthened student achievement is hiring and retaining highly effective teachers. 44% of teachers at GMES have achieved National Board Certification, 57% hold advanced degrees, and our teacher turnover rate is less than 3%. A strong and dedicated staff translates to effective instruction and high student achievement. Building on the milestone of our first statewide recognition as a School of Distinction in 1999, teachers are dedicated and committed to maintaining high achievement. GMES is a school where staff and students are challenged to develop skills to be successful. We push ourselves to never have an “off” day.

Beyond academics, strategies that have yielded high achievement for GMES are growth mindset, high expectations, and the Marlow High Five. These strategies develop the whole child and nurture growth in academics as well as character. Character-building strategies are not limited to students, but are exhibited and modeled by staff and stakeholders as well. We know we are role models, and we don’t have expectations for our students that we don’t hold for ourselves. We work to create an emotional connection with our students so we know who they are, not just as learners, but as integral members of our school community. Each child is a valued individual and will be accepted and embraced regardless of race, beliefs, attitudes, or abilities. This allows us to meet their needs at all levels - academic, economic, emotional, and social.

One feature unique to our school is the Roots & Wings time (Response to Intervention), a time when differentiation is the focus. This allows us to provide individual or small group instruction for each child, whether digging deeper to provide roots or enrichment lessons giving students wings to soar. This dedicated time allows students to do the unthinkable - reach goals that were never thought possible.

Though rigor drives our instruction, our goal is to create a culture of “loving to learn.” We talk, debate, discuss, respect each other’s opinions, and learn to work in groups. We strive to instill in our students a love for learning they will carry with them long after they leave Marlow. Our students enjoy learning, and they want to come to school!

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

GMES teachers possess extensive knowledge of the NC Standard Course of Study, allowing for the implementation of rigorous instruction that ensures the continued success of our students. This encompasses what students should know and be able to do in ELA, math, science, and social studies. From these standards, we are committed to providing strong instructional practices that fit the needs of all students.

Our teachers do not follow a “one size fits all” approach to teaching our diverse population of students. We look at new teaching methods and resources with a critical eye to discern between those that will benefit our students and those with little substance. Limited federal, state, and local funding results in a lack of resources that our teachers find ways to fill. Committed to providing instruction at a high level, teachers work diligently to plan together and create their own materials. Our teachers pride themselves that every lesson includes materials, games, centers, and books chosen with purpose and intent.

In ELA, we follow a balanced literacy framework which includes whole group lessons, guided reading practice in leveled small groups, independent practice, and phonics instruction. Our district recently adopted Letterland for K-2 phonics; after implementing Letterland for a year, we adjusted the pacing to meet the needs of our students. Guided reading is the primary strategy used in K-2 to differentiate instruction. All students are exposed to skills in decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Our students develop as fluent readers, while teachers provide support and scaffolding. Our demonstrated success in K-2 reading provides a strong foundation, allowing 3-5 teachers to focus on reading for content with a high level of comprehension.

Knowing that reading and writing are reciprocal tasks, we embed writing into all content areas. We understand writing represents the highest level of comprehension. Therefore, it is not only taught as a separate subject, but also integrated throughout core instruction.

Our teachers recognize the importance of relevance and rigor to develop mathematical minds. Scaffolding skills from concrete to conceptual to real world application advances our students’ understanding. Teachers use a variety of methods including direct instruction, guided math, independent work stations, and multi-sensory activities. We don’t have a prescribed math program; NC standards drive our instruction. Our teachers have invested countless hours developing and creating resources for instruction.

The most unique feature of math instruction is the flipped classroom. GMES teachers were pioneers in developing this model for our district. Teacher-made videos are used for 3rd-5th grade students and parents to preview and reinforce targeted skills and instruction. Because math is no longer taught the way many parents learned, this enables parents to support student learning at home using the same terminology and methods delivered in the classroom. Class time is used for guided and independent practice with teacher support. Parents have favorably commented on this practice, and it has increased parental involvement in student learning.

Social studies is integrated throughout the curriculum, allowing teachers to make it meaningful and relevant. Our teachers recognize elementary students are egocentric and need to be challenged to consider the world outside of themselves. We utilize Scholastic News, NewsELA, and paired nonfiction/fiction texts, to embed social studies throughout the curriculum. At GMES, one of our goals is to create community-minded learners. An example of increasing civic awareness is the school-wide Day of Change, which was created by 4th graders to collect money for Blue Ridge Honor Air flights originating from Asheville, NC. The entire school brought pocket change to raise funds. Students collected over \$1600 in funds. Following our lead, this became a county-wide endeavor, embraced by many schools in HCPS, resulting in an \$11,000 donation to Blue Ridge Honor Air.

GMES has consistently demonstrated high performance in science, ranking first in HCPS science scores, using inquiry-based learning and the scientific method. Recognizing a national shift in educational focus and

practices in STEM, we are cultivating a STEM culture to prepare our students to be ready for 21st century employment. We have hosted STEM nights and initiated STEM clubs. We take advantage of local natural resources of Western North Carolina. For example, students participate in programs with the Pisgah Center for Wildlife Education (Fish Hatchery), Bullington Garden Center, Cradle of Forestry, and Pisgah Forest Gem Mine.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

At GMES, every student K-5 receives music or art, physical education, media, and computer instruction for 45 minutes a day on a rotating schedule. This is an intentional decision to provide equitable exposure to all non-core curricular areas each week. Enhancement teachers offer adaptive classes for our students with disabilities. Including these students creates an environment of acceptance. Collaboration makes these enhancement classes a vital part of our academic success.

Our classroom teachers recognize the value of these courses for all students. One of our best features is deliberate and collaborative planning to make connections between curriculum and enhancement classes. To coordinate this instruction, enhancement teachers send monthly surveys to classroom teachers.

Students participate in visual/theater arts for one semester and music the next semester. Instruction in the arts increases test scores, allows students to develop critical-thinking skills, and impacts their social development. The music curriculum applies the elements of music through instruments and voice. Fourth grade students learn to play recorders and have performed for the community at the Marlow Book Fair. Orff Ensemble and Chorus are offered before and after school. The visual/theater arts curriculum allows students to use movement and voice to communicate feelings, as well as create visual art pieces using a variety of mediums.

Many students consider PE to be one of the best parts of the week. The primary focus is on building strength, endurance, and preparing for a lifelong pursuit of physical health and well-being. Embedded in the lessons are character traits of integrity, teamwork, sportsmanship, and acceptance of others. As an example, Bridge 2 Sports from Durham, NC came to demonstrate adaptive athletic abilities, showing our students that they can excel in sports despite disabilities. One highlight in PE is fifth grade Outdoor Education, offered by district PE teachers. Students select a variety of activities, like shelter building or rock climbing, and participate in those outdoor activities for a day. The PE curriculum also includes participation in Jump Rope for Heart and class discussions about hygiene. Field Days are a highly anticipated school-wide culminating event. Community sponsored stations and parent volunteers are key in the implementation of these days. Students visit multiple stations designed for successful participation in a cooperative, non-competitive setting.

Technology skills require direct instruction, therefore our SILT voted to place a designated instructional assistant, with a 4-year degree, in the computer lab. Computer enhancement classes support student acquisition of essential 21st century technology skills, teaching digital literacy and internet safety. Technology skills are taught in conjunction with classroom lessons based on NC standards. For example, research skills were taught through collaboration with third grade teachers in producing biographies. Recognizing the importance of technology and the HCPS initiative for one-to-one device ratios, we have allocated monies raised through fundraising initiatives to increase technology available in our school. We recently purchased four Chromebook carts for access to technology beyond the computer enhancement class.

Our Media Center offers a wide and inclusive selection of age-appropriate media resources. Located in the middle of our main hallway, the media center serves as the central hub of the school for engaging readers. The media center offers extended hours before and after school, so students can select books outside of their assigned media class time. All students K-5 check out books each week and are encouraged to read a variety of literature. We accomplish this through participation in Accelerated Reader, biannual book fairs, NC Book Awards voting, bookmark contests, and year-long activities. Published authors visit the school regularly and give presentations to students. Our goal is to create a culture of readers to promote lifelong reading for pleasure and purpose.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

Our school motto is “Every child will achieve success.” These words have pushed us to think about each child as we plan instruction and implement interventions. Some of the high quality instructional methods embraced by our teachers include whole and small group direct instruction, higher level questioning, independent practice, cooperative learning strategies, inquiry-based learning, graphic organizers, flipping the classroom, modeling, flexible grouping, common anchor charts and vocabulary, peer feedback, and student-led learning.

We take seriously our obligation to provide appropriate explicit instruction for all students. Historically we have differentiated for struggling learners, but data analysis by our SILT led to a shift in focus toward our high-achieving students, recognizing their need for instruction in the standards, while pushing them toward real-life applications and higher-level thinking. We sought the expertise of our Academically and Intellectually Gifted (AIG) teacher to provide our staff with professional development opportunities in addressing the needs of high-achieving students as well as planning cooperative lessons.

Roots and Wings is an intervention block, established at GMES in 2013. Our School Improvement Plan includes a goal for growth, ensuring high levels of learning for all students. We intentionally created a schedule that includes a dedicated block of time for each grade level, allowing highly-qualified and trained support staff to differentiate instruction. The classroom teachers join forces during that time with the teachers for Exceptional Children (EC), AIG, speech, English as a Second Language (ESL), reading specialists, instructional assistants, and tutors, to direct our instruction based on demonstrated need. This influx of personnel during a specific time of the day allows us to lower teacher-student ratios. Intense interventions are implemented for all students during this daily 45 minute block. We use the following data sources to place students in homogeneous groups for instruction and review: formative assessment, mCLASS data, Dynamic Indicator of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), benchmark assessments, ACCESS testing, IEPs, MTSS (TIER) data, and teacher input. As a result of data analysis, these groups are ever-changing.

Examples from Roots & Wings include the following activities. Kindergarten students receive instruction in small groups, utilizing skill-specific, targeted instruction. First and second graders in TIER 2 reading intervention groups receive instruction in reading comprehension skills and written expression. Second grade also utilizes incremental rehearsal for math facts as well as targeted instruction for specific skill deficits. Third, fourth, and fifth graders receive instruction using leveled readers and math strategies which include previewing, skill review, and acceleration, which allows them to meet their maximum potential for growth.

While some students receive research-based TIER 2 and 3 interventions, those students who are on target in math and reading are participating in enrichment activities. The AIG teacher nurtures students who have been identified through mCLASS data and teacher input. Enrichment activities include research projects, complete with collaborative slideshows and oral presentations, problem-based learning in a water conservation unit combining reading and math activities, and lessons in diversity in conjunction with novel studies.

As a Targeted Title I school, Title I funds must be used for students who are identified or targeted for instruction. Reading specialists and certified teachers provide literacy support to students in grades K-3 who demonstrated need based on multiple forms of assessment in the selection process. We utilize mCLASS data, DIBELS, and teacher rankings to select students for interventions. Students in TIER 3 reading interventions participate in Fountas and Pinnell Leveled Literacy Instruction, designed specifically to accelerate learning thereby closing the gap and moving students toward grade-level achievement.

Due to these intentional instructional methods, GMES is a high-performing school that continues to meet and exceed growth. Still, we continue to set goals for growth. We use data to support our decision making for Roots & Wings and work in grade-level PLCs to analyze student growth and adjust instruction accordingly. Roots and Wings has allowed us to ensure each student reaches his or her maximum potential.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

At Marlow, our school climate is often referred to as the “Marlow Magic.” It is not something that you can put your finger on. It is a feeling. Beyond our students, it exists in our staff, our custodians, and our cafeteria workers. From the top down, our school cultivates an environment of support, engagement, and mutual respect.

We want our students to help create the climate at Marlow, not just staff. Students are encouraged to have visible leadership roles. Leadership is exhibited in Book Buddies between grade levels, safety and flag patrol, and hallway chalkboards covered with motivating quotes selected and written by students. Students manage our school-wide recycling program, Lost and Found, and the Marlow School Store, which was founded to raise funds for our sister school in Ethiopia. ‘Voices to the Hart’ is an additional group of fifth grade leaders who meet with the principal to bring cares and concerns from a student perspective.

We motivate students and honor their hard work in distinct ways. As a Positive Behavior Interventions System (PBIS) school, we embrace the “Marlow High Five.” We reward students exhibiting these behaviors. They are entered in a weekly drawing hoping to be chosen as “gotcha” winners. We showcase student talents through a yearly talent show, Spelling Bee, annual art exhibit, and A/A-B honor roll. We work hard to find strengths in all students, looking for ways to recognize each individual. The main hallway hosts a bulletin board in Braille, devoted to our visually impaired students. We celebrate our students participating in Special Olympics with a yearly assembly and send our kindergarten classes to the event as cheerleaders for our athletes. Marlow embodies an environment of acceptance.

The Marlow Magic is evident as our school becomes our extended family. Staff provides care for milestone life events and personal well-being. As a family, we believe in celebrating all of life’s ups and downs. Our job as educators can be very demanding, so we seek ways to have fun together. This year we made time to take a bus full of staff to go Christmas caroling throughout the Marlow community. We encourage each other through “shout outs” at monthly staff meetings, an ongoing prayer list for staff needs, and personal notes.

All of these items contribute to the Marlow Magic and a positive school climate which impacts student achievement.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

We believe that engaging families and community is a strength at GMES, and communication is the key to fostering parent engagement. School leadership keeps parents informed through social media, a weekly phone call, our website, and newsletters. A parent recently stated, “Communication between parents and teachers is awesome.”

Parent involvement begins within the first week of school, as parents are invited to attend the annual “Boo Hoo” breakfast. This is designed to ease the transition for kindergarten parents and families new to school. Recognizing the importance of fathers being involved in the school, the Marlow Dads group meets once a month. Additional examples of opportunities for family engagement are 5th grade Mother’s Day Tea, Book Fair Family Night, Pumpkin Lighting (fall carnival), holiday luncheons, STEM night, movie nights, and talent show. Our strong PTO provides great support as these volunteers are more than party coordinators and are regularly seen around our school community as active members. Parent representatives serve on the SILT and the newly-formed safe school committee. Due to funding cuts for instructional assistants, parents have helped bridge the gap by providing clerical support which allows instructional assistants to focus on student learning.

Strong transitions are a strategy for student success, family engagement, and school improvement. Recognizing transitions start before kindergarten, we participate in the county Kindergarten Readiness

Rally' and provide tours for families prior to kindergarten enrollment. At our Kindergarten Open House, incoming families are invited to visit classrooms, hear presentations, ask pertinent questions, and watch current kindergartners perform. In our 'Step Up to Third Grade' program, second grade parents are invited to an informative meeting to address the difficult transition from second to third grade. Some of the unique challenges for third graders include standardized assessments, letter grades, and increased student independence. Knowing the next significant transition is fifth grade to middle school, our teachers work closely with middle schools to ensure a smooth transition for both students and parents from the elementary to middle school culture.

Community goes beyond the walls of GMES. Our Kiwanis Kids club is a service organization doing community based learning projects. In collaboration with the high school Kiwanis Club, students collected food for a food bank, made blankets for the Linus project, and visited a local nursing home.

Marlow thrives from active parent engagement and an involved community, resulting in student success.

3. Professional Development:

Addressing the goals of our SIP, we wanted to maintain our high performance, and through data analysis, we exposed the need to address growth in high achievers. This knowledge guided us as we planned and implemented professional development (PD) during the school year. We chose vertical planning as a strategy to address the need. It provides a continuum that allows us to build on previous learning, utilizing common practices and resources. We had honest, reflective conversations about closing gaps and extending student learning. We also discussed what we want students to know when they arrive and leave a grade level. These vertical conversations led us to deliberately choose relevant, ongoing professional development.

GMES realizes our teachers are its best resource for PD. This allows us to focus on strengths and needs of each staff member, making PD more relevant and successful. For this reason, we created surveys to determine the most pressing needs for Marlow. Our instructional coach provided leadership in guiding teacher-led presentations. We called it 'Marlow EdCamp', and each teacher selected relevant workshops that would impact student achievement. This allowed high quality teachers to provide PD and impact instructional practices across grade levels. For example, our fifth grade teacher taught our third and fourth grade math teachers how to flip their classrooms. This has had a huge impact on student achievement, as evidenced in countywide math scores.

We recognize the best learning comes from each other; therefore, we set aside time for peer observations and grade-level walkthroughs. This leads to quality conversations regarding good teaching practices. Mentoring is vital to our PD at Marlow. We use our most experienced teachers to shape the curriculum and culture of school. Knowing teacher retention impacts student learning, we are determined to provide good mentoring relationships. We retain our beginning teachers because of this strategy.

As we encourage our students to develop a growth mindset, we embrace it as teachers when we seek opportunities for PD. Marlow is a safe place to grow as an educator. We are willing to be vulnerable and honest when targeting our own professional needs. As we model the growth mindset through our own development, we encourage each other to work toward National Board Certification and advanced degrees, providing in-school support.

Maintaining a high-achieving status is challenging. Therefore PD must be tailored to our specific needs. Our school leadership respects us as professionals, and allows us to set the course for our growth.

4. School Leadership:

Leadership at Marlow is driven by our school vision, embracing a philosophy of collaboration, communication, and cooperation with a student-centered focus. Every decision is made with students in mind.

Our school has one principal and 87 staff members, serving 580 students. Our principal views his leadership role as one of service, support, and facilitation. He believes we all have a voice in the decision-making process at Marlow. He reminds us as teachers, “You are the experts,” and allows us to think outside the box to support student learning and professional growth. He encourages us to pursue leadership positions within the school and district as advocates for our students. He applauds our efforts to be active community members, encouraging us to be involved in community events and civic organizations. He recognizes that this job is important, but there are times family must come first, and he allows us to do that without worry. We often hear, “Take care of yourself, and take care of your family.”

Teacher leadership and communication are structured through the SILT committee. Our principal actively supported a change by allowing our SILT to be teacher-driven. An elected chairperson streamlines the meetings, setting the agenda with items brought forward by staff members. This allows us to focus on specific needs within the school, such as school culture, academics, safety issues, and district mental health initiatives. For example, data-driven decisions made by the SILT impact spending for instructional materials, set schedules for optimum intervention time, and identify professional development opportunities for the staff.

Collaboration happens in many avenues at GMES. The instructional coach works with the principal to examine data and provide PD during PLC’s. Interview committees are made of teacher leaders, giving them a voice in choosing their peers. This builds strong grade-level PLC’s, showcasing the diverse strengths of teachers and directly impacting student learning.

Teachers recognized the importance of supporting Marlow students dealing with academic and behavior needs and created ATACT (A Tier and Care team). This team includes our principal, grade level representatives, school counselor, school psychologist, and reading specialist. This team allows us to keep track of students throughout their entire tenure at Marlow, considering the whole child.

The mutual trust and respect we have for one another at GMES enables us to consider all stakeholders as leaders and contributes to our high achieving status. It is not an “I do” mentality, but a “we do” culture at GMES.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

It is an unspoken, but understood expectation that everyone who enters GMES will achieve at a high level. We call it the “Marlow way.” The one practice that is instrumental in our sustained success is high expectations for all. Teachers, staff, administrators, parents, students, and community members share responsibility in providing a supportive learning environment. Children love to come to Marlow. We make learning something they want to experience.

Our vision, “Each child will achieve success,” looks different for every child. From something as simple as learning to successfully participate in the classroom community to earning A/A-B honor roll recognition, all accomplishments are celebrated. We encourage students to develop a growth mindset and take ownership of their learning. For example, fifth grade students set academic and personal goals that are revisited quarterly to determine next steps. We empower students to become confident, self-directed, lifelong learners. Mistakes are accepted and celebrated as learning opportunities.

We achieve success in academics because expectations are higher than state and county standards. We teach more than the curriculum, providing rigorous content beyond the minimum requirements. We are committed to early interventions, growing K-2 students to be proficient readers and mathematicians. Students come to grades 3-5 with appropriate skills ready to tackle the curriculum.

High expectations for teachers led us to utilize partner teaching, allowing us to become experts in our field. Specializing in a content area has been instrumental to our success. Common core forced us to focus on power standards and develop high quality lessons through vertical conversations and grade-level discussions. As evidence of student success on assessments, one of our teacher’s ranks in the top four in NC for ELA, and our K-2 math teachers rank in the top three in HCPS. It is an understood expectation: GMES teachers will set higher goals, focus on effective teaching, and provide high quality instruction.

We recognize students come from varied socio-emotional backgrounds, so we work hard to ensure their academic success. We provide social groups that explicitly teach appropriate social interactions that may not come naturally to some. Once students worry less about fitting in, they are free to be successful. Our school is a safe, nurturing, and comfortable environment for all.

High expectations are evident in every conversation, every lesson, and every piece of work displayed in the hallways. This is part of the Marlow Magic. It is something you just have to experience.