

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):
- 1 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 0 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 1 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 2 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	5	5	10
K	6	11	17
1	12	8	20
2	13	8	21
3	13	10	23
4	16	9	25
5	8	7	15
6	13	8	21
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	86	66	152

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 5 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 0 % Asian
 - 2 % Black or African American
 - 4 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 88 % White
 - 1 % 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: 9%

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	4
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	12
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	16
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2016	182
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.09
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	9

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: 62 %
Total number students who qualify: 94

8. Students receiving special education services: 5 %
8 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>0</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>2</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>4</u> Developmentally Delayed | <u>1</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>0</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>1</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

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

	Number of Staff
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	9
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	5
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	6
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	6

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 17:1

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%	95%	96%	96%	96%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

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

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

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

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

Yes No

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

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

To produce creative, adaptable, productive citizens committed to life-long learning.

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

Hitchcock County Elementary School is located in rural Southwest Nebraska in the town of Culbertson located 11 miles west of McCook. The District of Hitchcock County Schools includes the communities of Culbertson and Trenton near Swanson Reservoir and spans an area of 398.2 miles. The central offices and the secondary school are located in Trenton and the elementary school is located in Culbertson. Hitchcock County Schools are accredited by the Nebraska Department of Education and offer a wide range of curriculum offerings and athletic options. The communities of Hitchcock County Elementary are made up of diverse students, many from low socio-economic standing. Students that attend Hitchcock County Elementary are at a poverty rate of 62%. Many families within the community have resided in the community for many generations along with families moving in from Colorado, Kansas and neighboring communities. This heritage, along with the new families, works well together to create a life-long bond between community and school.

Hitchcock County Elementary School is a merger of the schools that were located in Culbertson and Trenton. The two school districts, plus Stratton Schools, were unified in 1999. Stratton left the unification and in 2008, Trenton and Culbertson formally merged and became known as Hitchcock County Schools. As with all small school mergers, losing a home school was trying on the communities and the students. But, over the years, the district has begun to flourish as new friends were made among the students of the different towns.

The area offers one of the best spots in the state of Nebraska for fishing and hunting. People come to this area from all over the country to partake in these outdoor activities. In addition, Southwest Nebraska leads the state in the number of Master Anglers caught by fishermen. Motels fill up with hunters in the fall to hunt pheasants, ducks, doves and deer.

The elementary school offers specialty classes of music, physical education, art, literacy skills, and media technology. We are a school-wide Title One school. We are accredited and involved in a continuous school improvement process. The communities came together to come up with a plan to replace the 1926 school buildings that the students were currently attending. A school bond was passed in November of 2012 and a new elementary school was completed in January 2013. The new school is climate controlled and ADA accessible.

In 2011 Hitchcock County Jr/Sr High School was named a U.S. Department of Education Blue Ribbon school for academic excellence. In 2015 Hitchcock Elementary was named a Distinguished Title One School because of the academic gains and the closing of the learning gap between different groups of students.

Demographically the district is located in poverty stricken Southwest Nebraska. The district has consistently had a poverty rate hovering around 60% mark, and the staff and teachers have refused to allow this to be an excuse to allow our children to fail.

The students who attend Hitchcock County Elementary School have all been given lessons in Positive Behavior Interventions and Support, otherwise known as PBiS. This program is based on the idea of first teaching all students the behaviors that are expected of them. This includes from how to act on the school bus to stacking trays appropriately at lunch. PBiS goes over examples of how the students can offer their help to others, and how to accept responsibility for their own actions. It deals with respecting themselves and others around them at all times. The PBiS program starts in the elementary grades and is carried on into the secondary school. The program has been a great success and as a result, the elementary school has well behaved, safe, and respectful students. Hitchcock County Elementary is a great place to be because of the students, the staff, and the community.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

The mission of the Hitchcock County Schools is to produce creative, adaptable, productive citizens committed to lifelong learning. The elementary school curriculum focuses on the four core subject areas: Language Arts, Math, Science, and History. Students develop strong reading comprehension skills, develop critical thinking skills, learn fundamental math concepts, explore a variety of science topics, and learn about the world around them.

At Hitchcock County Elementary, teachers understand that today's students learn differently than students learned many years ago. That's why there is a continual review of programs to include the most up-to-date teaching approaches that appeal to young learners. All programs include integrated technology lessons that coincide with subjects and lessons. Students don't learn technology skills in isolation, but develop an understanding and appreciation of how to apply these skills to their everyday work.

Reading Street Common Core by Pearson, is a comprehensive reading program, used by Hitchcock County Elementary that is built on solid research and prioritizes instruction for the five core areas of reading instruction for every grade: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and text-based comprehension. Blended, digital and print, delivery of content is available for every teacher. Foundational reading skills are reinforced in grades k-3 with the use of the Reading Street leveled readers, digital practice, and RTI (Response to Intervention) resources. Primary teachers use the content area standards provided by the state which clearly describes what students need to know and be able to do, thus placing student learning at the center of schooling. By setting clear expectations for learning in the content area of language arts, the state offers a means for the teachers of Hitchcock County to set personal learning goals connected with academic success.

Additionally, the Accelerated Reader Program (AR) from Renaissance Learning is used to support independent reading. Students take a reading assessment through the web site to determine their reading level. Books from the school or classroom library are selected at the appropriate reading level. Students then take computerized comprehension and vocabulary quizzes. The data from the quizzes helps to monitor student progress, adjust reading levels, and identify individuals who need more targeted interventions.

Hitchcock County Elementary staff integrates writing across curriculum areas. Ron Conigilo Writing has helped teachers seek to improve the voice, word choice, ideas, organization and sentence fluency in students' writings. Through Content Editing, direction is provided to dramatically improve the quality of the work produced by any writer. Students participate in quick writes in reading, science, and social studies to provide evidence and support their thinking.

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt; Think Central K-6th Math is the comprehensive Mathematics series used by Hitchcock County Elementary. The math curriculum uses an approach that promotes an understanding of math concepts through a spiral review. A small amount of math homework is sent home a few nights throughout the school week to reinforce the spiraling approach to math. Math concepts are connected to student learning through real world applications which hopefully connects a mathematical "purpose" for learning. Students are also required to give explanations to problem solving through writing, and daily instruction requires students to incorporate writing into their daily math work. A key feature of the math instruction in the primary grades is using math manipulatives to gain some additional concrete knowledge of mathematics. In addition to these concrete mathematical investigations, the upper elementary grades are introduced to mathematical concepts of pre-Algebra. If students' skills are missing in key areas such as math facts, additional practice is given by the teachers or aides in small groups, or individually. The Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Think Central Series also incorporates online activities and access to the student classroom and homework pages, so students and parents have additional opportunities to use, review, and support mathematics learning.

Students of Hitchcock County Elementary broaden their view of the world through many "hands on"

learning activities. Regularly, students are engaged in current affairs through student-targeted news articles and through online CNN broadcasting. Students are encouraged to discover the world through captivating lessons revolving around their community, local and state, American History, and becoming global citizens of the world. Implementing PBiS allows the teachers at Hitchcock County Elementary to teach the students about how to be a safe, responsible, and respectful members of society. Students are encouraged to offer themselves by engaging in civic events such as activities through the local 4-H, actively participating in community betterment events, and by gaining work experience by way of school improvement projects. Due to these programs, students take more initiative and pride in their school and community. Students apply their knowledge by creating projects that substantiate their learning of Native American homes and cultures, flags from around the world, and timelines of American and Nebraskan history. The primary students are emerged in several social studies activities, consisting of a fire station visit, celebrations of President's Day, Constitution Day, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day, while learning about important national symbols and the importance of following expectations in their family, school, and community.

The science curriculum revolves around the Nebraska State science standards. In the lower grade levels, science is integrated more heavily into reading instruction through nonfiction reading. Students are exposed to the various fields of science. The science curriculum uses the Macmillan/MacGraw-Hill textbooks. The scientific method is taught in further depth, with complex scientific observations and experiments with a deeper depth of knowledge of subject matter. The teachers supplement the curriculum with outside sources such as Scholastic News, videos, attending the Groundwater Festival in Grand Island, NE, the Nebraska State Fair, and the Henry Doorly Zoo in Omaha, NE.

Hitchcock County Elementary preschool curriculum is based on the Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines for ages three to five, and core curriculum areas provided are literacy, science, and math. The Guidelines align with Nebraska's K-12 Standards. These guidelines are used in an effort to recognize and promote early care and education experiences that support lifelong growth and development. Essential Learning Standards have been identified and are taught.

In partnership with families and our communities, our quality, center-based, early childhood education program provides a foundation for learning and development in the areas of language and literacy, mathematical thinking, scientific inquiry, approaches to learning, social-emotional development, physical-motor development, and creative arts. An all-inclusive approach is the key to positive outcomes for young children with regard to being prepared for a successful experience in school. It is essential for our center-based early childhood education programs to provide inclusive learning environments that maximize the participation of all children, and to ensure that participating children and families have access to comprehensive, high-quality services.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

At Hitchcock County Elementary, we have Physical Education classes 4 days a week, 20 minutes for grades K-2. For Grades 3-4 we have class 5 days a week for 30 minutes and for grades 5-6 we have class 5 days a week for 45 minutes. We focus on developing fundamental motor skills and then translate those into individual skills/team skills that will give the students the tools to make healthy decisions later in life. We really work on students showing good sportsmanship as well as reinforcing positive behavior (PBIS). Students are encouraged to work out minor disagreements themselves and then report to the teacher.

We also team up with the local 4-H group as well as the local Health and Wellness department to emphasize the role health and nutrition play in the children's lives. Each year we take our 4th grade to a Health and Fitness day where they go through stations and learn about making healthy choices in their diet as well as showing them activities that will keep them physically healthy. Our 5th and 6th grades participate in a health day with our local 4-H department. Students spend the day learning how to read labels and actually get to cook healthy foods. We also work cross curriculum activities into our classes. We use math a lot and reinforce the use of proper grammar throughout the curriculum. Our administration and staff are very supportive of our Physical Education program.

Hitchcock County Elementary offers art education for kindergarten through sixth grade. Each grade level

attends art once a week for forty minutes. The teacher is certified in art k-12. Lessons are based on the Nebraska Art Standards and the National Art Standards. Most art lessons use cross curriculum to better enhance student learning. Cross curriculum topics include, but are not limited to, ruler measurements, various global cultures, fine motor skills, handwriting, reading, scientific methods including making and testing hypothesis, insect and animal habitats. Students are also taught social and behavioral skills through the PBiS program. Students are taught in a spiral method where one skill builds on another.

The music curriculum is based on the Nebraska K-12 Fine Arts Standards for music. Grades k-6 attend music classes four days a week for twenty minutes each class period. Students at a young age (K-4) are introduced to musical elements such as counting and are also asked to socialize and work together. Counting in music is an essential element, as well as a great way to learn patterns and repetition, along with allowing students to use basic math outside of the home classroom. Students of all grades and ages are required to work together which, in turn, can foster better socialization skills and teamwork.

Another important aspect of music is improvement of language skills. The students improve language skills through vocal music via pronunciation of words and foreign languages. Clinics and music competitions can further allow students to meet and socialize in a united common interest. The common interest of music can also be something that keeps individual students in school as they can feel a sense of accomplishment and find praise from their peers.

The school library is an inviting, creative and informational hub in the school. The mission of the school library is to ensure the success of all students to effectively use ideas and information to become life-long learners. Students attain knowledge and skills to become accomplished readers, independent learners, problem solvers, and to foster an enjoyment of reading. This is done by collaboration of the classroom teachers and librarian to plan, organize, and create lessons and experiences in the library that support the curriculum within the classrooms.

At each grade level, targeted goals help students with library knowledge, reading, and listening skills to help cultivate a lifetime enjoyment of reading. Incentives are used to motivate students such as the AR Store, library contests, and rewards that allow special time in the library.

Weekly story time is incorporated in the lower grades to introduce simple reading and listening concepts. The lower grades spend 30 minutes each day in the library choosing books, reading and testing. A library skills class also meets once a week. The upper elementary has input on the books that are ordered and has independent library time. The librarian works with different reading groups in the library as well to support the teachers in the classroom.

Technology is integrated into all aspects of the curriculum. Blended learning is used in the classroom and each class gets a minimum of 60 minutes a week of computer time in our brand new computer lab. There is also a mobile lab of Chrome books for teachers to use on a sign-up basis. All teachers utilize technology to collect and analyze data which drives our instruction.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

At Hitchcock County Elementary School we focus on small successes to build real achievement. To meet the diverse and individual needs of students, and achieve instructional goals, we use a variety of instructional methods, interventions, and assessments.

Each Fall the MAP (Measures of Academic Progress) tests and STAR tests are taken by all students as a universal screener. By using these tests, we have baseline data for all students. Reports from this data can then be generated to tell us if there are any trends, specific skill deficits and current level of mastery based on student's age and/or grade level. The Pyramid response to intervention is then used to define instructional groups. Goals and timelines can be created within the STAR Reading, Math, and Early Literacy Programs and progress monitoring is completed mainly using these tests.

Tier One students at all grade levels receive tiered instruction within the core program that is aligned with

the state standards. The teaching staff attends ongoing professional development to assure that the delivery of Tier One instruction results in a high percentage of students meeting expected benchmarks. Teachers use effective teaching strategies based on Marzano's Instructional Frameworks, TBL (technology based learning) and differentiated curriculum and instruction. Upon completing the Fall testing and looking at baseline data, students who fall at or above benchmarks will be at Tier One in the Pyramid model. Students who fall significantly above the benchmark are given the opportunity to enrich and extend their learning through small group activities that take into consideration the advanced conceptual and processing abilities of gifted students.

Tier Two students who are in need of supplemental instruction are then broken down into smaller groups to focus on their particular need. Specific student needs are identified by the baseline data. Other relevant testing instruments such as AIMSweb, Pearson, and criterion referenced tests can also be used to further pinpoint specific need. Instructional methods and content are then differentiated to meet the diverse needs of these students. Small group instruction is more targeted on specific skills that can either be re-taught or practiced.

Interventions used are research based and include the following: Tier Two materials provided by the GoMath and Pearson curriculum series, The Sound Case, Saxon Phonics Intervention, Systematic Sight Word Intervention, Ready Naturally, SRA Direct Instruction Reading, STAR Reading Grade Book, and other materials as needed for practicing or re-teaching specific skills. Creating a climate that encourages interactions, relieves tension and builds confidence, is a goal of Hitchcock County Tier Two instruction.

Tier Three students identified as high risk for failure and have not responded to Tier Two interventions and/or are lacking foundational skills are then considered for Tier Three instruction. Smaller groups and often one on one instruction is provided using explicit instruction. Although 'evidence' based materials for explicit instruction are now recommended, an evidence-based curriculum consists of practices that have been vetted through rigorous research which hasn't been done with most materials at this time. The curriculums used for the explicit instruction are extensive, research based, spiraling programs which have motivational strategies, placement tests, and progress monitoring built within the programs. Tier Three and verified students are then taught according to their individual needs and testing data, using a combination or portions of various programs and methods. Hitchcock County Elementary uses SRA/McGraw-Hill as a base series, with other supporting programs such as Reading Mastery at various levels and sections, Corrective Reading & Math, Spelling Mastery, Visual Phonics and Touch Math.

The grade levels which utilize these Norm Referenced assessment tools are as follows: Preschool uses the Teaching Strategies Gold Online Assessment Portfolios. Kindergarten, First and Second grades uses Aimsweb Math and Reading, Star Early Literacy is used in Kindergarten through Third grade. Star Math is used in First grade through Sixth Grade, NWEA/MAPS is used Kindergarten through Sixth grades, and NESAS (Nebraska State Accountability) assessments are used third through sixth grades.

Hitchcock County Elementary School has met and/or exceeded the percentage necessary for AYP (average yearly progress) over the past five years. Collaboration and consistency make our school successful. Through implementing PBIS and making connections with students, and creating consistent academic expectations through all grade levels, we have narrowed the achievement gap. We continue to focus on finding the tools we need to build high expectations for our teachers and students.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

Hitchcock County Elementary School motivates its students in a variety of ways. The school has been implementing PBiS (Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports) in the elementary building for ten years. In our preschool and kindergarten programs, we are in the beginning stages of implementing the PBiS Pyramid Model. Geared to meet specific needs of young learners, it is a framework of evidence-based practices that promotes social and emotional competence in young children and prevents and addresses challenging behaviors. The model is designed as a promotion, prevention and intervention framework built on a solid foundation of a high quality workforce.

The PBiS program aligns with the Nebraska AQuESTT (Accountability for a Quality Education System for Today and Tomorrow) System mission and is designed "To lead and support the preparation of all Nebraskans for learning, earning, and living." As well as strongly aligning with the district's mission: "To produce creative, adaptable, productive citizens committed to lifelong learning." In addition, adoption of the PBiS framework promotes the school improvement goal of a commitment to a safe and orderly school environment through the adoption of positive behavior intervention strategies. These are more than just written statements, they represent the culture of our school, the hearts of the staff, and faces of our students.

Some strategies through the PBiS program include assemblies, Falcon Families, and a school-wide recognition program. Through the PBiS Initiative, Hitchcock County Elementary recognizes students who learn and succeed in the four primary expectations. These include safety first, offer yourself, accept responsibility, and respect self and others. Through the Falcon Families, additional support is provided in the four expectations and also includes social skills to better provide their students with the tools necessary to become successful citizens in the community. Staff utilizes a 5:1 ratio with positive reinforcements to negative statements. Hitchcock County Elementary also enriches and engages students through activities such as educational field trips, charity work, and introducing them to new life skills.

Learning is fundamentally a social phenomenon. Some of the greatest pleasures, accomplishments, and satisfactions that people experience throughout their childhood and adult lives comes from their interactions with others. Therefore, it is vitally important for Hitchcock County Schools to place a great emphasis on children's social and emotional development. Within the classroom, social and emotional skills are directly taught using a curriculum developed by local teachers to aid all students in their experiences. An example expectation is to introduce children to self-control strategies and problem solving techniques. Then the social and emotional skills instruction is embedded within the classroom routine and taught during teachable moments. If a student displays challenging behaviors in the classroom, the teacher meets with families to collaborate on implementation of a preventive personalized behavior plan. The PBiS program is implemented in order to prevent challenging behaviors rather than trying to repair challenging behaviors.

The school values and supports teachers through experienced mentor teachers. The mentor teachers provide additional wisdom and skills to support the successful transition of new teachers into the classroom. Book clubs and committees provide teachers with the opportunity to collaborate and strategize new ideas and techniques for the classroom. The combination of ESU #15 and the new addition of the PTO HELP club provide new opportunities and resources to enrich the teaching experience and show the value of educators. Also, allowing teachers to have an equal say in committees and meetings for school procedures creates a trusting and open environment where everyone feels supported. Regular meetings with administrators provides helpful guidance and feedback to create a positive school-wide culture. The administration demonstrates support to the teachers by providing additional support staff in order to lower the student to adult ratio, which encourages more one-on-one guidance for students. Overwhelming community support is shown for the educators through positive parent teacher conference attendance, involvement through community church and activity groups, and large turnouts for school events.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

The Hitchcock County Elementary uses PBiS assemblies to acknowledge successful achievements of our students. The community is invited to come attend and participate during the assemblies. The community is involved with helping acknowledge the successes of the students. Some examples are: the local family-run, coffee shop donates cookies for the top two AR points for the month in each class, the local convenience store donates personal pizza certificates for the two with the highest AR percentages in each class. In addition, the school has started a PTO group of parents, called the H.E.L.P. group, which has sponsored a game night and movie night, so far.

Every teacher has a newsletter that goes home to inform the parents about upcoming events and going-ons in the classroom. There is also a school-wide newsletter that goes home with PBiS information in it. At recent Parent-Teacher Conference, there was a family survey for parents to fill out to see how they felt about PBiS, how they felt communication was with the teachers, and whether or not they would recommend other families to come to our school based on our behavior program.

The PBiS team has parents involved with the meetings and trainings over the summer. The school also has a student PBiS team that consists of five fifth and sixth graders that were chosen for their exemplary demonstration of the expectations. A majority of the teachers use an app called Bloomz, that allows instant communication like texting between parents and the teachers. Teachers can also post announcements and pictures of what the class is doing or needing on the Bloomz home page, as well. Some of the other teachers use a facebook class page to do their announcements and recognition of rewards. Teachers also post upcoming information and pictures of classroom activities. The PBiS team has started a PBiS facebook page to increase parent awareness and to give immediate recognition to students for their positive choices in the school.

During Read Across America, community members and local church members read to the different classrooms. This is an opportunity for students to become aware of the world around them and become better able to adapt to the changing world. Hitchcock Elementary recognizes that family and community engagement is a vital part of a truly successful school.

3. Professional Development:

At Hitchcock County Elementary, every staff member has a variety of opportunities for professional development. Continuing education is a vital part of our professional development as the district feels this is the best way to stay current of the latest research-based instructional strategies for instruction. Teachers are allowed three professional days to attend workshops, professional organizations and clinics. Most of my staff have a Master's Degree in their area of expertise. Teachers are encouraged to continue their education by moving on the salary schedule and paying for their education with unused sick days. Paraprofessionals are sent to workshops geared for their job description with all expenses paid. Bus drivers, cooks and secretaries attend training to hone their skills. Hitchcock County teachers are active in professional organizations. Teachers are also involved in attending and providing input to the Nebraska Department of Education committees that develop state standards.

This year the focus of our professional development is on Marzano's Foundational Five: rules and procedures, adherence and lack of adherence to the rules, withitness, engagement and relationships. Our building's professional development also includes book clubs, where a teacher can reflect on his/her teaching, improve his/her practice, and become inspired to become an even better educator. Content area meetings and workshops allow an interaction between educators, and this interchange is essential for efficient everyday school operation that advance student accomplishments.

Other opportunities for professional development available at Hitchcock County Elementary include mentoring and workshops for new teachers. The beginning teacher has the support and expertise of an effective teacher to become more confident, developing his/her own teaching strategies and style of teaching. It is hoped that with success, the beginning teacher will love the teaching profession and will continue to have a passion for student achievement. Workshops are provided by the Educational Service

Unit 15 which include Professional Learning Communities, technology opportunities, and classes on topics which relate to the state standards and current topics in education.

The School Improvement Committee helps in building advancement in student achievement. By studying academic data from a variety of sources, we identify the most essential components according to best practices research and well-tested models to improve student success.

Teachers attend state-wide PBiS (Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support) workshops in Lincoln. The team goes to Lincoln for three days twice during the summer for training. Professional Development is also available at the ESU for teaching writing, vocabulary and reading.

4. School Leadership:

The leadership structure at Hitchcock County schools is led by a six member board of education that is elected by the voting patrons of the district. The Superintendent/7-12 Principal and the PK-6 Principal are the administrative portion of the leadership. The board along with the administration work together toward a common goal which ultimately is to provide a quality education and to provide high student achievement.

As the Elementary Principal, it is my responsibility to see that all students in my school have the opportunity to succeed. Everything I do, every dollar I spend, I try to answer the question of how does this affect our children's education. I have been in education for thirty-five years and a principal for ten years. During this time, I have always tried to find things that were research based to improve student achievement and programs that help to supplement that goal.

As the Elementary Principal, I believe in empowering teachers by giving them shared leadership and by guiding them to a shared vision. Leadership is nurtured at all levels. The teachers and I meet regularly to discuss school climate, to look at and study our academic and behavior data, and to look at avenues for professional development. Teachers are selected for staff leadership teams that also meet on a regular basis. By empowering the teachers, they take ownership of the vision and work hard in working towards that vision. Students apply to be part of our Student leader PBiS team and go through an interview process. Once they are selected by our PBiS Leadership team, they meet on a regular basis to provide a voice for the elementary students of our school. The voice of all stakeholders helps to keep everyone on the same path. Classified personnel, parents and community members are on our Early Childhood team, Pyramid model team, and Positive Behavioral Instructional Supports team.

Local community groups meet regularly and support our students and families by providing supports after school. The Rock (Reaching out to Capable Kids) club provides homework support to students who are in need of help after school. The EELS (Extended Enrichment Learning Sessions) club provides enrichment activities in academic areas after school as well. The HELP club is our Parent-Teacher organization that the principal was involved in starting this year to assist teachers and students. Their leadership team meets with me monthly and as a group every Thursday to plan activities to help our teachers and students.

By being a part of the school improvement process, I have the ability to provide input to ensure my school moves in the direction of continuous improvement.

As the Principal of a high poverty district, it is important to be visible to the patrons of the district and to know the backgrounds of the students. Fortunately, we are a small enough district and this is much easier to accomplish. By building relationships with parents and students, it is easier to encourage students to attend school and to give the students the extra help they need to be successful in school.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Prior to being hired as the principal of Hitchcock Elementary School, Lakeside Elementary in Stratton and Culbertson Elementary had been without a principal during the unification years. To save money, the three separate boards of Culbertson, Trenton, and Stratton had made a position of Head Teacher for each site. A Full-time teacher was given a stipend to be in charge of the elementaries which meant they handled any discipline issues. When the Stratton board pulled out of the unification and merged with Dundy County schools, the Trenton and Culbertson boards merged into one district called Hitchcock County schools. I was hired to be the elementary principal.

Without a building leader in the school during the unification, each teacher was basically on his or her own. The first grade teacher had her own series of math and reading curriculums, while the Kindergarten teacher had a different set of curriculums, and so did the second grade and so on. There had been very few teacher meetings and very little professional development. Teachers were on an island in their own world in the classroom.

One of the first things that I instituted as the Principal was to apply for a Positive Behavioral Instructional Supports grant. I selected my team with experienced teachers who were respected by their peers, along with the custodian, secretary, paras, and involved parents. The team went to training for three days twice that summer. The team came back to school and trained the other staff members which implemented phase one during the school year.

The most important thing that made the most difference during this process was that my team and the teaching staff as a whole, met on a regular basis to implement the PBiS program. A common language was established that all teachers used and understood. School-wide expectations were defined from the team with input from all of the stake-holders. During those meetings, the staff would go over the discipline data. Decisions were based on the collected data. As the year went along, more and more buy-in from the teachers became apparent and I could see a culture shift. Teachers were collaborating with each other and sharing ideas and strategies. This routine of getting together and collaborating and making decisions based on the data evolved into the academic area as well.

The next year we moved into phase two which was PBiS implementation in the classroom. Each individual classroom teacher established a system of reinforcement and rewards for positive behavior. Meetings were then added to address academic issues. Teachers met to align their lessons to our essential learnings and vertical and horizontal alignments were reviewed. Instead of punishment, teachers focused on reteaching. From reteaching behaviors to reteaching the standards, high expectations were established and every student and staff member was held accountable.

Our school culture is well-established, now, and I believe our achievement reflects that culture.