

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):
- 4 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 2 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 7 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	32	16	48
1	27	21	48
2	23	34	57
3	22	21	43
4	24	27	51
5	29	26	55
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	157	145	302

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 1 % Asian
 - 1 % Black or African American
 - 12 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 84 % White
 - 2 % Two or more races
 - 100 % Total**

(Only these seven standard categories should be used to report the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.)

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2016 – 2017 school year: 8%

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

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

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	9
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	15
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	24
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2016	304
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.08
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	8

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 3 %
8 Total number ELL

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 37 %
Total number students who qualify: 113

8. Students receiving special education services: 18 %
55 Total number of students served

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional conditions. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <u>5</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>2</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>5</u> Developmentally Delayed | <u>10</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>2</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>26</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>4</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: 3
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.	18
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	9
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	13
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 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%	96%	95%	95%	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. 2004

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

W.E. - Committed to Growing, Together, Every Day!

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

Westside Elementary School is located in beautiful Park County, Wyoming, and nestled in the Big Horn Basin between the Big Horn and Absaroka Mountains. Our town of Powell is a rural community comprised of hard-working families who place great value in the public education system. Powell maintains a family-oriented culture with a plethora of school, community college, recreation, and religion-based activities in any given week that bring our citizens together. Perhaps Tom Brokaw has said it best when visiting Powell in 2017, we are the “picture postcard” and “perfect example of small town America.” Some of our time-honored and joy-filled traditions at Westside that exemplify this best as they unite our families and students are the annual Westside marathon, grandparents day program, kindergarten circus, and 5th grade Yellowstone field trip. In addition, our student council leads our school in a variety of service learning events and fundraisers to help out with local needs, showcase student talent, and challenge us to get creative with various dress-up and spirit days.

In 2004 Westside Elementary was first recognized as a National Blue Ribbon School and much has changed since then with the exception of the unerring focus on the well-being and achievement of our kids and strong family support for student learning. In fact, almost 85 percent of our certified staff, including our principal, were not at Westside in 2004, and we transitioned from a two track to three track system with an added classroom at every grade level. Even though we have experienced this 33 percent increase in student population, significant staffing changes, and an increase of the state academic standards’ proficiency expectations, our staff are committed to Westside and our school has embraced the many changes with a commitment to collaboration and a mindset of growth for every learner. It’s also important to understand that Westside Elementary is not an isolated building of excellence within the school district. Rather, since 2004, two other elementary schools within our school district have also been recognized as National Blue Ribbon Schools which is evidence of our district’s commitment to inter-school collaboration within a district-wide professional learning community (PLC).

Throughout the past three years, we at Westside Elementary have anchored ourselves to our mission of “W.E. – Committed to Growing, Together, Every Day!” and stayed true to our values and commitments for the sake of our kids. Every year we set the tone using a school-wide read-aloud of an anchor text and challenge classes to unite as a community around a theme or project that supports our mission. Some examples have included creating class dream jars of a goal, after listening to excerpts from the “BFG,” and becoming super-heroes with our very own class capes to symbolize our grit and kindness toward others just like our favorite super-hero dog from “Dex: The Heart of a Hero.” We teach our students about grit, the power of yet, and how to develop a growth mindset so they gain the confidence and show perseverance in achievement of their goals. Then students and staff celebrate choosing kindness and working hard to grow smarter (just like Dex) through monthly assemblies. Student pictures posing as super-heroes of grit and kindness decorate our hallways and honor these core principles of our school culture that we have created. Even our principal encourages a growth mindset by allowing students to vote on something new she must learn, struggle with, and practice, i.e. learning to ride a dirt bike. In this way students and staff live our mission of growth in a positive and fun environment.

In our PLC we have made it a part of our culture to follow the wisdom of the late Richard DuFour in that “we work and learn together.” The W.E. in our mission may be the abbreviation for our school but it symbolizes the collaborative culture we have created in order to do our very best for students. Everything we do and achieve is a team effort. As educators we collaboratively dig deep into student outcomes and data, reflect on outcomes relative to our practices, grapple with new methods and research, and share with one another our successes and our failures. If one listens into a staff meeting it is clear that everyone’s input is valued and it is safe to admit that as individuals we may not have all the answers. Regie Routman’s words of wisdom hold true at Westside in that we achieve our goals given “an upbeat, positive, trusting culture, where we feel safe, valued, and encouraged to raise questions, voice our opinions, and set our own worthy goals.” Our building and team goals guide our professional learning and growth each year. Therefore, it is relevant learning that we immediately apply within classrooms. We value our time together and make certain it is spent doing the right work, and not busy work. All of this, combined with some light

hearted fun, allows our school to be a place where every child is welcomed, cared for, valued, and given the hope and confidence to grow as a learner.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

As a PLC, Westside Elementary School provides an engaging, guaranteed and viable academic curriculum. Our students learn and grow because teams of teachers continually collaborate about the curriculum, the delivery of it, and our students' outcomes. We believe that such a curriculum extends far beyond the content and requires us to constantly reflect and respond to our learners.

Based upon the PLC framework our teams engage in processes to identify essential standards and to develop common assessments. Our work does not end there because then we collaborate to respond and re-engage students who do not master essentials and/or meet benchmarks, and we collaborate to enrich the content for those who achieve mastery. Essentials are identified by determining which of the Wyoming state standards in each content area have endurance, leverage, and are pre-requisites to the next level. They are the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that we promise all students will meet. We work as grade level and district teams to map the essentials and vertically align them across the grades. The essentials are deconstructed into targets to guide our development of common assessments. While this process represents the foundation of our guaranteed and viable core curriculum, we recognize that student mastery is contingent upon our instructional practices. It is a continuous, responsive cycle that flows through targets, instruction, assessment, and either re-engagement until mastery or enrichment.

In reading and writing, Westside Elementary literacy instruction utilizes a balanced literacy approach. Resources and practices from various sources are employed, as well as digital programming. More specifically, balanced literacy allows us to teach reading and writing essentials and corresponding strategies in whole group, small groups, and through individual feedback. The gradual release of skills and strategies flows through interactive read-alouds, shared reading, small groups, to eventual independent practice and application of the essentials. Teachers across our school maximize every instructional minute through ongoing feedback as students productively struggle through text and engage in writing to accomplish their personal goals and their professional goals (the targets).

In math, Westside Elementary teachers have carefully written curriculum and gathered various resources to support student mastery in the essential standards identified within our school district. Across classrooms students are engaged in frequent spiral reviews, utilization of math practices, math games, math writing, and a carefully scaffolded gradual release of knowledge, skills, and strategies. Through collaborative analysis of outcomes teacher teams determine when students have acquired mastery and when re-engagement efforts are required.

Science and social studies curriculum are based on current Wyoming standards and our grade level teams collaborate to integrate many of these essential concepts and processes into literacy and math. Students build background knowledge, make connections, and synthesize their new learning through real world and hands-on experiences, such as field trips and projects. For example, kindergarten students use two dimensional shapes they study in math to construct their home and then add it to a social studies community map which represents each students' home relative to our school and other major places in Powell, Wyoming. A first grade unit on the life cycle integrates literacy and science as students read non-fiction books, produce expository writing, and engage scientific processes and thinking as they observe eggs hatch into baby chicks and engineer containers to protect eggs in an annual egg drop. Second grade students read, write, and create projects around social studies and science concepts, i.e. clay landform representations and Wild West PowerPoint presentations, through units of study. Third graders develop their reading, writing, and speaking skills while studying historical persons and bring them to life in a wax museum. In the fourth grade, students develop their expository and opinion writing skills as they research and learn about Wyoming history and various earth and physical science concepts. They present a final product/project in a learning fair. Fifth grade students conduct research, create printed and webpage publications, and create museum displays for their Yellowstone unit which integrates reading, writing, earth science, and geography concepts.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Westside Elementary School believes that other curricular areas, outside of the core, are important for educating the whole child. These curricular areas often provide the ‘why’ for students and are experiences that students can apply to their daily lives. Physical education, health, music, information literacy, foreign language, and technology not only enrich learning at Westside but they also provide a unique set of skills/knowledge that students will be able to use for a lifetime.

Physical education instruction is provided to students’ kindergarten through 5th grade, twice a week, for 30 minutes. Students participate in a wide range of developmentally appropriate activities for developing movement skills, gaining an understanding of fitness concepts, and learning to interact positively in a social setting. Additionally, physical education partners with other teachers and aims to support other academic areas such as reading and writing through the use of technology. An example is a joint elementary librarian/physical education partnership where 5th grade students engage in research of a sports topic and then create a web page and also present their sports topic to their peers.

Health education instruction is provided to student’s kindergarten through 5th grade at a dedicated time by a health education professional, in addition to bi-weekly physical education classes. Health instruction incorporates the Wyoming State standards for health, science and language arts. The health lessons focus on physical, mental and social/emotional wellness using visual aids and hands-on activities.

Music education is valued at Westside Elementary. Kindergarten through 5th grade students attend two 30-minute sessions of music class each week. Students experience singing, moving to music, playing instruments, music theory, music history, and performance for the community. The music curriculum aligns with the state of Wyoming music standards. Within the music classes, we support language arts and math concepts whenever possible. Fifth grade students enjoy a unit where they learn to play guitar. They are also able to participate in an after-school choir called "Powell Kids Chorus" which performs around the community. Westside students participate in an annual "Fine Arts Extravaganza Student Show" where K-12 music groups perform for an evening of entertainment and K-12 artwork is displayed for the community's enjoyment.

Information Literacy is addressed through weekly lessons in the library. Our kindergarten through 2nd grade students enjoy lessons exposing them to various genres of literature and basic library organization skills. When students are in grades 3rd through 5th, their lessons are taught by a certified school librarian and focus on more in-depth research and information skills with units that explore digital literacy and citizenship, safe and effective searching, reading websites, evaluating sources, using databases, note taking, and use of inquiry processes. Our information skills classes focus on inquiry, inclusion, collaboration, curation, exploration and engagement as we teach our students to think, create, share and grow in accordance to the national standards.

Art education and character education are integrated into our core curriculum instruction across all grades. To this end, teachers encourage students to explore a variety of mediums in hands-on projects that support core curriculum concepts. Art activities are also a time when our students collaborate across levels in “bucket-pal” projects where they also practice peer mentoring and kindness to one another. In addition, character education occurs through bullying prevention and friendship skills classes provided collaboratively by classroom teachers and support services.

Westside Elementary offers foreign language instruction to students in kindergarten through second grades in compliance with state regulations but more importantly because of the positive impact foreign language instruction has on development and learning. A variety of digital lessons and community resources assist in our delivery of this instruction.

At Westside we are striving to have our students be 21st century ready. We focus on preparing them with the foundational technology skills such as word processing, presentation skills, and keyboarding. Students are also engaged with curriculum that teaches and offers coding practice. This occurs during the school day in the lab, during the annual hour of code, and through our after school robotics club. In robotics club, our

fourth and fifth grade students use Ev3 Mindstorm robots to collaborate, fail, and persevere in responding to challenges. Through these other curricular areas students gain valuable life skills that help them develop their interests and support the development of all other academic areas.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

It is Westside Elementary's vision to deliver high quality, research-based instruction that is tailored to students' needs. By providing authentic opportunities to demonstrate knowledge, students are empowered to take control of their own learning. We encourage active family involvement in the learning process. Through setting goals and frequent feedback, students develop a growth mindset that requires stamina and grit.

The core instructional program and methods are continually reviewed, modified, and enhanced through the PLC process and common collaboration and planning time. While teachers have identified priority standards and developed common assessments based on Wyoming State Standards, the assessments and instructional methods change as teams use valuable data to focus instruction that is differentiated and guides all students to mastery. Our ELA blocks are focused on the balanced literacy approach to reading. Through interactive read alouds, shared reading, guided reading, strategy conferencing, strategy grouping, and goal setting in reading, we are gradually releasing responsibility with the ultimate goal of independence. As a staff, our book study of "Who's Doing the Work" by Burkins and Yaris, grounded our beliefs that the students can take more of an active role in their learning. Math blocks consist of a hands-on approach that starts with concrete representation, moves to pictorial representations and finally abstract thinking and algorithms. There is an emphasis on math practices, math talk, partner practice and finally independent practice. Students are given experiences that involve setting goals and learning from mistakes. Through vertical alignment, PLC teams ensure consistency across grade levels using common vocabulary, multiple strategy instruction and continuous spiral review.

We have a building intervention/enrichment schedule that allocates resources throughout the building during designated times to specific grade levels. During these intervention blocks, certified tutors and teachers push-in to grade level classrooms to remediate/enrich the core instructional program. This allows for small instructional groups (strategy-based or guided skills) based on formative assessments as well as student conferencing around individualized goals. In addition to these supports, pull-out evidence-based intervention programs to remediate more significant academic delays at Tier II/III level are provided through Title I and Special Education during these designated intervention blocks.

Through the integration of technology, students practice fluency and application of academic skills through computer-based programs on a daily basis during computer lab and within the classroom. Beyond the school day, tutoring and further intervention is also offered to students in need of more support through the Bridges after school program. Therefore, students have opportunities to learn essential targets in the core instructional program through differentiated instructional strategies and high quality intervention programs. These efforts are aimed at closing achievement gaps.

Westside Elementary measures student attainment of Wyoming content and performance standards through a balanced assessment system. Student proficiency in reading and math in grades 3-5 has been assessed on the large-scale Wyoming PAWS. Benchmark assessments of reading and math are also given two to three times a year measuring progress within a given year and have included a variety of reading comprehension, accuracy and fluency, and math application measures. Instructional staff also assesses student mastery of essential content and performance standards through end-of-unit summative assessments in core curriculum. These, along with formative assessments throughout a given unit, provide valuable information that PLC teams use to respond to students' learning needs.

The building leadership team, which is comprised of professional and support staff, analyzes data from multiple sources to inform school improvements. Achievement and growth data are carefully analyzed to identify patterns, trends amongst grade levels, demographic groups, academic skill domains, and programs. Through collaborative data analysis and reflection, the leadership team develops school improvement goals that address teaching/learning across all programs, leadership, and resource allocation. Given building focus

areas and benchmark data, grade level teams develop SMART goals to direct their collective inquiry, action research, and professional development which is aimed at improving student achievement. Teams reflect on the four PLC questions as stated by DuFour and Eaker in “Learning By Doing” to determine “What do our students need from us?” These building and grade-level goals direct professional development and study which in turn drives improvements to the core instructional program, Tier II/III program services, culture, family engagement efforts, and operating procedures. Finally, as we further our work with collaborative common assessments this data is used beyond grade level teams at the building level to vertically align improvement efforts.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

At Westside Elementary, we strive to provide a safe, nurturing, and supportive learning environment. We know that when students feel safe, they are more likely to learn and take risks. Expectations are established in each classroom that create a community of learners, where being brave in your thinking is the norm. Westside staff cares for, and encourages the growth of our students. They are given multiple authentic opportunities to succeed and are encouraged to have a growth mindset that enables them to excel. Classroom instruction offers learning targets that are designed to guide lessons and offer positive instructional feedback. We encourage emotional growth for our students, in and out of the classroom with the help of our school counselor who provides units on social skills units that foster healthy relationships among peers. Another school wide practice is one that encourages and celebrates students who are Bucket Fillers, or someone who lifts up another student or staff member, and each intermediate student is paired with a primary level Bucket Pal. This allows a community of role models whom have numerous opportunities to mentor younger students and create a caring environment throughout the school. This culture allows us to more deeply support students' needs as a building, rather than individually.

Not only do we believe in growing our students, but as a staff and community as well. We are committed to positive, honest, and respectful communication that leads to creative decision-making. Along with multiple professional development opportunities, we also have a strong leadership team that represents the school as a whole. As a school wide team, we have thoughtfully created our Collective Vision as well as our Values and Commitments Statement, which are posted as reminders at every meeting. Through collaboration and shared responsibility, we are able to support each other's goals and values. Our Professional Learning Community, PLC, framework gives us the opportunity to collaborate as a team in order to respond to each individual student's needs, and we have a shared responsibility in ensuring the growth of each and every student. Yearly, each grade level team creates a creative, reflective, and interactive SMART Goal share-out, where we come together to celebrate each other's successes during the year.

Westside Elementary creates a positive environment where students can find the joy in learning and appreciate their hard work. We take pride in and celebrate our hard-working students, our focused teams and our well maintained facility. Our monthly awards ceremonies celebrate the success of our students. Grit, Academic Achievers, Bucket Fillers and Citizenship awards challenge students to be persistent in their learning, and know that working harder makes you grow smarter! Our hallways are filled with bulletin board shout-outs that recognize students for their random acts of kindness and integrity. Westside Elementary is committed to growing together every day. As a result, our students have grit!

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Westside Elementary strives to include all stakeholders in the educational process. We achieve this goal through many avenues.

Our parent teacher council is heavily involved with our school. They hold monthly meetings inviting all parents throughout our school to be members. At these meetings, they discuss funding for academic purposes as well as funding for reward goals. The parent teacher council paid for grades 2-5 to attend the movie "Wonder" as a community building event. This event supported our local movie theater as well as encouraged all students to choose to be kind. They also purchase new books for each classroom after the fall book fair to allow for more choice for students' growing interests in reading. Our yearly harvest festival is a huge hit with our families. We have a hay ride, various games, a bake sale, face painting, and balloon animals! Each fall we welcome dads into our building and celebrate them with our donuts with dads morning. In the spring we welcome moms into the building for muffins with moms. We also have a yearly dinner and dessert auction that is enjoyed by all that helps to raise money for our parent teacher council.

Westside Elementary works with the local "Foster Grandparent Program." In this program, we welcome 2-

3 members of the retirement center to become “Foster Grandparents” within our school. This program allows for the grandparents to mentor some students, work with small reading groups, work on math concepts that students have not yet mastered, and most importantly, allow for meaningful relationships with both students and staff. These “Foster Grandparents” are hired through Westside and paid through a grant which allows the grandparent to supplement their income.

Parent volunteers within our classrooms are instrumental in reaching the academic growth that we have been achieving for quite some time now. All grade levels have parents reach out at the beginning of the year to volunteer in their child’s classrooms. Typically, you can find at least 5 parent volunteers within our school at any given time. Parent volunteers are used within our school for a variety of purposes. Some work with small groups of students to reinforce skills, a few work on prepping materials for teachers when needed, many simply listen to students read and provide caring feedback about the student’s growing reading skills.

Westside also focuses on family involvement which encourages parents and guardians to become active participants in their child’s school. We host math nights where each grade level demonstrates a different math themed game. We host a yearly spooktacular that allows families to decorate pumpkins to look like book characters, participate in a reader’s theater, decorate cookies, and enjoy read alouds.

Much of the growth and achievement that Westside Elementary has seen can be attributed to the above mentioned supports from our parents and community members.

3. Professional Development:

Teachers, here at Westside, have the greatest impact on student learning. All staff take this very seriously because our ultimate goal is student growth and achievement. Our staff works with dedication toward two main objectives that drive our professional development: staying current in our own learning of best practices and continual reflection. The foundation of Westside Elementary is our belief and passion for PLC’s. As a staff, we meet weekly to discuss research-based professional texts to help us stay abreast of current, best practices. Many practices from the professional texts are implemented almost immediately to positively impact student learning. The improvement of our teaching is grounded in research and effective practices.

Each week in our grade level professional learning teams, we have the opportunity to continually reflect. Through this reflection, we create a SMART goal as a team and study a professional text that aligns with our goal and drives our improvement. Data analysis is a core foundation during our team time. We use our data to reflect and learn from each other. Trust and open communication among team members create a culture of universal learning. If a team member has been successful teaching an outcome, the willingness to share methods and tools to grow students, is essential. The same openness occurs when the opposite happens. If a team member is struggling to teach an outcome or has had poor results, they ask for help from other team members. Teachers are also very willing to share students in order for each student to grow academically and to ensure that every student is working hard and growing smarter. Collaborative team meetings are a great place to discuss and ensure that our high expectations are being achieved.

The leadership team meets weekly and is a group of teachers that consists of one teacher from each grade level, a Title I teacher, a para educator, a “specials” teacher, an instructional facilitator and principal. This group does a weekly research based book study and collaboration. Ideas, thoughts, and reflections are a huge part of this learning community. Important information is also discussed and taken back to grade level teams. Directives and weekly updates are communicated through the “Westside Weekly Bulletin” from our principal. Her own reflections and thoughts specific to professional reading, our mission, and commitments are also communicated to the entire staff through this bulletin and set the tone for our professional growth.

We also jump at every chance we can to learn from experts in the education field first hand by attending conferences and learning from speakers during in-service days. All of these instrumental experiences help to keep us current and knowledgeable in our profession.

4. School Leadership:

At Westside Elementary School, collaborative leadership is the means by which we operate and continue to grow as a learning community for kids and with kids. It is how our vision, mission, commitments, and goals are developed and systematically accomplished. Our leader and the leadership team keep us focused on the purpose of our important work evident in our mission, Westside Elementary (W.E.) – Committed to Growing, Together, Every Day! With this in mind, the leadership team, comprised of representatives from each grade and department, serves as a guiding coalition for executing our commitments that support our mission. We have identified those commitments to include collaboration, honest and positive communication, a caring climate, shared responsibility, professionalism, and pride in our school. We have defined these beliefs and we live these in our relationships with one another every day and in our execution of policies and procedures, so that all continue to show growth in the journey of learning.

As a PLC, annually our leadership team, as well as teams throughout our school, engage in reflection around the questions of “Where are we at as a PLC, What do our students need from us?, and Where do we want to be?” Collectively we examine our culture, our outcome data, our instructional practices, and our resources relative to our vision and derive SMART goals. Alignment is apparent as everything we do, and set forth to do, supports our vision and mission. Recent examples include a focus on balanced literacy practices, feedback, collaborative common assessments, and growth mindset. We recognize that all change begins with collaborative adult learning. Our leader reminds us that adult learning precedes student learning, and often this requires us to take risks, productively struggle, and together reflect upon what has worked. Also through her advocacy of our priorities, our teams have the resources, including time and professional learning, to remain focused on the important work of their SMART goal in the context of essentials, collaborative common assessments, and instructional responsiveness or practices to meet all learners’ needs. This is complex work and as a team we are all committed to it, as well as taking care of and respecting all within our learning community. Simply put, ongoing improvement and ensuring the academic growth of every child is a team effort. After all, our mission is W.E. – Committed to Growing, Together, Every Day!

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

At Westside Elementary there is not one strategy that has singularly resulted in our success. There are several strategies and there will be several more as we continue to collaboratively learn and grow within our PLC. We understand that society is constantly changing and consequently as an education system so must we adapt to these demands and prepare our students to meet those demands. Therefore, change is a reality and the only way to thrive is to use the guiding principles and practices of the PLC framework and stay focused on the right work – our kids.

Our vision, mission and collective commitments guide the sights and sounds one can observe on any given day traveling throughout our school. Formal and informal collaboration occurs before school, during common planning/learning blocks, on early release days, and after school. It is just something that is woven into the fiber of our daily work. Together we develop and align our goals so as to remain focused on school improvement. This has resulted in classrooms filled with high leverage practices and responsive teaching including the use of learning targets, the gradual release of content/skills, small group guided instruction, individual conferencing, differentiation and student choice, technology integration, and meta-cognitive strategy instruction.

We also continually collaborate as educators and with parents to intervene and respond to learners' needs. Shared responsibility for our students' growth is one of our commitments. Together we analyze student performance data and maximize our resources to intervene with the most effective people and programs within our walls and within the community. It's not uncommon for our work to extend far beyond academics into helping our students by helping families in difficult circumstances, or securing community volunteers to help us offer enrichment and fun activities, such as our Arts, Robotics, Kids Chorus, and Harry Potter Clubs. Essentially, we are confident that together we have incredible resources and the capacity to help every child that walks through our doors.

Finally, our PLC culture celebrates each dynamic school year and all those who make it possible, but particularly our kids. Together we work hard for kids, and we have fun together. Classmates work collaboratively on engaging projects.

Older students and younger students pair up as bucket pals to spend quality time playing, teaching one another and creating together. Finally, our entire school laughs and screams together in joy as we slide down our home-made water slide at the end of every year. It's wacky fun but it's our way to celebrate our school and our kids.