

**U.S. Department of Education**  
**2019 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program**

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

For Public Schools only: (Check all that apply) [ ] Title I [ ] Charter [ ] Magnet [X] Choice

Name of Principal Mrs. Lisa Connor

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name Kyrene de la Sierra Elementary School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 1122 East Liberty Lane

(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

Phoenix AZ 85048-8426  
City State Zip Code+4 (9 digits total)

County Maricopa County

Telephone (480) 541-5200

Fax (480) 541-5210

Web site/URL https://www.kyrene.org/sie

E-mail lconno@kyrene.org

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent\*Dr. Jan Vesely

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other) E-mail JVesely@kyrene.org

District Name Kyrene Elementary School District Tel. (480) 541-1000

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board

President/Chairperson Mr. Michael Myrick

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

The original signed cover sheet only should be converted to a PDF file and uploaded via the online portal.

*\*Non-public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, write N/A in the space.*

## Part I – Eligibility Certification

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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. 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, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
2. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2019 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.
3. 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.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2013 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, or 2018.
6. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. If irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state, the U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school’s application and/or rescind a school’s award.
7. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as “persistently dangerous” within the last two years.
8. 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.
9. 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.
10. 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.
11. 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

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Data should be provided for the most recent school year (2018-2019) unless otherwise stated.

### DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 19 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 6 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 0 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 25 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, 2018 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	13	9	22
K	31	30	61
1	41	37	78
2	40	60	100
3	39	43	82
4	56	50	106
5	65	42	107
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
<b>Total Students</b>	285	271	556

\*Schools that house PreK programs should count preschool students **only** if the school administration is responsible for the program.

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 1 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 6 % Asian
  - 3 % Black or African American
  - 20 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 62 % White
  - 8 % 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 2017 – 2018 school year: 10%

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.

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2017 until the end of the 2017-2018 school year	22
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2017 until the end of the 2017-2018 school year	35
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	57
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2017	553
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.10
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	10

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

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):  
Arabic, Cantonese, Czechoslovakian, Filipino, French, Hebrew, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Other Non-Indian, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Spanish

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 13%  
Total number students who qualify: 70

8. Students receiving special education services: 10 %  
53 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>4</u> Other Health Impaired                 |
| <u>8</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>11</u> Specific Learning Disability         |
| <u>1</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>32</u> Speech or Language Impairment        |
| <u>2</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: 6
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	22
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	9
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	12
Student support personnel e.g., school 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 25:1

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

<b>Required Information</b>	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014
Daily student attendance	96%	96%	96%	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 2018.

<b>Post-Secondary Status</b>	
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.

As Sierra Suns we inspire confidence, empower each other, respect diversity, reach for knowledge, and achieve academic excellence!

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**

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Kyrene de la Sierra Elementary School is nestled along the foothills of Ahwatukee, a suburb of the Phoenix, Arizona metropolitan area. Sierra's community consists of parents who are highly educated professionals with strong beliefs in a quality education. Our families are actively involved in our school community by being members of the Parent Teacher Organization, volunteers in the classroom, and participants in extracurricular school events and programs.

The total population of Sierra is 558 students with 41 gifted students, 53 special educational students, and 15 English Language Learner students. Many of these students are highly driven, motivated learners who excel in the classroom and on state standardized tests. Sierra uses a Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) discipline model that emphasizes the use of positive character traits in all areas of the school. This program promotes a safe place for student learning and thus reduces the number of discipline problems referred to the office. The framework teaches students to conduct themselves in an appropriate manner while also encouraging positivity among their peers. This creates a warm and welcoming atmosphere at Sierra.

A number of milestones place Sierra as the top-ranked public elementary school in the state of Arizona. We rank number one in our school district of 25 schools, and an overall ranking of seventh in the state that includes public, charter, and private schools. Our most recent accomplishment includes a statewide award that recognizes Sierra as an A+ School of Excellence™.

Sierra takes great pride in its mission and vision as a foundation of learning. Our mission statement reads: As Sierra Suns, We Inspire Confidence, Empower Each Other, Respect Diversity, Reach for Knowledge, and Achieve Academic Excellence. Each section of our mission statement exemplifies the attitudes staff and students value as members of our learning community. We believe that our school's mission statement guides us as a learning community and reflects our drive to pursue quality education. We pride ourselves in tradition because we feel that the emphasis placed on education results in a student and staff population that is dedicated to increase rigor and student learning. This translates to high performance on the state's AzMERIT standardized test. This tradition of academic excellence has been a priority since the opening of the school in 1992.

Sierra teachers, staff, and administration create a positive environment for all who enter our building. The connection between the entire staff resembles that of a family. We encourage and challenge one another to strive for excellence. This atmosphere not only permeates classrooms, but also reflects our community. Administration leads by example to promote the positive climate through recognition. This flows from administration to the youngest students at Sierra. We expect academic excellence and continually strive to improve the art of teaching and the learning experiences of our students. We do this by providing real-life examples and experiences during their learning. Our philosophy is that we are lifelong learners and strive for continual growth.

Sierra staff work closely with each student to nurture his/her academic, physical, social-emotional, and cultural needs to develop their full potential. We use a variety of curricular materials that meet the academic needs of our student population. Our primary resource of English Language Arts is Amplify Core Knowledge. This program specializes in foundational background knowledge with high interest level material to engage students in reading skills and strategies to increase reading comprehension. Not only are students encouraged to tap their prior knowledge, but also they have opportunities to read and analyze complex text to shape their understanding across all reading genres. Our district math program integrates a number of high quality curricular materials to address the specific cognitive skill levels required of students in grades pre K to fifth grade. Our school emphasizes a strong foundational understanding in mathematical concepts. This includes logical and critical thinking skills that allows students to solve real-life problems. Students use manipulatives, computer applications, visual representations, and standard algorithms to find solutions to mathematical problems. We teach our students to rely on the method of inquiry-based learning in science. This inquiry approach requires students to think like scientists using the scientific method to hypothesize outcomes, collect and interpret data, and infer and draw their own conclusions. In social studies, we want students to be aware of themselves, their peers, the community, and the world around them with

respect to cultural diversity. It is important for our students to know how to be good stewards and productive members of a global society.

Sierra has a long-standing tradition of providing a quality education for all students. Instructional decision-making is at the core of our effectiveness. These progressive decisions keep us in step with the most current and innovative educational trends while responding to student needs. Sierra administrators, teachers, parents, and community partners work collaboratively to positively impact each student's educational experience.

## **PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

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### **1. Core Curriculum:**

#### **1a. Reading/English language arts:**

English Language Arts instruction is rooted in foundational skills in the areas of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Teachers use a phonics-based instructional approach for students to develop phonemic awareness, apply phonics, and recognize words to read with fluency. Students read complex and rigorous texts to enhance skills and expand knowledge in different reading genres, increasing reading comprehension. Teachers use whole class, small group, and individual instruction to meet reading standards. Teachers create flexible groups based on students' reading abilities to maximize academic growth. Teachers analyze and interpret data from DIBELS testing, district-wide English Language Arts formative assessments, teacher-made tests, and supplemental reading curricular materials to accurately place students in the proper reading group. Teachers meet as a team to analyze formative assessments using rubrics and data spreadsheets to diagnose skills that need reinforcement. This makes grouping by reading ability fluid and dynamic to address and differentiate skills according to each student's needs. As students matriculate from each grade, they develop strong reading skills to increase reading comprehension. Teachers plan vertically to ensure students acquire standards-based skills and strategies in our reading and writing program. A strong reading background incorporates a variety of texts to collect evidence to compose expository, narrative, and opinion essays. Strong reading skills transfer directly to applications in writing. Students in primary grades incorporate phonics rules, sentence structure, and word usage to write meaningful sentences to construct paragraphs. As students reach intermediate grades, they have the ability to acquire rich text to construct ideas for their writing. Students become better consumers of information as they effectively communicate their ideas, beliefs, or arguments for each genre of writing. Teachers believe students can empower themselves by connecting reading and writing. Therefore, lessons are integrated to enrich students' creative license in these closely related subject areas.

#### **1b. Mathematics:**

Sierra teachers focus their mathematics instruction using the Arizona Mathematics Standards. Teachers utilize district-created pacing guides as an outline for their instruction to create a roadmap for yearly planning. By planning vertically with other teams, teachers cover standards to the depth and breadth needed for each grade's skills and content. Teachers create units based on specific needs in their classrooms and supplement or intervene as needed. Teachers place great emphasis on conceptual math by using concrete, pictorial, and abstract learning opportunities to deepen understanding with number sense and mathematical fluency. Using this method of instruction reaches all levels of understanding and learning styles, while also building understanding of how each representation is linked to the larger learning goal/targets. Many teachers are also trained in Cognitively Guided Instruction to create problem-solving opportunities that involve various problem types, while differentiating the level of difficulty. Students examine each other's solutions to encourage mathematical discourse which promotes understanding other mathematical approaches. During math intervention time, teachers create mini lessons based on observation, unit assessment, district interim assessment, and state assessment. Students in intervention groups experience a variety of instructional supports, including small groups and computer-based intervention. Teachers collect data to make fluid groups based on current instructional needs.

Sierra implements a two-tiered math model that includes a "compacted math" and grade level track at both the fourth and fifth grade levels. The Compacted Math model engages and challenges high ability math students to allow them to move through the math curriculum at an accelerated rate in order to achieve one grade level above their current grade. The regular track math students continue to build a strong foundation in mathematics with more individualized time with the general education teacher. Our data shows that students reach their highest potential in math when they are homogeneously grouped.

#### **1c. Science:**

Science concepts taught at Sierra are progressive throughout each grade level and are categorized in the areas of living/nonliving organisms, force & motion, planetary systems, weather & climate, and magnetism & electricity. Each one of these science strands increases with rigor throughout the grades. Students acquire strong conceptual understanding in these areas through hands-on activities complemented using science materials that reinforce the investigative process. We teach lessons using direct instruction to safely model the scientific method while conducting experiments. Our goal for science is for students to formulate questions and to collect data to find accurate solutions. The demonstrations conducted in class allow students to proceed through the inquiry process by working in small groups to replicate the scientific techniques taught during whole group instruction. Students use a variety of recording sheets to document their findings to analyze the data and draw reasonable conclusions. These opportunities to interact with their peers promotes critical and logical thinking skills. Students in the intermediate grades rotate to a class taught by a teacher who specializes in one of the scientific areas for that grade level. There is a two-fold benefit to using a rotational system; teachers mentor and work with all students at the grade level, and each teacher becomes an expert in their area of science. All grade levels provide opportunities for students to share their scientific skills by participating in a project based assignment that allows students to exhibit their learning. Some of these projects include conducting science fair experiments, caring for and observing animal behaviors, creating insect and solar system models, and observing and monitoring the plant cycle. Each of these hands-on, project-based learning opportunities provides a detailed rubric that is student-friendly so students and teachers can assess how well our students grasp and master scientific standards.

#### **1d. Social studies/history/civic learning and engagement**

Sierra teaches students to analyze historical events in order to understand diverse cultures and the effects on modern society since our world is rapidly changing. We accomplish this by focusing on citizenship, community & global awareness, geography & map skills, and Arizona/United States History. At the primary levels, we instruct students how to be active members in their classroom, school, and neighborhood communities. By being aware of their environmental surroundings, students learn the appropriate skills to conduct themselves as model citizens such as helping others, understanding the democratic process, using proper etiquette in social settings, and respecting the environment. Students take these civic concepts to heart by actively involving themselves and the school community in charitable efforts. Sierra Student Council leads school-wide initiatives, which includes collecting clothing, food, personal hygiene products, and volunteer time to various community organizations. All students learn how to be an involved citizen, even at a young age, which instills a sense of pride knowing that they have voice and can make a difference in other people's lives. By committing time to help those who are less fortunate, students are applying real-life skills that tie directly to the social studies standards. Not only are students learning academic skills in social studies, but they are also learning how civic duty addresses problems and improves their community and society as a whole. In order to assess how well students meet social studies standards, teachers provide direct instruction, small group, and individual research projects. Whole class discussions on different social issues encourage students to be active participants and good citizens of their classroom community. In order to make positive and effective change, we model and invite students to reflect about the past, present, and the future possibilities so they can positively contribute to their neighborhood, city, state, nation, and world.

#### **1e. For secondary schools:**

#### **1f. For schools that offer preschool for three- and four-year old students:**

The Kyrene Integrated Preschool is a program where children with differing abilities play and learn together cooperatively. This model is designed to educate eight children with Individualized Education Programs and eight typically developing children in the same classroom.

The Kyrene Integrated Preschool program uses the Scholastic Big Day for Pre-K curriculum to incorporate child-centered, developmentally appropriate concepts that align to the Arizona Early Learning Standards.

The Kyrene School District's model for integrated preschool has been in place for 30 years as the district  
NBRS 2019

firmly believes that high quality early childhood services is strongly linked to both academic and life skills success.

## **2. Other Curriculum Areas:**

Students in kindergarten through fifth grade participate in general music, visual art class, physical education, and library. Each class meets once a week for forty-five minutes. Across the curriculum, students are able to integrate skills and concepts from these special area classrooms to their general education classroom, and ultimately to broader aspects of their lives. A highly trained and certified teacher follows Arizona Standards specific to the subject area, building on prior skills and knowledge as students advance through the special area curriculum.

Art instruction excites and engrosses students' creative outlets in various art forms, while also providing connections to classroom curriculum. This provides students with opportunities to develop individual expression while learning about artistic elements. Lessons incorporate fine motor skills, organization, and spatial awareness as well as color, shading, and artistic composition. Families eagerly await our annual Gallery Night, which celebrates and exhibits students' artwork. Older students are given leadership opportunities by applying to be docents that educate the Sierra community on that evening about various artists and the techniques learned by our students. The walls of our building are decorated with all the different expressions of art from students over the school year.

General music is a positive, active, and exciting class where all students receive a balanced, sequential and comprehensive education using The Orff process. Over the years, students become fluent in music first by hearing and performing music, then reading and composing their own piece of work. Students learn and utilize consistent musical vocabulary and develop understanding of playing instruments that include the wooden xylophone and metal glockenspiel. They learn to describe and evaluate various kinds of music. Our fifth grade students showcase their learning for our families and community as a culminating celebration of their musical talents. Our students have opportunities to join our after school choir, Sierra Singers, and/or the mallet ensemble, Sierra Strikers, where they apply the skills they have learned during their time in music. These groups have the opportunity to perform at school-wide and local events.

Physical education and health provides students the chance to acquire skills important to make healthy decision about an active lifestyle. Lessons promote positive decision-making, building of skills, and healthy choices. Students participate through movement, team activities and cooperation. We are fortunate to offer several after school enrichment classes that support physical activity like running club, tennis, golf, gymnastics, and dance.

During library time, students engage in interactive lessons that share historical, geographical, or informative perspectives through many kinds of literary genres. Fiction and nonfiction trade books are shared, discussed, and the content is integrated into meaningful lessons that help support the classroom teacher's instruction. Time is also dedicated to research based projects and appropriate ways to safely and effectively use the internet.

In addition, we have a technology rich environment that includes classroom tools and computer labs. Students have access to SMART Boards, document cameras, projectors, laptops, desktops, and various software. This allows classroom teachers to facilitate learning in different ways. Students have the ability to work together via Google Drive as well as their own folders to store individual work on our district's network. Teams of teachers build lessons and units across curricular areas. One example from the upper grades involved students in creating a new animal and constructing its habitat. Students had to apply how an animal's adaptations help it survive in its habitat. They utilized additional research from online sources to create visual presentations using technology.

## **3. Special Populations:**

Sierra takes pride in our high quality teaching staff who intentionally plan for our diverse student needs, including demographic subgroups. A multi-disciplinary team of educators and administrators work

cooperatively to advance and challenge students performing below or above expectations. All students are placed into tiered Intervention Focus Groups (IFG) to receive specialized instruction for 30 minutes each in math and reading, four days a week. This time is designed to supplement core instruction.

English Language Learners are a small part of our population (3%). Our teachers respond based on the needs of students. Teachers create Individual Language Learner Plans (ILLP) for each student based on the AZELLA profile. A variety of supports are given by the classroom teacher to facilitate their acquisition of English.

A dedicated team of master teachers and interventionists monitor progress and make changes to student interventions as needed. If a student continues to struggle, the collective efforts of our Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) team convenes to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions to close the achievement gap. Students who score in the at-risk level on DIBELS, phonics screeners, common formative assessments (Interim tests) and/or AzMERIT, are identified for additional pull-out services.

Our resource teachers regularly progress monitor each student's IEP goals. This timely data is used to monitor and adjust instruction. Additionally, these students are progress monitored three times a year using DIBELS to measure on grade level performance. Each student has specific accommodations to address their needs in the classroom and on standardized assessments. Some students require extended time with an instructional assistant. During small group instruction, we utilize different strategies to respond to specific student needs.

Classroom teachers analyze every student's progress on district formative assessments to identify specific standards that need reteaching at the grade, classroom, or small group level, referred to as Response To Learning (RTL). Three district-created interim assessments are administered throughout the year in reading and math. These interims are aligned to state standards to ensure systematic preparation for the state test, AzMERIT. Data on the state test has consistently reflected a large percentage of high performing students.

Sierra is fortunate to have a high number of students who qualify for gifted services. Our gifted resource program is designed to provide enriching STEAM/Humanities problem-based learning experiences, in addition to an accelerated math compacted curriculum. Gifted identified students are pulled out for small group instruction to meet their higher cognitive needs. Students learn higher level critical thinking skills through collaborative STEM projects, escape room challenges, and real-life problem-based applications to encourage possible solutions to current societal issues. The gifted resource teacher and classroom teachers collaborate to allow for common content to be taught at a deeper and more complex level.

Sierra has implemented systems to ensure that we meet students where they are and move them forward.

## PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

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### 1. School Climate/Culture:

Every member of the Sierra community works together to create a warm and positive environment. This is accomplished by the implementation of the PBIS model. This allows us to focus on positive behaviors and specific steps to encourage and celebrate students with support from everyone on campus. The 3B expectations at Sierra are to Be Safe, Be Responsible, and Be Respectful. All teachers use PBIS language to provide a clear message and understanding of student expectations. After receiving 25 3B coupons, they exchange the coupons for a Be Buck and certificate. Group pictures are taken and proudly displayed. This recognition serves as a reminder for students, staff, and parents alike to help Sierra maintain consistent expectations.

Sierra teachers create positive, healthy relationships through morning meetings in classrooms, reading buddies between grade levels, and classroom “ambassadors” who assist new students. These are a few ways that teachers promote cooperation and collaboration. Additionally, local Cub Scout groups have worked together to install “Buddy Benches” on the playground, which encourage students to develop positive friendships.

Sierra has also implemented WATCH D.O.G.S. (Dads of Great Students). WATCH D.O.G.S. is a unique national program that was brought to Sierra by two involved fathers who realized the importance of male role models and the impact they have on campus. WATCH D.O.G.S. spend a full school day volunteering, assisting with small groups, reading with English Language Learners, monitoring games at lunch recess, and helping in any way needed. Students beam with pride to see their dad around the school. This has been an excellent program for connecting fathers with their children in the school setting.

Perhaps one of the most unique parts of Sierra’s climate involves the care that staff members have for one another. Staff members love to recognize one another on the “Shout-Out” board, which highlights teachers, office staff, the building manager, and others who go above and beyond to make Sierra a productive, proactive, and positive place. The staff “Funshine” committee organizes monthly gatherings and celebrations to strengthen relationships. Staff members come to one another’s aid when someone is in a time of need. Sign-ups are created to support our staff members with meals, gift cards, or assist in the development of lesson plans when needed. Working at Sierra embraces a sense of community and camaraderie where staff are valued members of our school family.

### 2. Engaging Families and Community:

Sierra has established a strong partnership with its families and community. The relationship with students and parents begins at our “Meet Your Teacher” event. This is the first time that students, teachers, and parents meet and greet to set the tone for the year. Within the first month of school, parents are welcomed back to “Curriculum Night” where grade level teachers present the curriculum to parents to give an overview of the learning their child will experience during the school year. This special event initiates the teacher/parent relationship that is paramount to student success. Sierra always welcomes parents to volunteer and values their contribution to the classroom. Our school has a dedicated PTO who work diligently on a number of fun and exciting family events. The events that they plan throughout the school year strengthens the community bond and shows students the commitment the school has toward their education.

A major reason why our school community is so strong is due to the effective communication between parents and our school. We use a number of formats to communicate important information such as school/teacher newsletters, school/classroom websites, Remind and Facebook social media apps, e-mails, and personal phone calls. The consistent communication shows the proactive role staff take in each of their students’ education. Parents appreciate the efforts our teachers and administrators put forth to communicate regularly regarding student academic progress and overall general welfare.

Sierra partners with outside agencies to create enriching experiences that connect students with their community. These partnerships allow learning to extend beyond the classroom by providing real-world applications to concepts studied in the classroom. We collaborate with several outside resources such as The Arizona Science Center, Salt River Project, guest authors, First Responders, Arizona State University, Intel, Southwest Adopt-A-Pilot, and the American Heart Association to name a few. Sierra is appreciative of all the professionals who volunteer their time to make a difference in students' lives.

We also participate in fundraising efforts with local restaurants. These are always popular events with teachers, students, and parents. The money raised by these fundraisers goes toward field trips, learning resources, and assemblies to enrich student learning.

Sierra has made it part of its tradition to involve the "whole" community and collaborates with a wide spectrum of community members. Most importantly, Sierra is fortunate to have the collective synergies that come together to ensure each student at our school a quality education.

### **3. Professional Development:**

Administration has strategically focused on two essential staff development areas: Closing the Achievement Gap and Enhancing Collaboration Skills. The book, "Driven by Data" by Brambrick-Santoyo, has provided a framework to help teachers analyze the relationship and effectiveness of teacher actions on student achievement. Staff have learned to develop response to learning plans (RTL) to reteach in an intentional, systematic manner. This involves looking at individual class and overall grade-level data for each Interim assessment. Plans are put together to address root causes for lower student performance. Possible causes have been linked to lack of rigor, instructional time dedicated to master concepts/skills, proper test-taking skills, and rich vocabulary. These plans are shared with administration once the root cause has been identified and instructional strategies are put in place for re-evaluation of instruction.

The staff has addressed topics within the book, "HEART! Fully Forming Your Professional Life as a Teacher and Leader" by Tim Kanold. "HEART!" is based on the belief that people find happiness and passion at work by engaging in meaningful alliances while taking focused risks using intelligent thought and wisdom. Some reflection exercises asked staff to think about reasons they chose to become a teacher, the characteristics of significant mentors or colleagues in their professional life, how they demonstrate compassion in their work, their current energy state using the Energy Quadrant so they can be mindful of when drifting into negative and low energy territory, and how well they monitor and respond to their emotional state and interactions with others.

Other team building exercises focused on Patrick Lencioni's book, "Overcoming the 5 Dysfunctions of a Team". Teams not only learned about each of the five dysfunctions of a team, but also engaged in a team assessment and activity designed to build trust, show vulnerability, display levels of commitment, and measure task-oriented behavior. These exercises revealed vulnerabilities yet challenged team members to work toward improving team interaction.

The development of teamwork/social intelligence skills has been a priority. Staff have learned about their temperaments and those of their colleagues through Myers-Briggs Temperament Inventory. The results gleaned from this inventory provided staff insight as to how well certain personality types interact with one another. The information acquired from the survey identified individual personality strengths that would help the staff be more cohesive. We learned as a staff the importance of working together as a productive team to provide a culture aimed toward success.

### **4. School Leadership:**

Sierra's leadership philosophy is to ensure all students reach their fullest potential. Our principal coaches teachers to implement best practices using the tools and materials needed for student success. Relationships, processes, and results are the core components of our facilitative leadership model.

One of our principal's first actions at Sierra was to have the staff revisit the school's mission and vision, to

engage the staff in an open dialogue about their collective beliefs, and core purpose. Updating the mission and vision had the beneficial effect of unifying the staff. The new mission states we will Inspire Confidence, Empower Each Other, Respect Diversity, Reach for Knowledge and Achieve Academic Excellence. This statement is the driving force that guides initiatives.

The principal also involves the assistant principal in many facets of school operations. This partnership is characterized by daily conversations about all aspects of leadership and effective functioning of the school. The assistant principal currently oversees the daily tracking of interventions through MTSS processes, assessment coordinator, scheduling, student discipline, material inventories, shared teacher evaluation, and daily operations. Both administrators are highly visible and lead by example. They fill in for any duty or needs on campus. Together, they create a strong administrative team that exemplifies every word of our mission statement.

The principles of Facilitative Leadership guide the meaningful involvement of stakeholders to process information and generate ideas using a collaborative management style to elicit input from all voices, knowing that each individual plays a vital part in Sierra's success. The Advisory Committee consists of a member from each grade level team, special areas, and support staff who meet once a month. The purpose of this group is to address all business as it relates to the mission and vision of the school.

Sierra leadership works with staff to look at data for continual school improvement. Our success is attributed to high functioning teams that focus on teaching, learning, analysis, and reteaching. Administration values collaboration by ensuring time for teams to work together weekly to realize their goals. When interacting with staff, students, and community our leadership is receptive to individual ideas and their perspectives. These voices and viewpoints inform decision-making and help develop strong bonds and trust. The principal works closely with Site Council and the PTO executive board to establish community involvement and events. The relationship between these stakeholders fosters a climate conducive to building community, making it possible to fulfill our mission and dream.

## **Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

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Sierra uses formative and summative assessments to measure student academic success such as district interim tests, unit assessments, formal and informal observations, and teacher-made assessments. Data from these assessments drive instructional decisions. Other components used to gauge success include reflecting on best practices, empowering students to own their learning, and implementing academic structures such as Instructional Focus Groups (IFG) to increase student achievement.

Our district administers quarterly interim assessments to serve as formative tests that inform instruction and prepare students to be successful. Results from interims influence decisions to maximize instructional time as well as identify student needs. IFG groups are formed in math and reading by analyzing ordinal data on each student's performance. The data is quantitatively rich to accurately place students as at- or above-grade level as Benchmark or if below grade level as At-Risk of failure. An intervention plan is then developed between the teacher, grade level team, interventionist, and assistant principal. Below Benchmark, students are progress monitored weekly through DIBELS. Data chats provide a forum for teams to determine the level of support needed for groups of children to be successful which include accommodations in the classroom, pull-out small group services, and/or additional resources. Extensive training on data interpretation helped determine flexible learning groups. This concerted effort to analyze data results ensures that all students receive instruction at their skill level. Planning time to meet student needs aligns to our school's mission of achieving academic excellence. This intervention was strategic to help close academic gaps and to differentiate instruction. The advantages of using IFG block time built into our day enables teams to use assessments to tier instruction based on academic needs. Interacting with multiple teachers shows students that all teachers have a vested interest in their education.

Sierra also incorporates computer technology during IFG such as iReady, SMART Boards, and laptops to support learning. These interventions are critical to help bridge learning gaps that exist for students for those receiving additional instruction outside of the classroom. Success at a school comes when everyone is committed to using assessment data to create quality instruction tailored to meet each student's needs.

We appreciate the opportunity to showcase all of Sierra's exceptional talents and attributes. We believe Sierra represents all characteristics of a Blue Ribbon Exemplary High Performing School. We want all students to achieve at their maximum potential to become the problem solvers, creators, and visionaries of tomorrow.