

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. 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

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):
- 8 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 0 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 0 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 8 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	0	0	0
K	16	12	28
1	25	19	44
2	23	16	39
3	16	30	46
4	21	22	43
5	20	23	43
6	23	15	38
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	144	137	281

*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):
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 12 % Asian
 - 2 % Black or African American
 - 21 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 64 % 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 2017 – 2018 school year: 7%

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, 2017 until the end of the 2017-2018 school year	12
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2017 until the end of the 2017-2018 school year	9
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	21
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2017	310
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.07
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	7

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 13 %
36 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):
Cantonese, Dutch, English, Farsi (Persian), German, Hebrew, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin (Putonghua), Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Turkish

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 11 %
Total number students who qualify: 30

8. Students receiving special education services: 16 %
46 Total number of students served

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

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <u>1</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>5</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay | <u>8</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>32</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>0</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 6
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	Number of Staff
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	14
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	4
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	2
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 20:1

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

Required Information	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.

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. 2001

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

Del Mar Hills Academy is a community where everyone is committed to moving all students to and beyond proficiency to be college ready.

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

Nestled in the small coastal community of Del Mar, the Del Mar Hills Academy SurfRiders mirror the culture of the seaside neighborhood in which they reside. On any given morning surfers cluster at Torrey Pines State Beach, thirsty for exploration, patiently waiting to catch the perfect wave, and nurturing relationships with the Pacific Ocean. Similarly, the SurfRiders of Del Mar Hills Academy believe in embracing creativity and innovation, focusing on cycles of continuous learning, “rowing together,” and cultivating a college-ready culture.

When Del Mar Hills Academy opened its doors in 1974, it was the third school in the Del Mar Union School District. This school community is proud of its forty-five year tradition of providing educational excellence to all students. Many of our parents are alumni of the school who returned to live in this community so their own children can benefit from the family-like values that shaped their lives. Del Mar is a community in which medical professionals, leaders in technology advancement, and professionals from around the world settle based on the the strong academic reputation of the schools. In this community we also embrace students who come from families with considerable economic need. Our parents generously share their time and resources to support our school’s Parent Teacher Association (PTA). The PTA serves as a liaison between our school and parent community. They volunteer thousands of hours each year to provide additional instructional support in the classroom, co-facilitate extracurricular activities, and attend PTA sponsored events. Additionally, our parents play a vital role in collaborating with staff to fundraise for specialized academic programming and additional instructional resources for the school. Such supports include fundraising for the Del Mar Schools Education Foundation (DMSEF). Each year the DMSEF secures funding to support our school in providing every student with integrated learning opportunities within the STEAM+ areas of science, technology, art, music, and physical education.

With approximately 15 different languages represented in our community, Del Mar Hills Academy celebrates our rich diversity and unique backgrounds through personalized projects, daily interactions, and our annual World Festival. We serve 281 students in thirteen K-6 self-contained classrooms and learning spaces, which include our STEAM+ Specialists, Education Specialists, Speech/Language Pathologist, and Psychologist. Our students are inquisitive, creative, and highly engaged in their learning process. Del Mar Hills Academy celebrates the development of the whole child by encouraging an appreciation for the arts, creative expression, and scientific exploration. Elective programs offered during the school day and after-school, provide a plethora of opportunities for students to explore interests and develop new friendships.

Instructional programming is one of two areas that has changed significantly since the last time we were recognized as a National Blue Ribbon School in 2001. Even though our test scores place Del Mar Hills Academy in the top 1% of California schools, extensive research and analysis of students’ needs and existing educational practices uncovered a gap between what our school was providing and what our students will need for a successful future. To reach our goal of shifting from a culture of compliance to one of innovation, we have begun to change how we educate our children. Our five interrelated principles of agency, personalization, cultural intelligence, collaboration and design thinking mindset leverage our work. Students connect with industry experts from around the world to learn about contemporary and historical issues. Curiosity is promoted and empathy is developed as students seek out real-world problems and formulate innovative solutions.

Leadership changes at Del Mar Hills Academy played another significant role in shifting the culture of the school since it was last recognized as a National Blue Ribbon School. Working collectively with the staff and parent community, the principal anchored a vision for promoting the academic and social-emotional development of all students around a vision of college readiness and a common language for how we interact and operate effectively. College readiness is not the expectation that all students will attend college; it is the belief we must prepare all students to have a full range of post-secondary education and training options available to them after high school. The skill set for a successful future mirrors the skill set required to gain entrance into college; and at the elementary school level, this vision translates to working toward ensuring that each student meets or exceeds proficiency of grade level standards, and demonstrates mastery of the skills that matter most – the ability to think and learn across disciplines, connect ideas, and engage in

breakthrough thinking. Coupled with the college ready culture at Del Mar Hills Academy, The 8 Keys of Excellence character education program is the most instrumental schoolwide initiative at the school. The 8 Keys of Excellence provide a common language between all community stakeholders around the expectations of personal growth and high achievement. All members of our community-parents, staff, and students alike, work together to “be their very best selves” every day. We are a family in the truest sense of the word and we are proud to be SurfRiders!

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

1a. Reading/English language arts:

Over the past several years we have focused on establishing a dynamic balanced literacy program. This includes selecting curriculum and training teachers to include phonemic awareness, phonics, word study, vocabulary, and reading comprehension strategies into their instructional practice. Our teachers support students by engaging them in the following components of a balanced literacy approach: interactive read-alouds; shared reading; small group reading instruction; independent reading; writing; speaking and listening; and word work.

In reading and English language development, our teachers have received training on McGraw-Hill, Wonders (K-5) and StudySync (6th). After pre-assessing students to identify their prior knowledge of key standards or skills for weekly instruction, teachers (K-6) present meaningful learning opportunities based on student needs, and strive to engage them via inquiry to generate curiosity around the learning objectives. Students engage in a variety of Thinking Routines to make their thinking visible and deepen content understanding of key standards or skills. These routines meet every students' needs on their individual learning continuums, while providing for rich discussion and rigorous application of target skills. Ongoing formative assessment practices support teachers with monitoring student understanding of concepts taught, and using evidence collected to adjust instruction accordingly. Teachers provide targeted skill instruction to students through whole group lessons, small focus groups, and one-on-one guidance. In addition, our teachers utilize independent learning tasks to facilitate differentiated learning opportunities for every student and enhance student independence.

Our teachers utilize the Nancy Fetzer Writing Program to support students in grades K-6 with meeting grade-level writing standards across the three genres of narrative, expository, and opinion writing. To support word study instruction, teachers use Wonders and StudySync. In addition to ongoing formative assessment, teachers use standards-aligned rubrics developed by our District for each grade level as their primary method for evaluating student performance in the areas of writing and language development.

1b. Mathematics:

Our educational program is grounded in a strong academic core delivered through high-quality instruction. We pride ourselves in developing standards-based, progressive, meaningful learning opportunities that are integrated across disciplines to ensure all students develop the essential skills and competencies to be college ready. Utilizing a guaranteed and viable curriculum provides for consistent instructional practices across classrooms and grade-levels, and supports vertical articulation between teachers as our students transition from one grade-level to the next. As a result, using consistent instructional language and common practices provides all students an equal opportunity to learn and promotes our culture of achievement.

All of the instructional materials used at Del Mar Hills Academy support core curriculum, are state-approved, and aligned with Common Core standards. Teachers utilize research-based teaching practices, including the Essential Elements of Instruction and the Cultures of Thinking frameworks to enhance lesson design and delivery.

In mathematics, our teachers use a variety of instructional approaches including direct and small group instruction, as well as hands-on experiences, to blend foundational skill development with problem-solving applications. The emphasis is on building conceptual understanding rather than focusing on an answer, or rote memorization. Our teachers in grades K-6 are trained in implementing Cognitively Guided Instruction. This problem solving approach to conceptually based mathematics develops a culture focused on student thinking and understanding of mathematics. Teachers use questioning strategies to support all learners with

demonstrating their individual understanding of math concepts, and adjusting instructional strategies as needed to assist each student with reaching their next level of learning. This approach also creates environments where diversity in mathematical thinking is supported and valued, and all students are engaged in conversations around mathematical understanding. While formative assessment strategies are foundational to this instructional approach, teachers also evaluate student understanding on core content standards using common grade-level District benchmarks. Our Core instructional material used in kindergarten is Developing Number Concepts by Kathy Richardson. Investigations math curriculum is used in grades 1-5, and the Connected Mathematics (CMP3) curriculum is used in grade 6.

1c. Science:

Working in collaboration with the Del Mar Union School District for the past several years, Del Mar Hills Academy has been training all K-6 grade teachers on how to utilize the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) to drive instruction. NGSS incorporates Disciplinary Core Ideas, Crosscutting Concepts, and the Science and Engineering Practices through an integrated instructional approach. Teachers in grades K-5 use Houghton-Mifflin, and teachers in grade 6 use Prentice Hall Earth Science as our adopted textbook. Additionally, the Full Option Science System (FOSS) kits are used to engage our students in hands-on exploration and experimentation.

The transition to NGSS is aligned to the way we think about and deliver instruction across all content areas. It is our goal to engage students in making meaningful connections between the world around them and the content standards learned. Science instruction across all grade-levels is facilitated through a student-led inquiry process. Through guided discovery, teachers introduce lessons with a question and facilitate student-led scientific investigation through questioning, researching, experimentation, and explanation. Students also use the Design Thinking process to apply content knowledge learned toward addressing relevant, real-world problems. For example, while studying the topic of erosion within their Earth science unit, fourth graders learned about the impact of erosion on our local Torrey Pines State Beach. By interviewing a variety of experts on the topic including the Mayor of Del Mar, members of the Sea Level Rise Coastal Commission, and area historians, students discovered how erosion affects the quality of life for homeowners, beachgoers, and native plants and wildlife. Students were then challenged to design solutions for mitigating the impact of erosion for one of the identified user groups. Students utilized the Makerspace within the school's Innovation Center to prototype models of their solution and host an exhibition of their learning for the school community. After attending the Exhibition of Learning, the Mayor of Del Mar invited student groups with particularly novel solutions to present their findings before the City Council and advocate for continued research into mitigation efforts along the coastline.

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

In conjunction with our new History-Social Science Framework, the state of California also recently released a Civic Learning compendium. Much like the shift occurring in NGSS, the Civic Learning standards guide students with applying content learned to real-world scenarios. Our teachers recognize that as our world continues to expand and change, it is necessary to prepare our students with the skills and dispositions necessary to be productive and contributing global citizens. In addition to using Harcourt Brace as our core textbook in grades K-6, teachers employ the Design Thinking process to create a throughline between historical events and modern day connections. Often times these "design challenges" authentically include lessons on civic literacy and student advocacy. For example, Kindergarten students studied the history of their community and its evolution over time, and applied lessons learned toward redesigning inaccessible sections of the school's campus for members of our community with physical limitations.

Teachers assess student understanding of science and social studies standards through formative assessment strategies, including Thinking Routines, portfolios of student learning, and Exhibitions of Learning. Thinking Routines provide structures through which students individually and collectively discuss and demonstrate their thinking. Students also document their own learning journey using a variety of technology platforms and tools including Google Sites, SeeSaw, FlipGrid, and PowerSchool. Finally, grade-level teams host Exhibitions of Learning, during which Design Thinking projects are shared with the community. Each

assessment strategy provides opportunities for students to receive specific and actionable feedback to further guide and extend their learning.

1e. For secondary schools:

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

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

At Del Mar Hills Academy, we believe that it is our collective responsibility to prepare our students with the skills and mindsets to become productive members of the global society. These skills not only encompass a strong foundation in the core academic areas of literacy, math, social studies, and science, but also extend to the instruction of what we refer to as “the skills that matter most.” This includes supporting students with developing interpersonal skills such as feeling empathy for others, listening to new perspectives, promoting creativity and experimentation, and learning tools for effective communication and collaboration. Our parents and staff view these skills as prerequisites for college readiness, and we work collaboratively to provide access to high-quality learning experiences that foster these skills in all students.

The STEAM+ program at Del Mar Hills Academy, blends interdisciplinary instruction in the areas of science, technology, engineering, art, music, and physical education to encourage students to think critically, explore solutions to real-world problems, and unleash creativity. Students in K-6 grade receive weekly STEAM+ instruction led by a team of credentialed specialists from each discipline. The STEAM+ team meets weekly to plan highly engaging and integrated units of study for each grade-level. These units of study are often designed around a specific NGSS standard, but can also derive from relevant community needs, or student interests that surface during classroom instruction.

One example of a fifth grade integrated STEAM+ unit focused on the NGSS standard of interactions of plants, animals, decomposers, and the environment within ocean ecosystems. After learning about the problem of plastic pollution in the ocean, students collected plastics that washed ashore on our local beaches to make masks in art. These masks symbolized the amount of plastic pollution within our local waters and were mounted as an installation in the Innovation Center to promote community awareness. Students also worked with the technology and music specialists to use stop-motion animation and Garageband technology to create public service announcements about plastic pollution in our oceans. As a culminating project, students collaborated with the science and library/media specialists in using the Design Thinking process to develop novel ways to address ocean pollution. Students developed prototypes of their solutions to share with the community during an Exhibition of Learning hosted at our school.

In addition to the weekly STEAM+ instruction, our fifth and sixth graders receive the additional benefit of participating in a 90-minute weekly elective course run by the STEAM+ team. Each semester, students complete an interest survey which guides the teachers in developing high-interest and engaging elective courses for students to join. Examples of electives include, From Mind to Design: Using the Tinkercad App for 3D Design; Marvelous Murals: Bringing our ball walls to life through artistic expression; and SurfRider Symphony: Choosing an instrument to learn and hosting a community concert.

Our parents play an important role in collaborating with our staff at Del Mar Hills Academy, along with stakeholders from across the District, to ensure the success of the STEAM+ program. The Del Mar Schools Education Foundation (DMSEF), which includes parent representatives from Del Mar Hills Academy, organize annual fundraisers such as the STEAM+ Family Night and a Jog-a-thon, with the goal of raising money to fund credentialed STEAM+ specialists. Additionally, our PTA hosted a SurfRider fundraiser to install two new MakerSpace walls and supplies for the Innovation Center.

In addition to supporting the STEAM+ program, our staff and parents work together to facilitate a variety of extracurricular offerings based on student interests during lunch periods and after-school. Lunch Club offerings are differentiated based on the age and interests of the students. Clubs for our primary students (K-3) include Coding, Legos, Gardening, and MakerSpace. Clubs for our upper grade students (4-6), include Pixel Animation, Recycling, and French. Our most popular club for students in grades 4-6, the Academy Drama Club (ADC), meets after-school each Wednesday. The ADC uses the performing arts as a platform to improve student self-esteem, confidence, collaboration, and communication. Students collaborate with the school's library/media specialist in directing two large musicals each year. Students are responsible for co-directing the show, making costumes, and designing sets. Over the past nine years, well over 300 students have participated in the ADC and many have gone on to perform in middle school, high school, and beyond. The ADC has made significant impacts in supporting the development of at-risk youth and students with social and academic needs.

3. Special Populations:

Schools that enhance learning for all students use research and data to refine practice and involve everyone in the improvement process. Over the past six years, our staff has made significant shifts in our perception of student data and how it is used to drive instruction. Prior to our principal's arrival in 2013, reading and math achievement scores on the annual state test were strong, but they were also the lowest in a high-performing District. By in large, the teachers and the greater school community, prioritized nurturing well-rounded children over test scores. In rebuttal to this thinking, the principal asked her teachers to consider, "Is this the best we can do for every single SurfRider?" The staff engaged in profound reflection and agreed that it will be our collective goal to prepare all students to be college, career, and life ready. With this renewed mission, the principal challenged our staff to view data collected as "our students," and their performance on state assessments as the measurement for how well we have prepared them for their future. This transition stimulated changes to the systems and structures within the school that support student learning, and promote a culture of achievement.

At Del Mar Hills Academy, our staff embraces a community of "we," viewing all students as "our students." We work collaboratively to flex all available resources to ensure that every student meets or exceeds grade-level standard by sixth grade promotion. This begins with teachers working in grade-level and vertical articulation teams to regularly evaluate student data.

In the beginning of the year, teachers review student test scores from the Smarter Balanced Assessment in English language arts and mathematics to identify and place students in grades 4-6 performing below grade-level, as well as those performing significantly above grade-level, into targeted, need-based groups. Students requiring additional supports in either language arts or math, meet several days per week during the school day with a credentialed teacher to review or extend specific skills presented in class during the week. It is important to note these groups are fluid and responsive to the needs of students. Grade-level teachers regularly collaborate with the targeted intervention teacher to discuss students' levels of performance around specific learning objectives and then regroup students based on formative classroom assessments.

Primary teachers use formative assessments in grades 1-3 to identify students requiring additional support with literacy development and mathematics. These students receive small group push-in or pull-out support from a credentialed teacher up to four days per week, depending on student needs.

Our upper-grade English Learners performing at the Beginning level on the English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC), receive small group language development instruction from a credentialed teacher twice per week. Students with an IEP that require and would benefit from any of the aforementioned supports, are also placed in appropriate need-based groups.

We believe that ongoing formative assessment is the most important practice for meeting the individual needs of our students. Teachers work in communities of practice to co-plan lessons, assess student work samples, and tailor instructional decisions based on the individual needs of students.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

Research has shown that a safe, participatory, and responsive school climate fosters greater attachment to school and provides the optimal foundation for social, emotional, and academic learning (Blum, McNeely, & Rinehart, 2002; Osterman, 2000).

Del Mar Hills Academy lives the motto: “SurfRiders row together.” Our staff and families embrace a community of “we,” to ensure that every student achieves to their fullest potential- academically, socially, and emotionally. In 2013, there was a change in leadership at the school which fostered an opportunity to reevaluate the systems, structures, and beliefs that anchored our work. In building our shared commitment to prepare all students with the skills and mindsets required to become productive members of the global society, a culture of college readiness was adopted. Every staff member adopted a university and mascot to represent their classroom/learning environment. During the first three weeks of school, the College Crazy Committee, led by staff members, guide the staff and students in revisiting our “practices in kind.” These practices involve creating a climate of warmth and safety by guiding our students in how to care for the physical environment and materials of the classroom and school, explicitly teaching routines and our expectations for behavior, and promoting protocols for the ways we learn together in the year ahead. Some college readiness experiences at Del Mar Hills Academy include: adopting a four-year college or university in every classroom on campus; kicking off each month with a “SurfRiders Rock!” assembly where we connect our college-crazy spirit to the focus of our character education program; and wearing college clothing to set the tone for academic learning.

At the end of the day, it is the people within our school that foster a healthy and responsive climate. The teachers play a pivotal role in developing and modeling the systems, structures, and beliefs that form the foundation of our school’s culture. Through our shared effort to ensure that all students leave Del Mar Hills Academy performing at or above grade-level standard, teachers have formed a family-like partnership with their colleagues, administrator, and parent community. It is through this connection to fulfilling a collective goal that our teachers feel valued and supported. Teachers participate on a variety of leadership committees and work in grade-level and vertical teams to develop lessons, share resources, and research innovative instructional practices. Such experiences continuously challenge our staff to grow in their capacity, both personally and professionally. Over years of working together, our teachers have established a collective-efficacy around the mission of preparing all students to be college ready.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Del Mar Hills Academy offers many opportunities for parents to collaborate with staff in developing and evaluating strategic plans for continuous school improvement, and participate in school leadership. Such opportunities include attending quarterly “In the Know” meetings with the principal to provide input on decisions that impact instructional programming and student social-emotional wellness. Meetings are hosted during morning and evening hours to ensure all voices are heard. Additionally, parent representatives collaborate with staff in supporting school initiatives by serving on the School Site Council (SSC) and Parent Teacher Association (PTA). One such initiative included the funding and installment of two Makerspaces within the school’s Innovation Center.

Parents also play an important role in collaborating with staff to ensure the success of every student. This begins with promoting the college-ready mission of the school and The 8 Keys of Excellence character education program. Each month, our school hosts a “SurfRiders Rock!” assembly for the community; during which parents volunteer to serve as guest speakers to share their journey to college and how the monthly Key has positively impacted their lives. Additionally, to promote our culture of continuous learning, our school offers a variety of parent education nights on such topics as, using language from The 8 Keys of Excellence at home, and nurturing a growth mindset. To ensure parent education nights are accessible to all families, the events are free and include childcare and dinner. Parents also contribute their

time and talents with students by volunteering in classrooms.

Our school has ongoing partnerships with high schools, institutions of higher learning, and local organizations. Through these partnerships, students have bountiful opportunities to attend field trips, engage in inquiry-based learning experiences, and foster real-world connections with industry experts. Current partnerships include working with the Salk Institute's SciChats program, where scientists Skype with students to explain their path from elementary school to their current work. Additionally, our STEAM+ Science Specialist partnered the University of California San Diego to design the county's Structural Engineering Competition. Each year, our fourth graders prepare to attend the competition by engaging with applicable STEAM standards. Students also benefit from our "Study Buddy" program wherein high school students volunteer to assist with homework and making connections via positive mentoring.

We regularly communicate with families via social media to illustrate a "day in the life" of our SurfRiders; and through Sunday night's "Hills Happenings" newsletter to provide updates on school events. Teachers also send home weekly folders with student work samples and classroom updates. Additionally, Parent/Teacher conferences are held twice per year to discuss student progress toward meeting grade-level behavioral and academic goals.

3. Professional Development:

At Del Mar Hills Academy we engage staff in cycles of continuous learning to promote a culture of achievement. Research shows that an inspired and informed teacher is the most important school-related factor in influencing student achievement. Professional learning for our teachers align with district goals, Common Core Standards, and teacher needs.

Our District adopted the Essential Elements of Instruction (EEI) and Cultures of Thinking as two frameworks that guide our professional learning. EEI serves as a set of research-based practices upon which instructional decisions are based. This includes supporting teachers with planning how students will demonstrate their understanding of content, and practicing explicit teacher actions that lead to high levels of learning for every student. Additionally, our District is working with Harvard's Project Zero and Ron Ritchhart to create Cultures of Thinking within our classrooms. Most specifically, we are improving learning and collaboration by making students' thinking visible to enhance their understanding.

This year, all teachers at Del Mar Hills Academy attended two districtwide professional learning sessions, facilitated by district administrators, and focused on the application of EEI and its connection to creating cultures of thinking. These sessions supported teachers with determining instructional goals for each lesson based on student need, and identifying the subsets of learning that lead to all students meeting or exceeding said objectives.

Similarly, a group of teacher representatives from Del Mar Hills Academy joined a districtwide cohort of administrators and teachers attending professional learning sessions facilitated by Ron Ritchhart. These sessions are focused on making student thinking visible through the effective use of questioning, documentation, and Thinking Routines.

To ensure all teachers at Del Mar Hills Academy have practice with and access to high-quality professional learning, the principal and her cohort of teachers formed the Innovation Team (iTeam). The iTeam supports our staff with making thinking visible by modeling Thinking Routines during staff meetings, bi-monthly Collaborative Learning Wednesdays, and colleague-coaching sessions. By providing all teachers with resources to continuously grow in their individual and collective capacity, we promote a culture of achievement.

Our principal collaborates with a triad of principals from other campuses to participate in ongoing professional learning around EEI and Cultures of Thinking. These principals participate in continuous learning throughout the year around EEI from an expert consultant hired by our District. Additionally, they

completed a 13-week online course offered through Harvard's Project Zero around Creating Cultures of Thinking. With the support of instructional experts, the principal triad regularly visit each other's schools to engage in cross-school observations and conduct instructional rounds. They look for evidence that district initiatives are being implemented and opportunities for continued growth.

4. School Leadership:

The principal, who is in her sixth year in the position at Del Mar Hills Academy, prioritizes building relationships as the foundation of a successful school culture. In living the precept, "people during the day and paperwork at night," she can be seen greeting families on campus, attending community events, and visiting classrooms on a regular basis to actively participate in learning. Our principal is a revered member of the community because of her excellent communication and steadfast commitment to achieving the school's mission. Upon arriving to the school in October of 2013, Del Mar Hills was in a period of transition. Having experienced several leadership changes in the preceding years and a dip in standardized test scores, the principal and staff recognized the need to recalibrate the school's mission. The principal guided the staff in asking, "Is this the best we can do for every single SurfRider?" After that, we refined our collective commitment to prepare our students with the skills required to be college, career, and life-ready.

Honoring our connection to the community we serve, we rebranded ourselves as "SurfRiders," and it would be our mission to "row together" in preparing all students to ride the wave to college. Acknowledging it is a lofty goal to ensure every student leaves sixth grade meeting or exceeding grade-level standards, our staff developed several norms to foster a culture of achievement. First, we take universal ownership over the academic and social-emotional success of every student, and believe that all decisions made must be in the best interest of our students. Additionally, we engage in cycles of continuous learning and improvement to ensure our collective practice provides high-quality instruction for every student.

Leadership at the school is shared by the principal, staff, PTA, SSC, and our student-led 8 Keys Crew. Guided by our norms for building a culture of achievement, each school committee meets regularly to monitor current academic and social-emotional programming for students. The following is an example of how the partnership amongst our stakeholders reinforces our culture of achievement:

With the goal of creating interdisciplinary and real-world learning opportunities for our students, the Possibilities Committee, comprised of staff and parents, used the Design Thinking process to restructure our STEAM+ program. Changes to the program began with removing physical barriers between learning spaces and providing staff and students with novel opportunities to collaborate on Design Thinking projects across disciplines. With the addition of our Innovation Center and two new Makerspaces, students engage deeply in hands-on science and engineering practices, collaborate with industry experts, and construct explanations to communicate new ways of thinking.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Dr. Victor Battistich, a leading researcher in the field of character education, found that a sense of connectedness to school showed a significant link to improving good character. His research explains that, “As students grow in character, they grow in their capacity and commitment to do their best work, do the right thing, and lead lives of purpose. Character education done early and well, puts students toward successful life outcomes.” The Del Mar Hills Academy staff believe it is our collective responsibility to prepare our students with the skills and mindsets required to become college ready. Implementing The 8 Keys of Excellence character education program has served our school with developing a common language around the expectations for personal growth and high achievement expected for all stakeholders.

The 8 Keys of Excellence character education program provides a common framework for teachers, parents, and students to use in modeling excellence. At the beginning of every school year, classroom teachers introduce The 8 Keys of Excellence to our students and explain that the “Keys” Keep Everyone and Yourself Safe and Supported. Teachers reinforce the message that SurfRiders “row together” and use the Keys to “be our very best selves” every day. Parents and community partners are also introduced to The 8 Keys of Excellence through parent education nights and during monthly “SurfRiders Rock!” assemblies.

The 8 Keys of Excellence are referenced by all SurfRiders throughout the day and are routinely reinforced through campus-wide practices and traditions because it is the fabric of our school culture. Each morning students and staff recite the pledge to live their life with The 8 Keys of Excellence. Additionally, any SurfRider (staff, student, parent/community member) can nominate another SurfRider for demonstrating personal excellence in a Key trait. Nomination slips are kept in the office and honorees are celebrated during daily announcements. One very special tradition for students is being selected as an “8 Keys Crew” member. Students in fifth and sixth grades are eligible to be nominated by the SurfRider community for showing excellence in one of the Key traits. These students are selected to serve the school in the 8 Keys Crew during the “SurfRiders Rock!” assembly; take pride in modeling excellence across all Key traits; and distribute golden Keynote Awards to deserving SurfRiders demonstrating Key traits around campus.

The 8 Keys of Excellence character education program is the most instrumental schoolwide initiative as it provides a common framework around expectations for personal growth and high achievement for every stakeholder at Del Mar Hills Academy.