

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

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Mr. Sean Burgess Keller

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

Official School Name Robert H. Down Elementary School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 485 Pine Avenue

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

Pacific Grove CA 93950-3401
City State Zip Code+4 (9 digits total)

County Monterey

Telephone (831) 646-6540

Fax (831) 648-8414

Web site/URL https://robertdown.pgusd.org/

E-mail skeller@pgusd.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. Ralph Porras

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

District Name Pacific Grove Unified School District Tel. (831) 646-6510

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. John Paff

(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

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):
- 2 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 2 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 5 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	40	42	82
1	37	36	73
2	47	41	88
3	41	35	76
4	42	37	79
5	36	28	64
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	243	219	462

*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):
- 2 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 10 % Asian
 - 2 % Black or African American
 - 17 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 1 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 63 % White
 - 5 % 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: 14%

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	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	43
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	65
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2017	462
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.14
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	14

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):

Albanian, Arabic, Cantonese, English, Filipino (Pilipino or Tagalog), French, Gujarati, Hindi, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin (Putonghua), Pashto, Portuguese, Punjabi, Russian, Spanish, Tamil, Tongan, Urdu

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 18%
Total number students who qualify: 83

8. Students receiving special education services: 10 %
47 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>9</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>3</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay | <u>14</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>20</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>1</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 1
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.	21
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	6
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	10
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 22:1

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	95%	95%	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.

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

Robert Down Elementary School's mission is to challenge every student to learn skills, acquire knowledge, and develop character that is necessary for a rewarding life.

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

Robert Down Elementary School is located in the heart of Pacific Grove, California, a coastal village alongside the Pacific Ocean and Monterey Bay. Robert Down School opened its doors in 1891 and has developed a strong connection with the people of our community over the past 128 years. Robert Down has educated generations of the same local families, as well as students from around the world whose parents come to attend the military and international programs in the area (Defense Language Institute, Institute of International Studies, and the Naval Postgraduate School, to name a few). Our current student population represents 23 foreign countries. This diversity provides us with a rich, vibrant culture that is open to new ideas while sustaining the many long-standing, time-honored traditions. The positive relationships among students, staff, families, and the citizens of Pacific Grove have allowed Robert Down to consistently remain a highly regarded school where students want to be and where families want to send their children.

Robert Down School is a dynamic place with an educational philosophy that shines a spotlight on the development of each child's character along with a strong sense of community. From the moment you enter the school, you will find a welcoming atmosphere with student work proudly displayed down every hallway. You may see students practicing mindfulness, planting seeds in the garden, reading with a senior citizen, or observing a chrysalis in the butterfly habitat. There are traditions that date back more than 80 years—such as the Butterfly Parade every fall and the Maypole dance every spring—and new practices like robotics and coding in our Tinker Lab. Robert Down School reflects a memorable past and a promising future.

Many key strategies and practices allow our students to reach their full potential. In addition to rigorous academics, we are fortunate to have programs for social-emotional learning, character development, STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, Mathematics), foreign language, vocal and instrumental music, journalism, visual and performing arts, swimming, leadership, gardening, nutrition, inclusion for all students, and intervention support for reading, writing, and mathematics. The successful programs are a direct result of the dedicated staff, courageous leadership, supportive families, and responsive community. Teachers participate in collegial professional learning communities and meet regularly to ensure the growth of all students. Staff and parents work as partners in educating our children. The insightful principal provides exceptional leadership along with decisive actions to keep our school focused on academics, social-emotional objectives, and equitable support of all students. The principal knows every child and family by name, strength, and need. The local community actively supports our school with an average of 30 volunteers daily, in-kind and monetary donations, and opportunities for students' education outside the classroom. For example, the Monterey Bay Aquarium, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary provided students with meaningful outdoor instruction and leadership opportunities that allowed them to take action to improve the overall well-being of our bay. Through this intensive, real-life community-based project, our school was able to take a phenomenal step in creating a generation of well-informed and actively involved ocean stewards.

Each year, it is the challenge of our school to raise the level of student achievement and to use our resources to assist in the essential development of each and every student. In 2014, Robert Down School was named a California Distinguished School. In 2016, our school was awarded the Gold Ribbon by the California State Department of Education for high academic achievement for all student groups and its exemplary practices and programs. In 2017, Robert Down School was chosen by local citizens as one of the top two schools on the Monterey Peninsula. Additionally, our physical education, science, intervention, garden, nutrition, and schoolwide social-emotional development curricula have all been recognized as model programs by the state of California. In 2018, all students and all significant student groups scored in the highest band of academic performance for both English Language Arts and Mathematics on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress. These awards and test scores are a testament to the ongoing efforts of the Robert Down staff, students, families, volunteers, and community members who support our school.

While grateful for these recognitions, we also understand the best indicators of a great school are the engagement of our students and the happy look on each child's face at the end of every school day. The essential element in our children's success is having adults who believe in them, encourage them, and never

give up on them. This is our mission each day, and it is what keeps the students of Robert Down School growing academically, emotionally, physically, socially, and culturally.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

1a. Reading/English language arts:

English Language Arts instruction throughout all grades utilizes a systematic approach through explicit instruction and differentiation. Multi-sensory techniques meet the various needs of all students, regardless of levels or learning styles.

In the primary grades, beginning readers learn phonemic and phonological skills through movement, music, and meaningful activities. As children gain phonetic competencies, they apply these skills to literary and informational text. Guided reading groups are institutional practices.

In the upper grades, complex text is combined with a focus on metacognitive and text-dependent comprehension strategies. Students apply their skills across all genres, including narrative, opinion, and informational. Students build effective speaking and listening skills by working cooperatively with partners and small groups. Leveled readers provide differentiated instruction for equal access to information. Novel studies build worldly exposure, and integrate thematic concepts.

Students hone their writing skills by organizing their ideas and information into clear passages that are appropriate to the task, audience, and purpose. Writing workshops allow students to enthusiastically compose self-selected topics, collaborate and edit with peers, publish their writing, and share their work in an environment that honors the student-author.

Benchmark assessments, including district formative and summative tests, are administered three times a year. These measure student progress in early literacy skills, decoding, fluency, and comprehension. Grade level teams review student work and data at weekly collaborations, allowing for flexible student groups.

Our tiered intervention program uses teacher instruction blended with technology-based lessons at each student's level. Students in the intervention programs are progress-monitored monthly. Data determines the needs of each group and the targeted instruction to be used. Scaffolded support also allows English learners to develop their academic vocabulary and language proficiency.

Extension activities for all students include Junior Great Books, composing scripts for their morning message broadcast, writing for the school newspaper, poetry, and theater arts. The dynamic daily instruction, along with appropriate supports and enrichment, develops students who are avid readers and confident writers.

1b. Mathematics:

Mathematical education at Robert Down School is a time for thinking, developing number sense, and struggling with a problem. During the past two years, the teachers have worked closely with an eminent math coach to improve their classroom practices and to design a curriculum that expands mathematical thinking. There is opportunity in the classroom for number talks, building math concepts, fluency practice, and gradually releasing the responsibility to students for math dialogue and problem-solving. Math instruction at Robert Down School provides students quality time to persevere through a problem, tackle it with precision, justify their solution, and routinely reflect on their learning.

Our teachers understand that how math is presented is as tantamount to student learning as what math is presented. Teachers also agree that the eight mathematical practices as well as a growth mindset must be integrated into math lessons. Teachers are posing higher depth-of-knowledge questions. Students are learning to persevere, defend, and re-think answers, and take on more challenging problem-based performance tasks. Furthermore, our STEAM activities align with grade-level math content and truly enhance our school's mathematics program.

Schoolwide assessments conducted three times per year include district formative and summative assessments, Scholastic Math Inventory, and grade-level benchmarks. Teachers, in their professional learning communities, analyze data from these assessments to differentiate instruction to better meet the needs of a range of students. Math intervention is a multi-tiered approach and includes small-group instruction within and among classrooms. This allows for instruction to be targeted to individual learning styles, and provides support as well as challenge lessons. Intervention may include time in the Learning Center for students to build math fluency and work with visual representations of mathematical concepts. Extension activities include small-group challenge lessons, county math competitions, and an after-school math club for all students to develop as mathematicians.

1c. Science:

Science at Robert Down School is an exemplary program that has become a model for other districts in our area. The core curriculum, which includes Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), has been created, tested, and refined by our teachers. During science, the school comes alive with hands-on learning and engaging lessons. Together, the staff and parents have constructed a butterfly habitat, garden program, and Tinker Lab to create spaces for discovery to take place. Robotics teams challenge students to think like an engineer, collaborate as a team, and solve problems together. Students are able to work alongside scientists, conducting real-time experiments and observations. Annually, our students monitor and collect data on the coastal ecosystems and develop scientific understanding of the ocean through LiMPETS (Long Term Monitoring Program and Experimental Training for Students). The “Otters Saving Otters” project was a multi-year study on how we, the Robert Down Otters, could help the sea otters in the Monterey Bay.

Assessments, including project-based evaluations, are conducted throughout each science unit. Teachers analyze student work and conduct collegial classroom visits with follow-up reflections to improve their own instruction. Teachers plan and conduct lessons together to allow for deeper conversations around our current practices and student outcomes. This has been especially crucial to developing our science units with STEM activities and the cross-cutting NGSS concepts.

Representatives from the Monterey County Office of Education best described our science instruction after a visit to our school: “All the science lessons observed were hands on and meaningful. Students were doing experiments, observing, taking notes, and had reference materials that they knew how to use, and could discuss how this experiment was related to the learning they had done and were going to do. The hands-on lessons were academically rigorous and not simply just something fun to do.”

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

By learning about their past and developing compassion for the diverse societies in our world, students of Robert Down School are expanding their horizons beyond their own immediate experiences. This is what social studies instruction does for children and why it is not a neglected subject in our elementary school.

Teachers make social studies come alive. Students learn about government by transforming their classrooms into a country; holding elections; securing a position in the executive, judicial, or legislative branch; passing and vetoing laws; writing a constitution; holding a peaceful protest; enduring a conflict with another country; and then coming to an agreement with that country by signing a treaty. The mayor of Pacific Grove invites classrooms to City Hall, where students serve as mayor and council members discussing local issues and voting on resolutions. The county judicial system provides an Elementary Law course that culminates with a mock trial in which the students take on the various roles in a courtroom. An archaeological dig allows students to apply their knowledge of cultures, economics, educational systems, arts, and governments as they uncover artifacts that they analyze and interpret to discover how this society operated. Students studying agriculture meet with local farmers, work directly with a local farm production corporation, and learn about the county’s agriculture industry at a Farm Day event for elementary students. In lessons that simulate the westward movement, students cooperatively work together as their wagon train encounters the trials and tribulations of that time. These are a few examples of the many engaging experiences that deepen students’ understanding beyond the information in their textbooks.

Rather than assessing students with only pencil-and-paper tests, teachers use alternative techniques to address multiple intelligences. Performance tasks and authentic evaluations allow students to demonstrate their learning in various ways. Teachers, in their professional learning communities, study the student outcomes from these evaluations to drive their lessons and improve their social studies instruction.

1e. For secondary schools:

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

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Robert Down provides a plethora of opportunities for students to expand their creativity, build essential skills and knowledge, and express themselves beyond the core curricula areas.

A wide range of offerings in the visual and performing arts support students' interests and abilities. Weekly vocal music is provided for all students. Chorus is an after-school option for grades three, four, and five, with several community performances occurring each year. All students perform in the winter music program; a grade-level assembly featuring singing, skits, and themes from our social-emotional learning programs; and the annual spring dance with each class performing a traditional or modern dance. Each year, second-grade students perform a musical, and fifth-grade students produce two plays, one with a social studies focus and one melodrama. A schoolwide play is performed in the spring. Fifth-grade students take instrumental music lessons and practice weekly with the band or orchestra. Three band and orchestra concerts are held in the community annually. Fifth-graders had the opportunity to be the first west coast school to participate in Dancing Classrooms and The Dance Educators of America programs. First through fifth-graders work with local art docents to explore a variety of art mediums in their classroom and in community art studios. All classrooms provide weekly art lessons as well as art integrated across curricular areas. After-school courses in visual and performing art include ceramics, sewing, drama, photography, and community-based art. These class offerings change to meet the interests of the school population.

All 462 students at Robert Down Elementary School attend Physical Education (PE) daily and understand the importance of moving every single day. While the students learn new skills, they are also building confidence, stimulating their brain cells, and developing relationships with peers. The foundation of our P.E. program is sportsmanship and participation. No matter the size, shape, or ability of any student, there is 100% active involvement.

Our school's health and nutrition instruction includes a schoolwide garden program, a district wellness policy, Kids Eat Right program, a partnership with the Dole Corporation to taste a variety of crops and learn about local agriculture, a welcoming school cafeteria that provides fresh fruits and vegetables, the Days of Taste provided by the Julia Child American Institute, and Farm Day sponsored by the Monterey County Agricultural Foundation.

For the past 13 years, many parent and community volunteers have been the mainstay of the foreign language program at Robert Down School. The local Foreign Language in the Elementary School and Defense Language Institute have been instrumental in providing instructors and curricula. We have been able to offer Spanish, French, Latin, and Greek to our students in all grades.

All classrooms have interactive boards, projectors, cameras, audio enhancement, and iPads. Students in grades three-five have 1:1 laptop devices. Kindergarten, first, and second grade classes have 1:2 devices. There are many digital components to our textbooks. A school computer lab is available for all classes to use. Our district technology instructor provides weekly lessons to all students. The school Tinker Lab houses scientific equipment including two 3-D printers and a laser printer. Classroom websites provide

communication and podcasts of daily lessons to assist students with homework.

The Robert Down library is the heart of our school. All classes visit the library weekly for instruction, exchange of books, and for developing a love of reading. The knowledgeable library clerk brings unique guests and programs to the library that make the library a very special place on campus for our students.

Many other programs enhance the life of all students at Robert Down School. Our social-emotional and bully prevention programs are provided to every student and are coordinated by the school counselor. The recreation program, yoga program, and Just Run program allow for additional movement during the day. The Otter Ambassador Program builds leadership skills for students in Grades three, four, and five. Robotics clubs encourage teamwork and problem-solving. The school newspaper provides additional writing and publishing opportunities for all grade levels. An outdoor Mud Kitchen gives kindergarten students the chance to explore, create, and discover that play is learning.

3. Special Populations:

Our special populations include students with disabilities from mild to severe, English language learners, economically disadvantaged, children of military families who move frequently, and students in the Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) program.

Our special education program provides individualized instruction, alternative assessments, and an extended school year. It also tailors students' schedules to maximize time with typical peers. A lunchtime buddy program teaches all students to embrace differences and develop friendships. Students with autism and students with moderate to severe disabilities participate in the buddy program along with general education students. Our intervention and special education programs have received county recognition and a California State Board of Education Golden Bell award.

Our English Language Development program, whose yearly enrollment varies from 15 to 65 students, includes time for pull-out support and for support within the classroom. In conjunction with our adult school, parents are also included in learning a new language along with their children. New non-English-speaking families are paired with a current family, who often speak their native language, to help with the transition to a new country and school. Our English language learners' achievement scores are near the school's overall proficiency level. Redesignated English language learners exceed the overall achievement scores of the general student population.

New students, including students of military families, are part of the Movin' and Groovin' Club, which meets weekly during the first months of school to help develop friendships and acclimatize new students to our school. All new students have a welcome buddy to answer questions and assist new students in becoming a part of the community. A military liaison provides additional support for students of military families. For example, a free Saturday homework help time is provided for any student in a military family. The liaison provides military families with community and military resources to assist with any type of need.

Our economically disadvantaged students are given priority to attend intervention programs and participate in extracurricular activities. Students are provided scholarships to attend community fee-based recreational and science-based programs and camps.

Fourth- and fifth-grade students in the Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) program are provided innovative and challenging lessons within the classroom as well as from specialized GATE instructors. Grants from a local foundation provide for additional GATE teachers and programs for GATE students.

The most recent equity report from the California Accountability System notes all significant student groups at Robert Down School performed in the highest achievement band for English Language Arts and Mathematics in 2018. This significant increase from prior years has helped close the achievement gap among student groups. Through their professional learning communities, our principal and teachers consistently review assessment data of all students and monitor students in our striving groups to ensure

they are provided with adequate and appropriate equity. Site funds are prioritized for use in support programs and securing a variety of curricular materials. The ongoing assurance of resources—both staff time and site budget—reflects the continuous commitment and growth mindset the school has for all students.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

Robert Down School considers itself a family. We are all valued members of our family who depend on each other. Every primary and upper grade student is connected with a big or little buddy. Engaging, student-centered lessons motivate students to learn. With its high academic achievement, the school environment is balanced with equal emphasis on the social-emotional growth of all students. Along with the ability to practice mindfulness, a schoolwide social emotional learning program provides students with the tools they need to self-manage, build relationships, and make responsible decisions. A growth mindset allows students to make mistakes, persevere, and continue to strive to be their best. Conflict at recess is resolved through Peaceful Playground strategies. Staff take the time necessary to mentor and support students in all aspects of their life. Staff stay after school to assist students, take on unpaid extra-curricular duties for the benefit of students, and attend students' sporting events, music recitals, and theatrical productions to show their students how much they care. Students feel encouraged by and important to their teachers. Students' families feel a connection and a partnership with our school in the education of their children. The school and our families have a relationship with the larger Pacific Grove community that gives us all a sense of belonging. Community members are active volunteers in our school. Robert Down is held in high regard and our town is committed to continuing Robert Down's positive climate and culture for many generations to come.

Robert Down's longtime office manager often commented, "I skip to work!" That's how our staff feels; they love coming to work. They are a part of something bigger, and they know their effort and dedication will make a difference for our school and community. There is trust between staff and principal. The principal inspires staff to do their best, provides time for collaboration, and implements effective professional development. The administration leads by example and integrity. The collegial atmosphere and respectful relationships among staff members are contagious. Strong friendships and bonds develop among the staff. Because of the support and value teachers feel, they come to Robert Down School and do not leave until they retire after 25 to 40 years of service. Even then, many retired staff members continue to come back to Robert Down to volunteer and give back to the school where they experienced such a positive culture and climate.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Robert Down School believes a student's success is dependent on the extent families are involved in their child's education. From the moment a child enrolls at our school, we want to connect with that child's family. A welcome family is offered to each new family to make their arrival personal and positive. Parents stay informed via the school, classroom, and Parent Teacher Association (PTA) websites, newsletters, and text messages. Parent conferences and ongoing face-to-face interactions before and after school keep the lines of communication open between home and school. During conferences and student study teams, parents and staff review students' achievements and challenges. They work together to develop an action plan so that all students meet their full potential.

Ninety-nine percent of our families attend evening events at our school. Besides the Back-to-School and Open House nights, the school hosts evenings for family art, math, literacy, and STEM activities that involve the entire family. Parents can participate firsthand in what their children are learning and be full partners in their children's education. The PTA provides many social events for families to interact and make connections at school. Parent education nights allow parents and staff to grow in their joint role and responsibilities in raising the next generation. Some of the past topics include Positive Discipline, Technology and Learning, Raising Emotionally Healthy Children, Harmony at Home, and Building Empathy.

Twenty to sixty volunteers engage with our school every day. In conjunction with our families and the Pacific Grove community, we are able to offer many programs, such as Just Run, Drug Abuse Resistance Education, Dancing Classrooms, field science projects, after-school visual and performing arts, math club,

foreign language, and recreational programs. Volunteers include not only parents but many community members, senior citizens (one who has volunteered for 55 years at our school), retired Robert Down staff, California State University Monterey Bay service learners, Pacific Grove police officers and firefighters, and the Panetta Institute Monterey County Reads program, to name a few. Having children interact with parents and community members gives the students a sense of belonging, opportunities to connect with a variety of cultures, and a firsthand lesson on how giving back to the community enhances our greater good.

3. Professional Development:

At the completion of each school year, the principal and teachers reflect on our instructional practices, student outcomes, the challenges facing us, and the goals we wish to accomplish. Each professional learning community (PLC), which includes all certificated staff, hold a retreat day with the principal to thoughtfully plan out the type of professional development that will have the greatest impact on the capacity of our teachers and administrator. We work closely with our district's director of curriculum and instruction to see where the need is at our school site and to provide professional development that can aid us in meeting that need. An action plan is developed with school improvement at the forefront to provide equity for our striving student groups. The school site plan is written in alignment with these professional development goals, along with budgetary support from district and site funds.

Professional development draws from many sources. During the past several years, our school has hired an outside reading and writing consultant to improve our literacy instructional practices. A mathematics consultant has coached our staff for two years to meet the rigors of the Common Core math standards, improve our number talks, boost students' ability to discuss and write about math, and increase mathematical performance tasks in the classroom. The math consultant models replicable math lessons, and directly observes and gives feedback to teachers on their classroom instruction. During this school year, the staff has worked closely with the county science director to better incorporate the Next Generation Science Standards into our science curriculum. Teachers attend conferences and workshops from Guided Language Acquisition Design to Understanding Student Data to Peaceful Playgrounds. After each conference, teachers are required to share out what they have learned and help the staff incorporate new information into schoolwide practices. Collegial classroom visits allow teachers to observe each other, meet to discuss and reflect on the observation, and provide guidance for teachers to develop new strategies within their own classroom. The grade-level PLCs meet weekly to analyze student data and reflect on instructional practices. All teachers take leadership roles within the PLCs and partake in professional conversations so that teachers continue to learn and develop professionally from each other.

The principal participates in PLCs at the site and district levels. Professional development for our principal includes a yearly book discussion on current topics with fellow administrators, workshops in leadership skills, and ongoing attendance at conferences and workshops that focus on equity and student achievement.

As a result of working directly with expert consultants, attending workshops, and staff learning from each other, professional development has had a direct effect on our student achievement. With each focus (literacy, math, science, social-emotional learning, etc.), we have seen improved student achievement in that area.

4. School Leadership:

The community of our school comes together to collectively strengthen the many ways leadership takes form at our site. It is a philosophy and structure of shared leadership.

The dedicated principal brings years of wisdom, common sense, and a "can do" attitude to every opportunity, challenge, and possibility. The philosophy is "What you can do is often a matter of what you will do." There is no problem too large or small that cannot be addressed. If one solution does not work, something else is tried. The school administrator brings new ideas and programs to our school. The principal encourages and supports others to see their strengths and to become leaders themselves, from the custodian to the bus driver to all staff and parents.

The school leadership team, the School Site Council (SSC), Parent Teacher Association (PTA) executive board, and the English Language Advisory Committee (ELAC) work closely with the principal and each other to provide a coherent structure of leadership. Many innovative ideas emanate individually and jointly from these leadership groups, resulting in greater student learning and success. After reflecting on the California Healthy Kids survey conducted at our school, the site council suggested the need for improved school climate, the PTA funded and worked to change the entrance lobby of the school, the leadership team brought forth a schoolwide social-emotional curriculum, the ELAC inaugurated the Welcome Family program, the principal set up strategies for a Peaceful Playground, and the counselor commenced the student conflict-resolution program. By leading and working together, much can be accomplished. The next California Healthy Kids survey showed a significant increase in positive school climate from all stakeholders—students, staff, and parents.

Because we are a small school, we need staff, parents, and community members to share in the leadership role. When students asked for better communication about school events, a teacher organized a school broadcasting team, so all students could hear directly about upcoming events. A retired police officer reads with children every week and has recruited other senior citizens to come read as well. A parent, a building contractor, and a local landscaper took the initiative to gather a group of parents and students to help update our school garden. Currently, a parent and local food bank are organizing a backpack food program so students can have healthy meals over the weekend. These are all examples of the shared leadership that keeps our school a vibrant place to learn.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Our academic intervention program changes lives and sets students on a path of academic and emotional success. While serving a diverse group of students, the intervention program is fluid and adapts to students' individual needs. Student groups are flexible. Intervention is provided within the general education classroom or outside the core curricula time so no student misses grade-level instruction.

Students enter reading, writing, and/or mathematics intervention based on diagnostic information, analysis of assessments, evaluation of the student's daily performance in the classroom, and teacher consultation. Students exit the program through a similar process. The intervention teachers are members of the professional learning communities at all grade levels who collaborate weekly on students' progress and give guidance on the best instructional strategies to use in the classroom to ensure student success.

A growth mindset is built within the intervention program. Students understand that hard work and dedication are necessary for success in school and in life. As students increase their academic skills in intervention, they also develop a positive outlook regarding their learning potential.

Parental involvement is a critical component of our intervention program. Family evenings are held for literacy and mathematics. Parents learn what is happening in the intervention program and how to support their child at home. Families take home reading and math games to reinforce the skills their children are learning in school. With a book provided daily at the student's reading level, children are expected to read nightly with their parents. Books are given to children to expand their home library and to make reading an enjoyable habit.

The intervention program provides schoolwide benchmark assessments three times per year. Monthly progress monitoring is used for students enrolled in the intervention program. This allows our school to clearly see if the current intervention practice is generating positive student outcomes. When it is not, changes in strategies and instruction are implemented.

During the past several years, our achievement level in reading, math, and writing have increased remarkably, with all significant student groups scoring in the highest performance band in both ELA and Mathematics statewide testing in 2018. One-hundred percent of our reclassified English language learners' scores were at the highest performance level for math, and 94% were at the highest performance level for ELA. Intervention provides the necessary support so that fewer students are being referred for tier-three intervention programs. Our special education numbers have decreased 46 percent. Our intervention program is critical to our school's success. As a result, our district has called upon us to help other schools design a similar program that will benefit their students.