

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

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Mr. Kurt Siebold

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

Official School Name Slavens K-8 School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 3000 S Clayton Street

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

Denver City                      CO State                      80210-6704 Zip Code+4 (9 digits total)

County Denver

Telephone (720) 424-4152

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Web site/URL http://www.slavens.org/

E-mail kurt\_siebold@dpsk12.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\*Ms. Susana Cordova

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other) E-mail susana\_cordova@dpsk12.org

District Name Denver Public Schools District Tel. (720) 423-3200

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 Ms Anne Rowe

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

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

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

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

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

## Part I – Eligibility Certification

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The signatures on the first page of this application (cover page) certify that each of the statements below, concerning the school’s eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education and National Blue Ribbon Schools requirements, are true and correct.

1. All nominated public schools must meet the state’s performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
2. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2019 in order to meet all eligibility requirements. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
3. The school configuration includes one or more of grades K-12. Schools on the same campus with one principal, even a K-12 school, must apply as an entire school.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2013 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, or 2018.
6. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. If irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state, the U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school’s application and/or rescind a school’s award.
7. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as “persistently dangerous” within the last two years.
8. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
9. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
10. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district, as a whole, has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution’s equal protection clause.
11. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

## PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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

### DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
  - 114 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 34 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 56 High schools
  - 4 K-12 schools

208 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
<b>PreK</b>	0	0	0
<b>K</b>	49	31	80
<b>1</b>	43	36	79
<b>2</b>	41	44	85
<b>3</b>	45	45	90
<b>4</b>	43	41	84
<b>5</b>	43	46	89
<b>6</b>	41	43	84
<b>7</b>	42	37	79
<b>8</b>	41	38	79
<b>9</b>	0	0	0
<b>10</b>	0	0	0
<b>11</b>	0	0	0
<b>12 or higher</b>	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	388	361	749

\*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
  - 3 % Asian
  - 1 % Black or African American
  - 8 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 80 % White
  - 8 % Two or more races
  - 100 % Total**

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

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2017 – 2018 school year: 2%

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

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

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2017 until the end of the 2017-2018 school year	6
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2017 until the end of the 2017-2018 school year	8
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	14
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2017	734
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.02
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	2

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 1%  
10 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):  
Spanish, Vietnamese, Arabic, Chinese, Russian

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 6%  
Total number students who qualify: 42

8. Students receiving special education services: 6 %  
44 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>2</u> Autism                  | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>8</u> Other Health Impaired                 |
| <u>2</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>22</u> Specific Learning Disability         |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>22</u> Speech or Language Impairment        |
| <u>3</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: 11
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	3
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	31
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	18
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	18
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	1

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 24:1

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

<b>Required Information</b>	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014
Daily student attendance	96%	96%	96%	96%	97%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

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

Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2018.

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

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

Yes  No

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award. 2011

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

At Slavens School we provide a rich academic experience that builds a foundation for every student to become a compassionate, ethical, and productive global citizen.

16. **For public schools only**, if the school is a magnet, charter, or choice school, explain how students are chosen to attend.

## **PART III – SUMMARY**

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There are many reasons why Slavens K-8 school currently has over 300 children on its wait list, anxious to join our school community. While the general public may attest to our distinguished academic ratings and high standardized test scores, anyone that has entered our doors knows it is much more than ratings and scores that make our school unique. Visitors will notice framed student artwork adorning our halls, an ever-changing wall of fame that recognizes staff and student contributions to the school, and the welcoming feeling that comes from student-decorated furniture placed to facilitate gathering and discussion. Parents can be found throughout our hallways and classrooms, volunteering their time to rehearse Shakespeare lines with third graders, guiding small reading groups in kindergarten, or sharing about their careers with middle school students. Staff across grade levels can be found collaborating over a shared lunch. A sense of community is clear.

Slavens unique history illustrates how embedded our school is within our community, and likewise, how integral parent/school relationships are to our success. Slavens opened as a K-6 elementary school with 500 students in 1956 but was closed and used for administrative offices in 1982 due to low enrollment in the area. In 1996, a group of parents and community members worked to re-open the school as a K-8. The community momentum for our school's reopening, as well as our K-8 model, have continued to afford a unique experience for building camaraderie among all involved in the education of our children. On good-weather days, it is hard not to notice the 250 or so bicycles parked on the school playground or the numerous families walking to school. Parents often linger with coffee in hand to talk with each other, thus building a strong communication web for our entire community. According to our parent leadership groups, it is this sense of community that makes Slavens feel like such a wonderful place to educate children.

Just as parents were integral to our school's reopening, they were likewise an integral part of setting forth a strong vision for the school emphasizing the education of the whole child. Our vision states that "Slavens is a community that educates students for life's journey," and our values uphold this vision. We provide an edifying environment where students are challenged to be critical thinkers and creative problem solvers. Students are taught to reflect on their own learning as they progress along the learning continuum and hold themselves to both high academic and social standards. The growth and development of the whole child is supported through many "specials" classes including daily physical education or dance, musical theater, choir, coding, art, technology, Spanish, STEM, band, and photography as well as through robust social-emotional programming that addresses topics such as coping and communication skills, navigating friendships and relationships, and healthy and safe behavior.

The culmination of Slavens' vision in educating students for life's journey comes through our work becoming a "Leader in Me" school over the past four years. Being a Leader in Me school means that students, staff and families actively live the "7 Habits," which are based on Stephen Covey's 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. This framework allows us to establish a clear character education standard throughout the school community that is woven into all instruction and programming we provide. Classroom leadership work begins in kindergarten as students are introduced to the language and application of the "7 Habits" and offered the opportunity to apply for leadership roles within the classroom. This work continues through middle school where students engage in a deeper analysis of the "7 Habits" through book study, discussion, and journaling in semi-weekly "Advise" classes. Our students live these skills through independently organized bi-monthly leadership assemblies, where primary students may be seen on stage leading the student body in song, or middle school students may be giving in-depth presentations on issues from inside the community to across the world to inspire action and activism.

The success of being a past recipient of the Blue Ribbon award has brought about an influx of young families moving into our community so their children can attend Slavens, growing our enrollment at a considerably faster rate than before the award was earned. Three separate building additions have been completed as of January 2019 in order to allow us to accommodate the growing neighborhood population. However, Slavens continued growth in student achievement and well-being is what allows us to continue to demonstrate the hallmarks of Blue Ribbon status.

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

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

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

Reading and writing are fundamental components of all subjects at Slavens, meaningfully woven into not just language arts, but science, math, and social studies. Direct instruction is provided through learning to read with “Just Right” books, which our earliest readers are taught to identify with independence. Primary literacy teachers have been extensively trained at Columbia University in using the Lucy Caulkins curriculum, which includes the instruction of phonics as well as a variety of challenging reading and writing strategies that are implemented in the classroom. Intermediate grades and middle school use an immersive program that focuses on reading and writing to learn called Expeditionary Learning. All teachers use a scaffolded approach as they model their thinking and invite discussion before releasing the students to work on skills independently. Individual classrooms encompass heterogeneous needs while implementing flexible grouping; this ensures that we have both diverse perspectives and learning styles while also maintaining our ability to provide targeted instruction within each classroom community.

Students’ reading ability and progress is evaluated multiple times per year using standards-based, norm-referenced assessment measures, as well as more frequently with running record and portfolio review. Formal assessments include the iReady diagnostic assessment and Scholastic Reading Inventory at the primary and middle school levels, respectively. If a student does not demonstrate expected growth or achievement, a variety of interventions are available to support that student’s need. We have three reading intervention teachers and eight paraprofessionals who work exclusively with students in kindergarten through fifth grade for individual and small group instruction with evidence-based programming, including Leveled Literacy Instruction, F.A.S.T, and Step up to Writing. In middle school, an exploratory (elective) period taught by core literacy teachers and special educators provides an additional 80 to 120 minutes of targeted instruction per week. Slavens likewise has general education teachers trained in the Orton Gillingham method, which allows for provision of high quality, small group instruction within the classroom setting.

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

Instruction in mathematics at the elementary level utilizes the Bridges mathematics curriculum. This unique programming blends direct instruction, structured investigation, and open exploration while presenting material that is as linguistically, visually, and kinesthetically rich as it is mathematically powerful. Connected Math, utilized in our middle school, presents mathematical ideas embedded within in a sequenced set of tasks and explored in depth to allow students to develop rich mathematical understandings and meaningful skills. Both curricula are driven by inquiry-based learning rather than rote memorization, and incorporate reading, writing, and higher order problem solving skills in order to support students’ engagement in and flexibility with mathematical thinking. Formative assessment utilizing the online Illuminate platform allows us to monitor student progress towards standards easily throughout the year. This program also offers the benefit of providing easy to interpret graphics and metrics on student growth and performance, which supports teachers in efficiently identifying needs at both the individual student and whole-class level, and facilitates adaptive planning for instruction.

Using a pre/post test model, students’ individual needs are supported through the opportunity for goal setting, “testing out” of content, and identification of areas for targeted intervention. Students who demonstrate proficiency through pre-testing at the start of the unit are given enriched curriculum with extension activities to support continued growth. Those identified as needing additional support can be given push-in paraprofessional help, teacher-lead small group instruction, and/or work with a dedicated math interventionist in the 4th and 5th grades. At the middle school level, a stand-alone math class in grade 6, as well as an intervention elective in grades 7 and 8, are available to support students who need additional instruction. For students who demonstrate exceptional ability, Slavens offers the ability for students to

“grade skip” and attend mathematics instruction with the next grade level. Once eighth grade is reached, students with exceptional ability are provided the option to attend an online tenth grade geometry class.

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

Our elementary science classes use the BSCS Science Tracks: Connecting Science and Literacy with the goal of providing students with meaningful hands-on science which provokes students to ask more questions and investigate deeper. The elementary programs compartmentalize the content and skills to plateau them throughout the grade levels. This means that a deeper level of science is taught as a student progresses through the grade levels. A full range of study within Life Science, Physics, Earth and Environmental sciences are taught throughout. The middle school uses a hands-on science curriculum which builds skills through inquiry and application. The middle school students study the Human Body, Diseases, Energy, Land, Water and Human Interaction, Space, Earth, Chemistry, and Forces and Motion. Students of science at Slavens are prepared to protect their environment and see it as a world to be respected through what they learn at each grade level.

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

The goal of social studies at Slavens is to teach students to understand their world and the people in it through geography, history, and economics. Students at the elementary level learn about geography and history in each unit of study. Within at least one particular unit they learn an economic concept. For instance, a focus on the rainforest in grade 1 incorporates study into the economic impact of the rainforest on families and communities. In middle school, 6th graders study geographic regions and how weather impacts food production and trade around the globe. Economics remains a connecting piece in World History in seventh grade and American History in 8th grade. In these ways we seek to nurture the developing whole child who will grow to become a thoughtful citizen, able to see connections across disciplines, and make decisions informed by their understanding of global dynamics.

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

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

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

### **Arts**

The fact that Slavens has a fundraising organization (Friends of Slavens School; FOSS) dedicated almost entirely to supporting the arts speaks strongly to our commitment to developing children who can reflect, create, and express through a variety of artistic endeavors. We believe the arts are integral to the positive development of the whole child and cannot be separated from success. As such, students can choose to participate in vocal music, band, and drama, instruments such as guitar and violin, the visual arts, and STEAM (technology and art). Our students’ art product and performances are regularly recognized at competitions from the district to state level. Throughout our arts programming, students develop their own personal creative processes rather than relying on traditional guided instruction.

### **Physical education /Health/Nutrition**

At Slavens, our core value is for all students to achieve lifelong health, wellness, and academic success. Our physical education program has two full-time teachers and a half time dance teacher. Each of these teachers has earned a Master’s degree, and one is also National Board Certified. We are able to implement our core values by offering physical education and/or dance to elementary students for 30 minutes per day, five days a week. The middle school students are offered PE and/or dance 2-3 times a week for 40 minutes per class. In addition to being a district leader in our PE program, we have twelve organized sports teams that compete within the district. Our athletics department, directed by one of our own PE teachers, is proud to have 80%

of our middle school students playing on at least one sports team each year.

#### Foreign language

All Slavens students take Spanish in 6th through 8th grade for a middle school language experience that offers continuity and a clear pathway to fluency in high school. Sixth grade students complete an average of 100 minutes of seat time per week during the elective block, and 7th and 8th graders attend a 57-minute core class of Spanish daily. Slavens Spanish teachers are trained in “Comprehensible Input,” a communicative immersion approach to language acquisition. Lessons are conducted 95%+ in Spanish. After one year, students can independently read and understand several Spanish chapter books and write a one-page story in Spanish. After two years, they can compete in verbal debates and write an academic essay about a unit of cultural study. On the district World Language assessment given in April of each school year, Slavens students average Intermediate Low scores and typically enter high school able to enroll in Spanish 3 or Spanish 4 classes.

#### Technology/Library/Media

Slavens offers a wide variety of technology, library and media classes to inspire creativity, engage critical thinking skills, and expand student’s knowledge of data management, communication and engineering. In Slavens’ innovative STEM lab, students in grades one through eight tackle challenges and create solutions using a variety of software tools including TinkerCAD 3D Design (with 3D printing), Scratch programming platform, Lego EV3 robotics, GarageBand sound editor, Pixelmator photo editing software, and Home Designer 3D, to name a few. In addition, students use hands-on kits such as Snap Circuits, K’Nex, Legos, and Zometool for beginning engineering work. Partner and group work is emphasized, and students’ ability to think critically in partnership with others is a focus. Additionally, all students in kindergarten through middle school receive direct, regular instruction in responsible technology usage, typing skills, Google Suite tools, and search and research strategies in Library and Technology classes. Seventh and eighth grade students are offered additional electives in digital photography, STEAM (integrating technology and the arts), Computer Aided Design (CAD) for architecture, and Coding class.

#### Character Education

In the 2014-2015 school year, Slavens implemented the Leader in Me whole-school transformation process. This model, based upon work from Stephen Covey’s 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, empowers students with the leadership and life skills they will need to be successful in the 21st century. Skills include being proactive (“You’re in Charge”); beginning with the end in mind (“Have a Plan”); putting first things first (“Work First, Then Play”); thinking win-win (“Everyone Can Win”); seeking first to understand then be understood; synergizing (“Together is Better”); and sharpening the saw (“Balance Feels Best”). Work around the “seven habits” begins in kindergarten and continues as it is integrated into the daily whole class and school culture through fifth grade. Examples of this work in action include student-planned and run leadership assemblies, and integral leadership roles within classrooms that students apply for based upon individual skill sets. In sixth through eighth grades, students receive even more intensive instruction through daily and/or weekly discussions, and a book study to deeply instill these critical skills during their transition to young adulthood.

### **3. Special Populations:**

Perhaps above all, Slavens has a highly robust model for meeting the needs of diverse learners. As the foundation for our programming, regular assessment and review of data is used to identify students whose needs may extend beyond the instruction that most peers receive. Data review occurs both informally through grade-level meetings, as well formally through regularly scheduled data team meetings with school leadership. Teachers implement responsive planning for students following these meetings, adjusting classroom-level approaches and tracking subsequent growth.

For students performing below grade level expectations, a referral to the MTSS Team may be requested by parents or staff. This process coordinates teacher and parent input with additional screening and observational data provided by specialized service providers (psychologist, speech pathologist, occupational therapist) in order to better understand a student’s needs and guide an intervention plan. If a student fails to close expected gaps following a period of in-class interventions and accommodations, higher levels of

support or identification, be they interventions of increased frequency or intensity, special education supports, or evaluation under Section 504, will occur.

Intervention and supports for these learners take many forms at Slavens. Tier 2 pull out math intervention is available daily for students in grades 4 and 5, as a stand-alone math class in grade 6, and as an intervention elective in grades 7 and 8. Daily pull-out reading intervention is available for students from kindergarten through 5th grades. At the middle school level, reading and writing intervention is addressed through “Literature Skills,” “Study Skills” and SOAR electives. Many teachers in 3rd-8th grades offer before and after school support sessions to cover recently learned skills in a more intensive, small group environment. Additionally, the school provides a special education para for individual and small group math tutoring several days per week for any upper elementary or middle school student that is interested. Finally, recognizing the need to serve students with learning differences in a comprehensive way, our school has prioritized the funding of additional special education paraprofessionals and teachers, as well as ESL staffing, beyond what is covered by our district budget. This allows us to service students who need intensive small group academic support, regardless of whether or not they have been formally identified.

For students who perform above grade level, small group enrichment is regularly provided by our G/T teacher. Both students formally identified as gifted and talented, as well as those without a formal identification, receive these supports if need is demonstrated through in class performance. Teachers support differentiation of these students within the classroom by responsive programming following unit pre-testing, grouping students based upon proficiency and enriching content for those who would benefit from additional challenge. For students whose performance is well above their peers, grade advancement in math is supported from 4th through 7th grades, and accelerated math classes in 8th grade. Finally, groups and clubs that intensively challenge students’ academic aptitudes, such as spelling bee, Mathletics, Brain Bowl, and Light House writers, are led by Slavens’ teachers throughout the school year.

Supporting the needs of diverse learners is an ongoing goal for our staff. We continue to push ourselves to grow in this area, with whole school professional development this year dedicated to differentiation across the spectrum, specifically addressing modifications to presentation of material, content, and requirements for student product.

## PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

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### 1. School Climate/Culture:

Slavens' school culture, first and foremost, focuses on the value of each student's unique contributions both socially and academically to our school community. We uphold this ideal by supporting all students' engagement in leadership roles through our Leader in Me programming. These roles may be unique to an individual—entertaining the class while the teacher steps out, or being a technology guru within the classroom—or they may highlight grade-level leadership, such as middle schoolers pairing with younger peers on science fair projects, or older elementary students partnering with younger buddies for weekly reading. Additionally, students of all ages work together to design and facilitate Leadership Assemblies that recognize the important work students do within the school. These partnerships support not just collaboration amongst students, but likewise between staff and grade levels, facilitating an awareness of others' roles that is critical to a caring, supportive school culture amongst faculty. They also provide multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery, innovation, and leadership that extend beyond traditional academic skill sets, and as such are inclusive of a range of abilities and perspectives that students demonstrate within our school.

On this note, Slavens provides a broad array of clubs and teams that both facilitate and celebrate a diversity of student passions and abilities. These include both staff-run and student-led groups such as Green Team (environmental activism), National Junior Honor Society, Gay-Straight Alliance, Destination Imagination, Athletics, a variety of sports teams, Community Action Team (service projects), and multiple musical groups, such as Jazz Band and Choir. Student service and contribution to school culture is recognized at quarterly "Super Citizen" assemblies, where one student per class is nominated by his or her peers and recognized by our local Optimist Club. On a smaller scale, students and staff are regularly identified and celebrated for embodying the "7 Habits," with nominations prominently displayed for our school community to see.

In the classroom, our teachers embody the culturally responsive teaching style of warm demanders, focusing both on excellent instruction, as well as developing close, trusting relationships that foster willingness to take risks. This type of environment supports all students in rising to high expectations and feeling confident in their abilities as learners. Furthermore, our master teachers recognize that the best learning comes from collaboration, so in addition providing frequent opportunities for students to work with one another, they regularly collaborate with both other staff and parents. At the building level, this collaboration is fostered by our "One Slavens" mentality, where group breakfasts, team building, and authentic sharing of selves draws us together as a team. As a result of, and in celebration of, these close partnerships, staff are regularly recognized by both administration and the parent community. These recognitions have ranged from coffee delivery to in-classroom back massage to "Fabulous Friday" taco lunch bars.

### 2. Engaging Families and Community:

Slavens K-8 uses multiple strategies in working with family and community members for student success and school improvement, including educational outreach, relationship building through unique shared experiences, and frequent communication. For example, our middle school teachers have organized Parent Book Clubs that relate to student success and the challenges of our current realities. Staff are able to facilitate meaningful and collaborative discussion on these pertinent topics using great texts such as *The Gift of Failure: How the Best Parents Learn to Let Go So Their Children Can Succeed* by Jessica Lahey. Many grade levels have parent workshops to help with academics, Back to School Nights, open houses to bridge students' home life with school. Educators provide frequent communication to support connections with families through a variety of strategies, including regular newsletters, use of phone apps, creation of websites, and sharing of pictures, all of which improve families' knowledge of and investment in a child's success at school.

Parent volunteering, and the strong relationships between parents and educators at Slavens, has a

pronounced impact on student success and school improvement. We have several formal parent groups that make it possible to build these partnerships: Friends of Slavens School (FOSS), Parent Teacher Association (PTA), Middle School Parent Alliance (MSPA), and Collaborative School Committee (CSC). FOSS is a 501(c) 3 charity charged with the goal of raising money to ensure Slavens students have access to a well-rounded education featuring key courses including art, music, foreign language, and STEM. Along with FOSS, the school's PTA and MSPA contributions add to student success and schoolwide improvement. Slavens' PTA is the school's largest fundraising entity. While a majority of their effort is spent on raising funds, their mission is to engage families, enhance school programs, and supply much needed educational supplies, equipment, technology, and teacher professional development. The MSPA is the non-fundraising branch of the PTA that specifically addresses middle school needs and activities. Our CSC is responsible for partnering with the administration to collaboratively make decisions for the school in regard to budget, curriculum, and others that respond to the needs of the whole school. Aside from formal parent groups, Slavens' parents have many additional opportunities to get involved. They can volunteer for the annual Slavens' Auction that raises hundreds of thousands of dollars for the school, the "Drop off and Pick up Safety Patrol" that ensures children's safety, the annual Arts Festival, and numerous others. Slavens would not be the special place and community it is today without the partnership educators have with the amazing parent community.

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

The Slavens approach to professional growth and development focuses on teachers as central to student learning, and encompasses individual, collegial, and organizational improvement. Our professional development respects and nurtures the intellectual and leadership capacity of our teachers. It reflects the best available research and practice in teaching and learning and enables teachers to develop further expertise in instructional strategies and other essential elements in teaching to higher standards. To this end, the school provides funding for teachers to attend state and national conferences and professional development (such as CCIRA, Learning and the Brain, and trainings by Peg Dawson, author of Smart but Scattered) in order to refine their craft.

The school leadership team (SLT) is charged with planning collaboratively a yearly action plan for professional development. The ultimate goal of all PD is to promote continuous inquiry and to see improvements embedded in the daily instruction through the entire school. Professional development topics designed and utilized by our staff have focused on supporting the whole child through identification of and response to individual student needs. Topics have included differentiation in instruction, evidence based instructional practices (guided by John Hattie's Visible Learning), and supporting diverse learners (including topics in reading disability, executive functioning, and collaborative problem solving). As a result, teachers report improved capacity to independently support the whole child, while maintaining academic rigor and warmth in their classrooms.

Professional development provided at Slavens is evaluated ultimately on the basis of its impact on teacher effectiveness and student learning; this assessment guides subsequent PD efforts from one year to the next. For example, by evaluating CSAP data over several years, Slavens staff recognized the need to improve writing across the entire curriculum. To address this need, Slavens partnered with another school whose instructional practices in writing have led to strong student growth in order to collaboratively plan. Additionally, teachers attended district professional development and national trainings, and school leadership conducted targeted observations of writing instruction in order to guide feedback for best practices. Although our metrics for evaluating writing have changed with the transition to CMAS from CSAP, and therefore direct comparisons of growth are not possible, we continue to focus on the writing needs of every student and uphold an expectation that all teachers support writing skill across curriculum.

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

At Slavens, partnership with school leadership is integrated into our whole school culture. The principal, assistant principal, and dean of instruction have an open door policy, which school staff will uniformly agree creates a sense of trust, value, and collaboration that is critical to our team's success. This policy extends to parents, and as such, families feel comfortable approaching leadership with concerns, which

results in more productive, collaborative relationships schoolwide.

In addition to these three positions, Slavens has three Senior Team Leads who coach, mentor, and evaluate faculty members with the goal of continuous student improvement. The unique capacity of our Senior Team Leads stems from their concurrent roles as both leadership and classroom teachers, which allows them to speak to concerns experienced by other teachers with authenticity. Together, these six individuals form our Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), who then further collaborate to understand and respond to staff needs, design professional development, and monitor and promote staff and school culture.

We believe that one of the most important roles leadership provides is to remove barriers for teachers so that they are able to focus primarily on effective teaching and growing relationships with students and families. Be it partnering with teachers to addressing exceptional student need, supporting teachers in the selection of an alternative literacy curriculum, or providing teachers with double the mandated plan time, as well as common grade level planning time, in order to collaborate most effectively, our school leadership works to ensure teachers have what they need to be excellent educators.

Ultimately, our guiding model is that of shared leadership, which is evidenced by the reciprocal trust and support between administration, staff, parents, community members and students. This trust between leadership and stakeholders is a key facet of Slavens' success. Our administrators trust that classroom teachers will do what is best for their unique student needs, and as such, teachers are given the autonomy to create new ideas while supporting the standards. Administrators are then able to support new ideas by providing resources and at times, initiating further ideas for student achievement.

Within our shared leadership model, all teachers are requested to be a part of committee. These committees include the Lighthouse Team which supports the Leader in Me process, Instructional Services Advisory team to focus on the progress of our English Language Learners, a Community Action team who focuses on building bridges between the community and the school, as well as both Personnel and Social Committees. Finally, our school leadership team (SLT), comprised of representatives from across grades and disciplines, collaborates on our school's Unified Improvement Plan and communicates goals and priorities to our staff from the administration.

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

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As a K-8 school, our success begins with a shared vision for all students. It starts when students enter kindergarten and continue until they complete 8th grade at Slavens. Research regularly supports that adolescents in K-8 schools have higher achievement and attendance and better social-emotional wellbeing than those in a 6-8 configuration. Data from Slavens has borne this out, not only for our middle schoolers, but for all students.

Beginning in 2007, Denver Public Schools implemented a comprehensive, annual review of school performance in the form of a scorecard that measures multiple performance criteria, called the School Performance Framework (SPF). The categories include student progress over time (growth), student achievement level (status), post-secondary readiness, student engagement, school demand, and parent and community engagement. This school-specific document is a way to give the district, school, and the broader community the information they need to make critical instructional decisions that will have the most significant impact on improving student achievement.

Since the implementation of the SPF in 2007, Slavens has been rated “Distinguished” every year in our elementary grades and middle school. To be labeled “Distinguished” the school must receive 80-100% of the possible points available on the SPF. Within this document, the school is scored on their overall status on CMAS/PARCC, but more importantly, on the overall growth over time. Slavens has met or exceeded the district standard in every category since the SPF implementation. It is quite an accomplishment to have 86%-92% of your students proficient or advanced in all subject areas, but quite another to continue to grow at a faster rate than approximately 80% of similar students in Colorado.

Our K-8 system likewise supports social emotional wellbeing in a multitude of ways. Teachers are regularly involved with students across many different grade levels through coaching, field trip chaperoning, and student leadership activities, which fosters a sense of community and belonging outside of typical classroom contacts. Research consistently demonstrates that this sense of connection and community is a powerful predictor of wellbeing, as well as academic success, within schools. Additionally, our school culture has continuously emphasized the important role of mentorship between older to younger students. These connections provide a sense of purpose, and have been demonstrated to improve students’ sense of safety and reduce bullying behaviors in later years. The results of our district’s annual climate survey supports this: in the 2017-2018 school year, Slavens topped every elementary school in the district with regards to student-reported whole child outcomes such as feeling safe, socially-emotionally intelligent, engaged, and supported. We were likewise in the top 3 for each of these criteria at the middle school level.