

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 Mrs. Angela Schmidt

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

Official School Name North Mianus School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 309 Palmer Hill Road

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

Riverside CT 06878-1011
City State Zip Code+4 (9 digits total)

County Fairfield County

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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. Toni Jones

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other) E-mail toni_jones@greenwich.k12.ct.us

District Name Greenwich School District Tel. (203) 625-7400

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. Peter Bernstein

(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):
- 11 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 3 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 1 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 15 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	37	52	89
1	44	32	76
2	41	38	79
3	56	33	89
4	46	41	87
5	39	33	72
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	263	229	492

*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
 - 20 % Asian
 - 0 % Black or African American
 - 15 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 60 % White
 - 1 % Two or more races
 - 100 % Total**

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

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2017 – 2018 school year: 3%

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	4
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2017 until the end of the 2017-2018 school year	9
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	13
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2017	505
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.03
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	3

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 7%
34 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):
Cantonese, Dutch, German, Hindi, Hungarian, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish, Vietnamese

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 3%
 Total number students who qualify: 16

8. Students receiving special education services: 11 %
52 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>4</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>10</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay | <u>25</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>13</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>0</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 10
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	2
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	24
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	21
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	6
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 21:1

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	97%	97%	97%	97%	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.

North Mianus seeks to educate all students to their fullest potential and to develop responsible, creative, and compassionate members of society.

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

North Mianus is a neighborhood elementary school located in Riverside, Connecticut, a suburb of New York City. We are a school of five hundred two students, the largest elementary school in Greenwich. Ten years ago the school population was largely homogenous. We have seen an increased influx of foreign students from all over the world, with the majority coming from Spanish speaking and Asian countries. North Mianus is a warm and welcoming community and the infusion of the school norms into our daily instruction has resulted in students who demonstrate tolerance and kindness. Our discipline data indicates few office referrals, attesting to the infusion of district norms and a positive and caring school community that puts students first.

The school was founded in 1925 and its legacy is clearly the annual Pow Wow or carnival sponsored by the PTA and faculty. It is the largest fundraising event and enters its 77th year this spring. The spirit of North Mianus is apparent to everyone who observes the efforts of parents, staff and community in organizing this monumental event. The PTA ensures that proceeds go back to teachers and students for field trips and school events chosen with teacher and PTA collaboration and aligned with district curriculum.

In addition to our traditional Pow Wow we also host an annual Veteran’s Day ceremony inviting parents, grandparents and community service workers who have served our country. Parents are always welcome at the school and frequently support school events such as Kindergarten Friendship Day or the Monster Mash.

North Mianus embodies the Greenwich Public Schools Vision of the Graduate by developing interpersonal capacities like community service. Nine years ago we developed a close partnership with CHAMPS, a non-profit organization sponsoring mine detection dogs dedicated to building a safer environment for children all over the world. The annual fifth grade CHAMPS walk instructs visitors about the hazards of land mines and has sparked a close relationship with the local Rotary Club. Two of our staff members also sponsor an annual charity basketball tournament dedicated to supplying produce to our local shelter. Through these and many other activities our students learn the value of service to others.

The Vision of the Graduate embodies the beliefs of North Mianus in developing the academic, interpersonal and personal capacities of every student. Through a variety of strategies, we instill these capacities in many ways. Academic capacities are developed in a student-centered, standards based approach to learning. Through “voice and choice” our students help to design flexible seating that includes comfortable seating, bouncy chairs, quiet work areas and collaborative space. A personalized approach to learning ensures every student can progress at an appropriate pace and includes playlists, choice boards or station rotation in which students have choices based on pre-assessment data and interest. This data is used to determine the appropriate path and to help students plan appropriate goals along with the teacher. These assessments identify strengths as well as areas of need and provide a clear path to content mastery. Playlists include physical and digital content and provide resources necessary to ensure students can own and self-regulate their learning. Links can provide access to directions, videos, tasks, research articles and other exploration. Through inquiry, critical thinking, innovation and complex problem solving, North Mianus students are moved to a deeper level of understanding at a pace appropriate for each student. Post-assessments and teacher-student conferences provide feedback and evidence of successful student mastery.

Personal capacities guide students to be tolerant of other cultures and points of view. They encourage students to pursue passions, persevere and be responsible. We build these capacities by getting to know each student through interest surveys and taking the time to get to know them as both individuals and learners. The surveys conducted at the beginning of the year help identify areas of interest and strength and allow us to use the information to plan activities where their passions can be expressed. Research indicates bonding with a teacher has a positive impact on student success. We believe every student benefits from such a bond.

Interpersonal capacities are developed through project- based learning in third through fifth grade, debates in fifth grade and community service projects. Our Student Council provides leadership in collaborating with others to achieve a common goal. They initiate activities like “Crazy Hat or Hair Day” or “School Spirit Day” to build a positive school climate. They also serve as Student Ambassadors or tour guides for visitors

to our school. Evidence of the effects of these capacities was evident recently when a third grade student asked if they might have every student in the school decorate a fish origami he created to demonstrate how we are all different yet still alike. This action embodies the capacity of the Vision of the Graduate and the spirit of North Mianus.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

1a. Reading/English language arts:

The language arts core curriculum ensures students develop the strategies and skills needed to comprehend and communicate effectively in a variety of contexts. Personalized Learning provides multiple opportunities for students to think critically. Reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing and presenting are addressed within the units of study, aligned with Connecticut Core Standards. Instructional strategies to maximize student growth and development in language arts focus on direct instruction, meaningful feedback, mastery learning and playlists to provide opportunities for practice, problem solving, and metacognitive growth. The workshop model has been the vehicle through which staff support learning within a balanced literacy approach. Explicit teaching through mini lessons, small group instruction, independent practice, and guided practice permeate the reading and writing block each day. Connections between reading and writing are made using a variety of acronyms to support the tiered development of writing skills such as summarizing and textual evidence. Unique features found within the curriculum are the ongoing development and refinement of playlists to support, teach and extend the reading and writing process. Another element, unique to the school is flexible grouping in the primary classrooms to support student's emerging phonemic awareness and literacy development. In the first weeks of school kindergarten, early literacy assessments are administered followed by six to eight weeks of explicit instruction. Teachers reconvene after that to determine which students need early intervention and to plan flexible groups for the word study block. We have carefully tracked data and noted strong growth in K-1 literacy as a result. All grades, K-5, use district units of study and assessments as well as screening assessments given five times per year to monitor growth and determine appropriate strategies and interventions. Data suggests that early and frequent assessment and intervention promote student success, and at North Mianus School our classroom teachers and support staff work diligently to personalize instruction

1b. Mathematics:

The Mathematics curriculum is aligned to the Connecticut Core Standards for Mathematics. A variety of resources and strategies are used to implement the standards. Math in Focus is the primary instructional resource for the elementary schools, but we also draw on a variety of resources including digital tools. The District Strategic Plan is in the fourth year of implementation and the academic capacity of Personalized Learning is our primary focus. Each unit has a pre-assessment and staff have revised these assessments to include the standards from the previous and following grades. Once the assessment is complete it is reviewed with students. The teacher and student confer to set goals based on the outcome. If a previous standard was not mastered the student might begin with re-teaching in small group. This might be done during a block of time called WIND (What I Need), or through teacher-created videos. Students, in collaboration with the teacher choose a Playlist for the unit based on learning style, strengths and needs. A Playlist is a document that contains a progression of tiered learning aligned with standards, learning targets or content. It provides structure and allows a student to move at an individual pace. Links can provide access to instructions, videos, tasks, resources for research, articles and other means to engage and explore. Playlists provide a deeper level of rigor than the workshop model and provide opportunities to explore the concrete, visual and abstract models of mathematics instruction. Depending on pre-assessment data a variety of playlists are created. Students work independently or with others on their playlists. They meet with the teacher on a regular basis to check in and daily Exit Slips, tasks and journals allow the teacher to determine next steps and provide timely feedback. The end of unit assessment is also administered along with data collected from various digital resources and results are discussed with students as partners in learning.

1c. Science:

The Science curriculum implemented this year is aligned with the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). It contains three dimensions: scientific, engineering practices, and crosscutting concepts that can be applied across all science disciplines and core ideas (physical, life, earth and space sciences and engineering

and technology). This year the new units were introduced after teachers were provided opportunities to attend professional learning and pilot the units at various grade levels previously. This year we have begun to merge science and math instruction into STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math).

The new standards require greater rigor and a new way of thinking for both teacher and student. In a third grade unit, for example, on chemical change students are expected to develop an understanding of how physical and chemical properties affect uses of materials by developing a model to describe matter, by measuring and creating graphs and by conducting investigations. The models require frequent revisiting as students gain greater understanding throughout the unit. Science notebooks have become more essential to the learning process as students track their thinking and teachers provide feedback. The crosscutting concepts help students see the value of using data and evidence from investigations and problem solving. As we move to a more interdisciplinary approach our students have greater exposure to real world scenarios and data analysis. They are assessed through work in science notebooks, unit pre-assessments, post-assessments and presentations, both orally and using digital resources. We have begun to create playlists that include the use of tables and graphs. Students are expected to use these tools to draw conclusions about scientific problems. Our School Data Team feels it is important for students to be exposed to these tools as early as first grade so they see the value of using information to draw conclusions. We are confident it will help students grow as scientists and mathematicians.

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

The social studies curriculum at North Mianus School is integrated into literacy instruction during a cross-curricular block known as Humanities. The core curriculum has been created using the guiding principles of the National Council for Social Studies. Topics of study evolve through each grade level around the four overarching concepts of geography, history, civics and economics. The skills and concepts taught throughout the units align with the Vision of the Graduate, which promote academic, personal and interpersonal capacities. What makes our curriculum unique is the integration of debates in the intermediate grades, encouraging students to make meaningful, real-world connections, supporting students as they learn to analyze and construct arguments. What makes the social studies curriculum unique is also the integration of curriculum concepts with inquiry-based teaching methods and personalized learning. Students are immersed in historical references, civic duties and economic principles throughout their day and showcase their learning through a variety of outlets. The collaboration between literacy specialist and the general education teachers has resulted in units such as Connecticut history, incorporating literacy and writing with the social studies unit framework. This unit also included several playlists to support personalization. Within the curriculum, students take the primary role of answering overarching questions and researching primary sources to gain understanding. As teachers become more adept at developing playlists our students play a greater role in conducting research and pursuing topics of interest. Staff have become facilitators in the acquisition of knowledge and promote student communication to help others learn from their peers. Assessments and journal entries indicate our students benefit from opportunities to explore areas of interest within the social studies curriculum.

1e. For secondary schools:

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

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

1. Personalized Learning is incorporated into the art program with the implementation of Teaching for Artistic Behaviors (TAB). In a TAB class students learn about art by assuming the role of artist, directing their learning. Using district curriculum, students are presented with a concept or problem and provided a variety of mediums such as clay or watercolors. Once introduced to all available mediums students choose to demonstrate understanding of the standards through a final product. Notebooks are used to create a sketch

and plan a draft. Every “artist” has time for reflection and may revisit work in progress. In the TAB studio students learn to collaborate, use judgement and problem solve. Students are assessed with iPad reflections, journals and finished pieces. Rubrics allow them to self-assess along with teacher feedback. It is evident that students have found a new level of engagement with this innovative approach.

Elementary music includes units of instruction and assessments for four Artistic Processes: performing, creating, connecting and responding. Digital integration has allowed students to create pieces on the iPad. The curriculum aligns with indicators from Vision of the Graduate such as “Generate innovative, creative ideas and products” The music teacher collaborates with classroom teachers to support units of instruction such as the Sound unit in Science.

Performing Arts Chorus, band and orchestra are offered to intermediate students beginning in third and fourth grade. Students receive 90 minutes of instruction per week. Participation in these groups is high and North Mianus is always heavily represented in honors choir, band and orchestra events.

2. The physical education/health program provides a quality learning experience focused on concepts and skills related to physical activity, healthy choices and social emotional learning. Students spend forty minutes three times a week in physical education in K-1 and sixty minutes twice a week in grades 2-5. The goal of the program is to develop physically literate individuals who have learned skills needed to participate in physical activities, and are physically active. In addition to skills, students learn teamwork, caring for self and others, safety and resilience.

The health curriculum is taught primarily by the classroom teacher and includes a variety of topics under Human Growth and Development, Injury and Disease Control. The PE teacher is responsible for teaching substance abuse. The physical education and health curriculum embody the school norms, supporting social-emotional learning by encouraging sportsmanship, team building, and collaboration. These skills are important in all aspects of curriculum and life.

3. Foreign Language World Language study (FLES) in grades 3-5 introduces students to both cultural and linguistic understanding of the Spanish language. One of the primary goals of the program is to support students in communicating their basic needs and wants in Spanish. True immersion in the Spanish language is the primary instructional strategy used by the FLES teacher. Students are spoken to primarily in Spanish and provided visuals, models, and body language, building on background knowledge in the students’ native language. The continuum of language acquisition begins with listening and speaking at the early stages of the FLES curriculum, and progresses to reading, writing and presenting as their second language develops. Students receive instruction four days a week for thirty minute periods. Discussions with middle school FLES instructors indicate our students enter middle school at a more advanced level of language acquisition with early exposure.

4. The learning commons (media center) is the hub of the school, playing a pivotal role in the education of all students. Direct instruction is provided in grades K-2 and support is given to grades 3-5 in curriculum areas, research and technology. In addition to providing print and electronic resources, the learning commons is home to the innovation space where students are encouraged to tinker and use hands-on experiences to explore technology and the world around them. The curriculum aligns with national and state standards and supports the Vision of the Graduate by providing academic support in units of study, bringing in guest authors and speakers and building school community with technology projects like Genius Hour and project based learning.

5. Character Building: School norms are district-wide and include Be Safe, Be Here, Be Honest, Care for Self and Others and Let Go and Move On. These are guiding principles infused in everything we do and part of daily language. The Second Steps program provides specific lessons in each of the norms. Recently our school began training in Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS). The implementation of this framework will provide a consistent school-wide plan for discipline, further supporting school norms. Effectiveness of the school plan is measured by our low rate of office referrals and positive school environment.

3. Special Populations:

North Mianus is comprised of approximately 10% special education students, 6% English language learners, 12% gifted students and 12% receiving intervention. Our Personalized Learning initiative has enabled teachers, interventionists, support staff and paraprofessionals to differentiate learning for each child. Instruction in the classroom is directly related to assessment data pulled from the Connecticut Core State Standards and students are able to personalize learning to standards needed for continued mastery in a content area. The schedule has been created to incorporate “WIND” time (What I Need) every day for students in grades K-5. Keeping with our personalized learning approach, students are provided opportunities to choose where they need support and use this time to meet in small groups with peers, meet with teachers, and/or practice skills in a particular area. Additional classroom supports such as interventions, special education services and advanced placement classes are offered for children based on evaluations and assessments and are tailored to their specific learning needs. English language newcomers work in a pullout setting based on their Language Assessment Scales (LAS) Links score and are supported in the classroom as their language acquisition grows. Students who are non-English speakers also work through a gradual release program, with the goal of class participation as soon as possible.

The Advanced Learning Program (ALP) is for those students who require enrichment as evidenced by classroom performance and assessments such as the CogAT. Grades 3-5 use a content replacement model in language arts and/or math. Second grade students receive enrichment opportunities. Students are exposed to literary analysis and persuasive writing to move them into the realm of literary analysis. Math students demonstrate mastery of grade level standards and receive instruction typically a year above grade level.

Interventions are tiered and curricular programs are picked to specifically target each group’s unique set of needs. For example, Tier 1 instruction for reading includes the ability to access certain digital resources before moving to a more systematic program. In Tiers 2 and 3, researched-based programs are used by trained interventionists to support reading instruction. The variety of intervention options give our students the opportunity to find the appropriate strategy to facilitate learning. The state guidelines for Response to Intervention outlines clear steps required for all students as they move throughout intervention timeline including ongoing assessments to assess progress. To refine the intervention system, meetings are held on a 6-8-week basis and are run by a team of administrators, support staff and general education teachers. Decisions are made based on mastery of their goals, which can be evidenced by classroom performance and progress monitoring data. Goals and strategies are recorded by the interventionist digitally and updated regularly to help the team look at each child individually. Formative and summative assessments are also used for progress monitoring. The information and data gained help drive the decision-making process and determine if the goals and interventions are successful. To ensure all students are successful, frequent progress monitoring, team meetings, Planning and Placement team meetings and feedback from all professionals involved is a common practice at North Mianus School.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

At North Mianus School, we believe that all children can learn and our goal is to support the whole child. Our movement towards personalized learning has increased engagement and motivation in academic learning. The introduction of Professional Learning Communities has created a unique opportunity for vertical teams to address a common problem of practice, creating greater partnerships and collaboration. This has led to closer relationships both professionally and socially. A positive outcome is the movement to a less competitive relationship among teachers.

The administration has worked hard to ensure a climate of mutual trust and respect has been established and that teachers find a balance between home and careers. To foster a positive environment, administrators model positive interactions and present a united front in all decisions.

Teachers are supported socially through team-building activities and social gatherings. Activities like surprise breakfasts or goodie bags along with the recognition of risk-taking has helped the staff move to a culture of celebrating the success of all.

Frequent meetings with paraprofessionals, teachers and support staff to discuss and address concerns ensures all stakeholders have a voice.

The Staff Advisory committee supports the needs of the staff by providing an outlet to voice concerns about building-based issues to staff representatives. Meetings are held monthly and the information is shared with administrators to address concerns. North Mianus is an environment where teachers and administrators work collaboratively to ensure the success of every child.

Students at North Mianus are taught the school norms from kindergarten and these norms are reinforced on a daily basis when walking in hallways, transitioning to special classes or at lunch and recess. The school recently introduced Mindfulness as a strategy to help students calm down, avoid stressful situations and prepare for new learning. Many staff members have found this to be an effective strategy for their own well-being. Students often come to administration with suggestions. Recently, a third grade student created an origami fish for every student.

His intent was to have every student decorate the fish demonstrating the unique perspectives we bring to the school. This project evolved into a celebration of our culture and is displayed on the bulletin board. This is not uncommon in a school where students have been empowered to contribute to the school community, whether through community service or creativity.

A positive school culture develops when all members of the community are dedicated to the values and beliefs we embrace. This is truly that special community.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

North Mianus has developed a reputation as a high achieving and welcoming school community. A visitor's first impressions are lasting; and our office and administration takes time to welcome potential new families with a personal tour and individual time with the administration. New families frequently share they chose our school because of their welcoming visit, rigorous academics and recommendations of friends and community members.

Communication is very important and the principal provides a weekly update through the PTA newsletter highlighting school events, sharing moments of pride, discussing professional learning and informing parents of academic news. There are meetings scheduled between the principal and the PTA co-presidents twice a month for updates. An Open Door policy is also a hallmark of our school.

Parents are welcome to have lunch with their child or meet with teachers and administrators. Meetings are always scheduled within twenty-four hours. “Ask the Administrator” is a strategy that has met with great success and continues to be well-attended. Parents are invited to come four to six times a year to meet with administration and bring topics for discussion. Meetings occur mornings or evenings to ensure all who wish to attend may do so. Topics this year have included how to interpret assessments, understand Personalized Learning and Student Goal Setting. This open forum has helped to support greater understanding.

Parent conferences are held every winter and the highlight was having our fifth graders lead their own conference and write their own report card comments. Our parent representative from the PTA meet regularly with the principal to review progress of the School Improvement Plan (SIP) and attends meetings of the School Data Team. We offer many events throughout the school year such as STEAM Night, International Night, Open Music and Art Week, parent/student dances and Special Education coffees to ensure parents have opportunities to see students at work and to partner with them. The principal has spoken at the local Rotary Club to enlist their support in charitable work and share some of our academic successes.

Our local and state government representatives are often invited to visit our school to talk with students about the role of government and to answer questions about how they support our school and community.

North Mianus frequently reaches out to the local newspapers and radio station to share our academic successes as well as upcoming school events. In this way, parents and community know us as partners in our local community.

3. Professional Development:

The past few years have seen sweeping changes in professional learning. It began with the merging of professional learning with the teacher evaluation system (TEPL). Teachers and administrators collaborate at mid-year and end of year conferences in determining TEPL indicators where additional growth is needed. This personalized approach has helped teachers build capacity and bring new learning back to the classroom. For example, a teacher who is struggling with the implementation of higher level questioning in science could attend a workshop on teaching the new NGSS standards. The collaboration between administrator and teacher provides a targeted approach to professional growth.

The District Strategic Plan incorporates a three pronged approach to growth, including academic, personal and interpersonal capacities aligning with the Vision of the Graduate. The academic focus on Personalized Learning includes professional development in creating playlists, students as partners, student regulation and student ownership. Opportunities to learn more about PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention Support) and Mindfulness (interpersonal and personal capacities) are also offered. Our District provides three full day workshops using a course catalog. Much like a college course book, teachers are able to choose from a variety of workshops aligned with the District Strategic Plan and teacher evaluation indicators. This approach has allowed greater focus on identified needs supporting both buildings and District initiatives. Opportunities for teachers to lead workshops has also been a hallmark of the change.

At North Mianus professional learning is based on analysis of student need using STAR (Renaissance Learning) and district benchmark assessments as well as Smarter Balanced assessments. Data from administrative walkthroughs also provides invaluable information for planning professional learning. Vertical articulation meetings to uncover gaps in curricular areas are incorporated into our School Data Team planning. For example, our team noted students were coming into fourth grade without mastering third grade standards related to area, perimeter and measurement despite continued emphasis on these units. Classroom demonstrations by instructional coaches and outside consultants helped teachers identify strategies and digital tools to support these standards. Frequent collaboration has led to an increased understanding and trust among staff and has led to our growth as Professional Learning Communities. Once a month faculty meetings address action items on our School Improvement Plan and allow time to discuss problems of practice. We invite our district coaches and Program Coordinators when addressing a curriculum issue. Teachers are provided time during the day to work with coaches on their grade level goals and also visit other schools to see Personal Learning in action across the District.

4. School Leadership:

North Mianus has a full-time principal and assistant principal. Our building has also developed a leadership team known as the School Data Team. Most members have been with the team for ten years, serving as the governing body for initiatives, development of the School Improvement Plan and data specialists from each grade. Building leadership capacity within our teaching staff is critical to development of future leaders. Four teachers have been chosen to attend the county leadership course.

Twenty first century leadership requires a new way of leading to ensure teachers are willing and able to follow the administrators into “unknown waters.”

Critical to leading a successful school is trust. North Mianus has welcomed several assistant principals over the past ten years. A new assistant principal was hired in November and it was clear the team needed to get to know each other quickly and develop a level of trust by building an alliance based on clear expectations and outcomes. Together the administrative team conducts daily walkthroughs in classrooms to build that trust and to help the assistant principal build an understanding of daily practice. Time spent with staff, learning their talents and interests has helped to build a leadership team willing and able to support the District Strategic Plan and the School Improvement Plan.

Transparency, honesty and communication are key components of our leadership. Teachers need to understand expectations and feel supported. Daily memos sent by the principal share welcome news, inform readers of district updates and help build communication. Both the principal and the assistant principal “tweet” good news frequently for staff and parents. Open and honest communication when dealing with difficult issues helps the administration build respect.

The administrative team believes in positive energy and focus and develops it within the staff by immersing ourselves in the work as part of the team. We help with research, seek other schools where model classrooms are available to observe and most of all we recognize effort even when it fails to deliver the expected outcome. The principal demonstrated these skills three years ago when confronted with a request to implement Personalized Learning. She believed in the power of her teachers and trusted their skills. Today, data indicates our students are exceeding expected growth as evidenced by district and state measures. In short, leadership is a belief in the power of a team to create success for students.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

North Mianus is a school of innovation. Teachers consistently seek to improve their practice through purposeful research and thorough data analysis. Two years ago when the third grade team noted student performance was dipping in math they explored ways to better engage their students. After a careful “data dive” they decided to implement a Personalized Learning approach to instruction. The plan included flexible seating, learning partnerships and use of digital resources. The teachers immediately began developing “learning pathways” or playlists (documents that provide scaffolding aligned with standards). Students were given assignments such as watching a teacher created video or completing practice problems while having choices about project work or problem solving. It wasn’t long before other grade levels sought change.

At North Mianus Personalized Learning is successful because of four integral components: student/ teacher goal setting, practice and growth, personal pacing, and passion/pride. Goal setting takes place shortly after the unit pre-assessment is administered. The student and teacher sit down and review the unit standards as well as foundational standards from the grade above and below. If the student has gaps in earlier standards a plan is agreed upon to provide a playlist to address the need. When the student feels ready they complete an Exit Slip to determine mastery and move on to grade level standards. Goals are based on student need and interest. Children benefit from both practice and self-reflection and playlists provide a variety of activities, many student-chosen, leading to mastery of the standards for the unit.

Pacing is critical to success. Every student moves at a different pace and playlists allow students to move at a rate comfortable for them. It is personalized to what we know about the student as a learner. Finally, research indicates when students are engaged and passionate about their work they are more likely to be successful and to grow as learners.

Our units include many visits from “parent experts” such as architects and scientists, helping students see the value of the work in real world contexts. Administrative walkthroughs take place on a regular basis and observations indicate students are independent and highly engaged in their learning. They are able to articulate their goals and the purpose for the work.

The Vision of the Graduate supports academic, interpersonal and personal capacities every student should attain as they prepare for college and careers. A Personalized Learning approach ensures students learn to think creatively and pose complex questions, respond to failure with perseverance and resilience and communicate effectively for a given purpose. We believe our school is creating the environment necessary to support student growth.