

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. Julie Matarelli

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

Official School Name Columbus Elementary School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 315 North Kansas Street

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

Edwardsville IL 62025-1735
City State Zip Code+4 (9 digits total)

County Madison County

Telephone (618) 656-5167

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Web site/URL http://ecusd7.org/columbus/

E-mail jmatarelli@ecusd7.org

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

Date _____

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent*Dr. Jason Henderson

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other) E-mail jhenderson@ecusd7.org

District Name Edwardsville Community Unit School District 7 Tel. _____ (618) 656-1182

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 Mrs. Jill Bertels

(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):
- 10 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 2 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 1 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 13 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	0	0	0
1	0	0	0
2	0	0	0
3	67	83	150
4	59	72	131
5	79	68	147
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	205	223	428

*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
 - 1 % Asian
 - 8 % Black or African American
 - 4 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 80 % White
 - 7 % 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: 8%

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	18
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2017 until the end of the 2017-2018 school year	15
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	33
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2017	412
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.08
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	8

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

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):

Danish, French, Japanese, Mandarin, Spanish, Thai

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 16%
Total number students who qualify: 70

8. Students receiving special education services: 10 %
43 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>3</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>9</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>1</u> Developmental Delay | <u>36</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>4</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>8</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>1</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 2
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	Number of Staff
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	17
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	11
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	4
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	3

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 25:1

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

Required Information	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014
Daily student attendance	95%	96%	96%	96%	96%
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.

Columbus Elementary's mission is to educate the whole child, emotionally, socially and academically. Our mission is to prepare students to be productive citizens.

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

Columbus Elementary School is an intermediate school serving 400 students in grades 3-5 who live in the northern and eastern half of Edwardsville, as well as the surrounding rural areas. The campus is situated one block east of a quiet Main Street and is nestled within one of Edwardsville's oldest residential areas, which is bordered by small businesses and the county court house. Approximately 25 teachers and 20 support staff serve Columbus' students. The Columbus Elementary student population consists of 80% Caucasian, 9% Black, 3.5% Hispanic, and 5.8% Multi-Race students; 12% of students have an IEP and 19.4% are from low-income homes.

Columbus School has housed Edwardsville students since it opened in 1886. The campus that comprises the current Columbus Elementary School building consists of the original 1886 elementary building, an 1896 addition, and the original 1910 Edwardsville High School building. The 1953 addition of a cafeteria and music rooms joined the two buildings.

The school community is one of primarily middle class, well-grounded parents who truly understand the importance of a strong education for their children. The parents are supportive of the efforts the school district provides to ensure their children are educated to the high standards the community expects. Parents participate in a variety of activities, including parent/teacher organizations, volunteering at school events, and bringing their expertise into the classroom as guest speakers.

Leadership at Columbus Elementary School reaches far beyond the principal. The leadership team at Columbus Elementary includes the administrator, community leaders, teacher leaders and student leaders, all of whom are necessary participants in developing activities that enhance learning through innovative ways that engage all students. Columbus Elementary leadership has been recognized for bringing unconventional, innovative learning opportunities to students making headlines for its academic excellence in local and national news outlets.

At Columbus Elementary School, the staff has taken District-developed curricula and devised methods of instruction that truly engage its students, with one of the strongest components being the partnership between community members and the school. Businesses and individual community members play a huge role in providing resources and outreach activities and are truly seen as a "second textbook."

Outstanding examples of the partnership have resulted from the collaboration among Columbus staff, students, and community members working in the STEM fields. Columbus students launched a weather balloon 76,500 feet in the air and captured high-definition video of the atmosphere. They collected atmospheric readings of temperature and pressure and utilized geo-mapping in collaboration with Southern Illinois University's Geography Department. Students back in the school building communicated through cell phones to a small group of students following the balloon to its resting place more than 60 miles away. It was an exciting project that created an impact that lasted well beyond launch day. Students read, wrote, and spoke of geological information systems (GIS) and space for weeks.

Other projects included students creating a solar-powered Barbie Jeep that was controlled remotely. While students were controlling the vehicle at Columbus School, the vehicle was actually running the program three miles away at Edwardsville High School. Fourth grade students built a Virtual Reality Sandbox that brought 4th grade curriculum on landforms to life. Students manipulated plateaus, waterfalls, rivers, lakes, and hills to better understand this unit of instruction.

Columbus Elementary was the first to establish a "solar garden" that houses solar yard lights that recharge the batteries used for many of these activities. The activities listed here are only a sampling of the countless high-interest activities offered to engage students thoroughly in their learning. All materials for these projects were funded through the district's Citizen's Advisory Council group and Columbus' Parent Teacher Organization (PTO).

In addition to the amazing academic activities offered, students at Columbus Elementary School are

provided with the social and emotional support needed as well. Support teams, parent and teacher collaboration teams, and special education service providers hold continuous conversations about expectations for social and emotional growth at the school.

A large emphasis is given to teaching children how to respect each other and themselves through daily morning assemblies. These assemblies set the stage for the day and allow teachers to incorporate social and emotional topics such as character education and positive reward programs on a daily basis. Students are taught about diversity, differences, and understanding that not everyone thinks or acts alike. We emphasize the importance of teaching students about acceptance and tolerance.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

1a. Reading/English language arts:

District 7 has a long-standing curriculum review process that is thorough, unique, and effective. This 34-point process provides consistency across all buildings, removes redundancy among grade levels and courses, provides pacing guidance, outlines research-based instructional practices and ensures excellent results. All curricular areas follow the same process, which allows District 7 to write its own curriculum and determine the materials to be used in implementing the District-developed curriculum. With this process, a publisher's textbook is utilized as just another resource and is not the driving force behind the content taught or the strategies implemented.

Columbus Elementary School realizes stellar results in the area of Reading and English Language Arts; however, this was not always the case. In order to improve student performance in the areas of reading and writing, a thorough evaluation of all practices in this area was conducted. "The Reading and Writing Project," used the talents of teachers from all grade levels to initiate the tedious task of dissecting the actual "science" of the teaching of reading. Close to a year was spent in the study of the works of renowned specialists in the area, including Catherine Snow, Michael Pressley, Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell, in addition to the study of national documents such as the National Reading Panel Report. Every aspect of reading was broken down into key components, and the instructional practices that were said to produce great results were analyzed.

Using this information, a plan was developed, and teacher-leaders conducted training on each minute detail of the reading process over a three-year span. Hard questions were asked about the instructional methods used in the classroom, such as the balance of practices that included shared reading, guided reading, word study, and modeled writing. A plan was developed to ensure comprehensive coverage of each of the evidence-based skills that students need to read proficiently. From that point, key components were outlined, a developmental continuum of reading skills was developed, training was designed, and a three-year professional development plan was initiated.

Columbus Elementary School began to realize huge gains in the area of reading due to these efforts. Throughout this entire process, teachers analyzed student progress, monitored sub-group performance and developed tiered interventions by using the data gleaned from state and local assessments such as the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT), The Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC), AimsWeb, primary Illinois Snapshot of Early Literacy (ISEL), local common quarterly assessments, and classroom-based instructional reading level. Explicit instruction was required of all teachers, and outlined practices were required and documented through a lesson plan template. The principal is well-versed on best practices and supports teachers as they employ these practices.

1b. Mathematics:

Following the District 7 Board-adopted curriculum review process, Columbus Elementary School aligned its math curriculum to the New Illinois Learning Standards in 2010. Due to financial constraints, however, the District could not afford to purchase textbooks.

Out of necessity, the Columbus Elementary math review team identified the top no-cost national digital math resources available to teachers. Resources such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Better Lessons.org, and other research-based math sites were used to construct a local "digital textbook," developed completely by a team of classroom teachers. This approach helped student performance skyrocket.

Teachers evaluated the strength of the lessons by studying student performance on unit assessments, quarterly common assessments, and state assessments. These data were used to adjust pacing, to identify the

need for additional supplemental lessons, and to address gaps in student performance.

As a result of this study, a tiered intervention was developed to address an identified need in the area of fact fluency and to make adjustments to the pacing and order of units. Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) blueprints and evidence statement tables were used in analyzing student performance down to the individual standard and question level. Most importantly, adjustments were made to the curriculum and to individual student instructional plans based on the information gained from this analysis.

The instructional practice employed that required the biggest shift was that of academically productive math discourse in the classroom. A six-part course was developed and taught by teacher trainers on how to hold true “math talks” that deepen mathematical understanding. Teachers were taught how to support students as they questioned each other’s processes, added to peer solutions, and challenged peer thinking. Teacher practices shifted from a computational approach to math instruction to a conceptual approach.

1c. Science:

Most recently, a team of grade-level teachers began the study of the Next Generation Science Standards and initiated the development of a curriculum aligned to those standards. During this review, teachers outlined the differences between the outdated Illinois Science Standards and the newer Next Generation Science Standards. Teachers also analyzed Illinois Science Assessment data and high school course taking patterns, and even met with local university science professors to determine the strengths and weaknesses of our current curriculum and where changes needed to be made.

Once the scope and sequence was developed and transition conversations took place between 5th and 6th grade, classroom teachers turned their attention to the shifts in instructional practices now required and seen as the marker of a quality science program. In order to gain a full understanding of the practices that improve science content understanding and science and engineering practices, teachers attended workshops offered by the Regional Office of Education and the Illinois State Board of Education. They will soon attend the National Science Teacher Association National Conference to be held in St. Louis, MO.

Because the biggest shift required of Columbus Elementary teachers will be in the actual instruction that takes place in the classroom, there will be a heavy emphasis on professional development. Summer workshops are planned to support teachers in lesson writing and lab presentation. Teachers will be given the opportunity to practice labs with each other long before being asked to introduce a lab to a classroom full of children. Additional workshops will be offered on digital resources, the use of lab equipment and data collection devices, new microscopes, and the use of digital balances. Workshops on assessing student performance in the area of science will also be provided. Columbus Elementary teachers and students are looking forward to the implementation of the new District 7 science curriculum in the fall of 2019.

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

Although Social Studies will be the curricular area that will be under study for the 2019-20 school year, Columbus Elementary faculty and staff have always placed a heavy emphasis on school-based civic learning, civic engagement, and a basic knowledge of democracy. Edwardsville is the county seat for Madison County, and the county courthouse sits only blocks from the school. This is a perfect background to many great lessons on elections, the voting process, and other school-based civic learning opportunities. Students learn consensus building and voting procedures and make decisions on how to take action in their classrooms, school, and community.

In social studies classrooms across Columbus Elementary, teachers can be found supporting students as they learn to evaluate sources of pertinent information, as they develop their own claims, and as they learn to distinguish between fact and opinion when determining the credibility of the news sources they are utilizing.

In addition to the study of civic and political institutions, the study of geography comes to life at Columbus Elementary School. Students can be found using a Virtual Sandbox designed and built by the principal, teachers, parents, and students to study landforms and bodies of water across the state, nation and the world.

Student performance is assessed not only through quizzes and tests, but more often through the use of rubrics that gives a fuller view of each child's understanding and participation.

1e. For secondary schools:

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

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Columbus Elementary School has a mission to serve the whole child. At times, students who struggle with the academic core courses may find success in other curricular areas such as the visual arts (grades 3 and 5), performing arts (grades 4 and 5), PE (grades 3-5), Health (grades 3-5), foreign language (grades 3-5), and technology (grades 3-5). Columbus Elementary is proud to offer strong programs in each of these areas. Columbus students receive weekly instruction in music, art, physical education, health, foreign language, and technology. These areas are given the same emphasis as core subject areas. The specialist teachers who teach many of these courses receive intense training in their discipline so that they are well versed in their respective areas.

In the spring of a student's third grade year, students are invited to the Band and Orchestra Petting Zoo. This event gives students an opportunity to try different instruments they are interested in playing beginning in 4th grade. Nearly 70% of students in 4th and 5th grades participate in Band or Orchestra, which feeds into successful, award-winning middle school and high school programs. A large percentage of students who begin playing an instrument at Columbus continue throughout high school, speaking volumes about the teachers working with these students.

Annual musicals are a big part of the intermediate school year. "Arf," a third grade musical, allowed students to showcase their musical abilities. Students, parents, and staff anxiously await the musical each year.

Each spring, Columbus Elementary hosts a "Field Day" for all grade levels where students can participate in friendly classroom competition. Games like potato sack races, kick ball, and Frisbee golf keep children active. It's a great event for students and teachers alike.

Columbus Elementary students all participate in foreign language (Spanish) and a technology course on a weekly basis. The emphasis in the Spanish course is on cultural sensitivity, expressive and receptive language, and cultural awareness. Students take virtual field trips to foreign Spanish-speaking classes, make travel brochures, and design restaurants and other shops where only Spanish can be spoken. The technology course was first introduced this year and teaches young digital natives keyboarding skills and digital presentation skills.

3. Special Populations:

Columbus Elementary School endeavors to meet the academic and emotional needs of all students. We use a variety of assessments to help us identify students in need of support. Classroom teachers assess students' reading levels using the Fountas & Pinnell Text Level Gradient. Teachers use the reading levels to tailor literacy instruction to meet the needs of all readers. Combined with quarterly language arts assessments, our faculty can implement a tiered intervention based on student need, which can include support from a reading specialist. Quarterly assessments in math are also used to identify students in need of support and target specific skills for supplemental instruction.

Students may also qualify for additional support through our collaboration process. Teachers can refer

students to our collaboration team to discuss and address the needs of struggling students. The collaborative team will hold a meeting with the parent to discuss student needs, parental concerns, and provide classroom strategies to help the student. The collaborative team consists of the building principal, the general education teacher, a special education teacher, and the parent.

Students with IEP's, 504 plans, and English language learners represent 10% of the student total population at Columbus. Students who qualify may receive small group instruction, related services, and accommodations. The special education team is composed of the building principal, a psychologist, social worker, special education teacher, general education teacher, and school nurse. If a student meets the district's IDEA criteria as a student with a disability requiring special education services, an Individual Education Plan is developed in collaboration with the parents. Resources are made available to meet these educational and/or developmental goals. A student's IEP is reviewed and revised on an annual basis. Students identified as gifted represent ten percent of the total student population at Columbus. Third grade students are assessed and identified using the Gifted and Talented Screener, Williams Test of Divergent Thinking, and the Cognitive Abilities Test. The assessments are administered by our gifted education teacher. Students who qualify will participate in the District 7's Challenge Program. Once students are identified for the Challenge Program, principals cluster identified students into a classroom with a teacher who has had special training in teaching gifted and talented students. Students participate in enrichment activities within their regular classrooms. In addition, a gifted resource teacher serves students in grades 4-5 through a combination of pull-out and in-class instruction.

The Columbus family is dedicated to addressing the needs of every student. Whether a student is identified by a parent, teacher, principal, social worker, or school psychologist, every stakeholder's voice will be heard, and our team will work to implement interventions and plans to meet the needs of that student.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

Columbus Elementary is a school that represents a culture of positive beliefs and high standards. The staff members believe in our students' ability to meet high expectations and they encourage students by using a variety of initiatives.

One of the primary methods of motivation is a daily morning meeting. During this time, the principal meets with the student population to discuss the highlights for the day. This may be activities occurring during the week, special evening events coming up or special visitors to the school. At this time, students are also recognized for their achievements – big or small. Special life events may be shared – the birth of a sibling, a birthday, an upcoming move, or the addition of a new puppy.

Another positive recognition is related to students demonstrating character traits of responsibility, respect, honesty, and leadership. All Columbus staff members are encouraged to nominate students who exhibit character traits that represent high levels of citizenship. "The Paws of Character" recognizes these students with a certificate of achievement.

Columbus Elementary School also participates in a district-wide initiative to recognize students for "Doing the Right Thing." This is a special recognition by the Board of Education and anyone on the staff, custodians, playground monitors, cafeteria staff, can nominate a student for doing something that improves the school environment for someone else.

In order to create a positive culture among teacher peers, the principal works hard to create an environment where teachers are supported and valued. Staff members are able to share ideas, review action plans, and continue to improve school initiatives in a collaborative approach. The Columbus Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) schedules several socials for the teachers throughout the school year. During the 2018-2019 school year, the PTO has organized and provided coffee and bagels for breakfast, healthy salad luncheons, and special treats during the staff appreciation week. In addition, the Columbus PTO has funded classroom supplies, Story Works, and other instructional resources for the teachers.

Columbus Elementary School is a positive learning community where students are being challenged each and every day. We treat our students and staff with respect and they are valued and supported.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Columbus Elementary School administration and staff actively involve the community and parents in a variety of ways. This "it takes a village" approach to educating children helps children to be successful on all fronts. The partnerships created help support students fully and promote optimal learning.

The Columbus Parent/Teacher Organization (PTO) is highly engaged in supporting teachers and students by providing items to teachers to enhance their instruction and classroom environment. The PTO raises money and organizes events to help maintain the positive culture and relationships at the school and with the community. The PTO supports the school in building a positive culture by providing family activities like trivia nights, movie nights and schoolwide dances.

Columbus Elementary School routinely invites community members to provide real world application to the current topics being discussed in the classroom. Teachers have invited not only local community members, but state and national politicians as well. Columbus has invited multiple politicians to speak to how government works and the role of young citizens, and local military veterans are invited to meet with students and be recognized for their service. Community members visit classrooms to enhance students' understanding of what they are learning as it compares to real-life situations. Due to Columbus Elementary's great location within the community, students are able to take walking field trips to various community locations to extend what they are learning in class. Class may be held at the local Watershed

Nature Center, the historical Benjamin Stephenson House, the Edwardsville Children's Museum, the Madison County Court House, Lewis and Clark Community College, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, and various businesses and historical sites that are located within a short walk.

Columbus staff members make every effort to engage those families who are harder to reach (two working parents, single parents, grandparents raising their grandchildren, foster parents) by utilizing a variety of communication tools to inform families of a child's progress. To support students who may be struggling, Columbus Elementary School incorporates a collaborative process that includes parent, teachers, and administrators to discuss and formulate a support plan to help the student become successful. This can lead to the implementation of various strategies to help engage, enthuse, and redirect students on a case-by-case basis. For those who cannot attend special events and meetings, Columbus staff members provide weekly and monthly newsletters to parents and maintain a digital presence through Facebook and websites. For those who do not have children in school, Columbus Elementary maintains a positive relationship with both the local daily newspaper and the local digital paper to keep the community abreast of all of the exciting events taking place.

3. Professional Development:

Columbus Elementary utilizes a Teacher as Expert model to professional development. Each area of the curriculum and each instructional strategy is sub-divided into smaller components, and small cadres of teachers research and study these areas and develop professional development that is then offered to the faculty. Teacher leaders spend time answering the questions that they know their peers will have as they begin to implement a new strategy or new curriculum: What type of positive impact will this new practice have on my students? What impact will this have on how I currently teach? How do I pace the content that needs to be taught? What will be the barriers to implementation? How will I integrate this new practice with practices I already have in place?

Once consensus has been achieved that the practice is worthy of further study and implementation across the building, the development of workshops begins. All professional development is tiered. Teachers are first offered an Overview workshop. This workshop introduces the new practice, defines the components, shares the research behind the practice, and outlines implementation guidelines. Once a teacher has attended the Overview session and has had some time to implement, a trouble-shooting workshop is offered. Clarification is offered, teachers share their struggles, and work collaboratively to find ways to overcome any barriers. After a few months of implementation, additional enhancement workshops are offered that help teachers strengthen their practices. These workshops may take the form of online discussion groups, grade-level meetings, or book studies.

Columbus Elementary staff has found the Teacher as Expert model to be extremely successful as it provides onsite support to teachers by teachers who have studied the practice thoroughly. The Teacher as Expert model allows teachers to buy-in to practices slowly with daily support from their peers.

An additional step that has ensured great results is the principal's understanding of the challenges facing her teachers as they begin to implement as well as a strong understanding of the actual practice. Once the principal has supported staff through the initial implementation process, eventually the practice is expected, and teachers are evaluated on the quality of delivering that practice in the classroom.

4. School Leadership:

Effective school leadership begins with the belief that all students can learn. Leaders achieve this by promoting a positive environment that brings out the best in every student. Collaborative efforts among staff and students, parents, and community stakeholders is key. The Columbus leadership team plays an integral part in bringing each of these groups together to ensure student success.

We embrace a cooperative team approach where everyone's ideas are shared and valued. Our team consists of the building principal; grade level teachers; support staff (psychologist, social worker, speech pathologist, school nurse, and reading specialist); and administrative support staff (secretaries, monitors,

custodians, school safety officer, and cafeteria workers).

The parent/school partnership is another vital piece of our students' success. The Columbus PTO assists the principal and classroom teachers with a variety of events and programs throughout the school year. Each January, the PTO organizes a school event for students to celebrate and promote positive school spirit. The PTO actively supports our staff by holding multiple teacher appreciation events.

Due to recent budget cuts in Illinois over the last several years, the Columbus PTO has committed the organization to meeting the needs of our students. As budget cuts decreased our financial resources, our PTO responded by increasing their fundraising efforts. In the last two years, our PTO has raised approximately \$40,000. We have used the money to fund an additional computer lab and provide supplemental materials for teachers.

Successful school leaders will not only facilitate communication and cooperation between parents and teachers but they will also build a partnership that includes parents and community leaders sharing their expertise in the areas of business, science, technology and other areas.

An excellent example of collaboration between our community and our school is our Technology Club. One of our parents approached the principal with an idea to share his expertise in the areas of engineering and technology. We invited a teacher to help us brainstorm an idea for an after-school technology club. We worked together to create an after-school program that would meet once a week for six weeks. Throughout the course the students learned about website building, multimedia and video editing, the use of drones in engineering, architectural design software, augmented reality, and virtual reality.

Another excellent example of collaboration among our teachers, parents and community leaders was our Near Space Balloon Project. One of our parents indicated the desire to try sending a helium balloon into near space. Our principal met with some teachers to integrate this activity into our curriculum. As we planned for this activity we also enlisted the support from our local university. Two geography professors with expertise in the area of remote sensing helped us track and graph the data collected by the instruments on the balloon. This project was featured on the NBC Nightly News.

The Columbus leadership team has been able to bring together parents, students, and community members to develop and implement these above-mentioned programs.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Over the past decade, Columbus has been a frontrunner for providing instruction that engages all children. The development of creative, innovative strategies to present content and engage students is key to ensuring our students' success.

Students engage when the mode of instruction is relevant to them. Upon initial implementation, the school was a leader in incorporating the use of interactive whiteboards to teach content that was “tired” and not relevant to the intermediate-aged child. Many topics are now taught using virtual manipulatives on a platform that looks more like the platforms and games that students play today. Teachers and students make use of the interactive whiteboards throughout the day, whether it is utilizing virtual manipulatives in math, web versions of Guided Reading lessons, video recording of student-led instruction, or interactive music programs that record to let band and orchestra students know when they are off-key.

Students engage when they can get their hands dirty and manipulate their environment. Columbus Elementary students created an Augmented Reality Sandbox for use in geography at all grade levels. The Augmented Reality Sandbox, a device that utilizes technology combined with sand, creates a real-time virtual representation that changes as the students manipulate the sand. This piece of technology replaces the static, outdated salt dough map used in the past. Students are able to build virtual landscapes to demonstrate their understanding of land formations and how they work.

Students engage when they see the real-world application of the content being taught. Columbus Elementary School continually creates grade-level and buildingwide projects that simulate real-world topics. Columbus Elementary School launched weather balloons with high definition cameras, GPS devices, and weather sensing equipment to create an opportunity for students to truly understand the atmosphere and how wind, temperature, and pressure change. Columbus Elementary students have engaged in solar power exploration by creating solar powered vehicles in the classroom to understand how alternative energy sources work. Grade levels utilize a 3-D printer to design and create their own vehicles for exploration into the physical science realm.

In the Arts, Columbus Elementary School has provided students opportunities to learn an appreciation of the arts by inviting international musicians and dance groups to perform and interact with the students.

Engagement is key. Innovation is key. Columbus Elementary School staff members take this to a whole new dimension. Students take an active role in their learning and enjoy the local and national recognition they receive through the news media.