

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

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Mr. Matt Jansen

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

Official School Name Wass Elementary School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 2340 Willard Drive

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

Troy MI 48085-4009
City State Zip Code+4 (9 digits total)

County Oakland

Telephone (248) 823-3900

Fax

Web site/URL https://wass.troy.k12.mi.us/

E-mail mjansen@troy.k12.mi.us

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. Richard Machesky

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other) E-mail rmachesky@troy.k12.mi.us

District Name Troy School District Tel. (248) 823-4000

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. Karl Schmidt

(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):
- 12 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 4 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 4 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 20 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	14	18	32
K	39	30	69
1	33	37	70
2	35	36	71
3	37	36	73
4	39	28	67
5	40	37	77
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	237	222	459

*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
 - 29 % Asian
 - 5 % Black or African American
 - 2 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 1 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 63 % White
 - 0 % 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: 4%

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	5
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2017 until the end of the 2017-2018 school year	14
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	19
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2017	427
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.04
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	4

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 16 %
75 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):
Arabic, Telugu, Korean, French, Italian, Chinese, Hindi, Marathi, Urdu, Romanian, Albanian, Syriac, German, Spanish, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, Tamil, Gujarati, Malayalam, Ukranian, Bengali

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 7 %
Total number students who qualify: 34

8. Students receiving special education services: 9 %
42 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>5</u> Autism | <u>4</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>9</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>4</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>1</u> Developmental Delay | <u>2</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>31</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>1</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>4</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: 8
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.	18
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	16
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	5
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	2

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 24:1

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.

The purpose of Wass Elementary School is to ensure that all students reach his or her highest learning potential.

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

Wass is a public elementary school that has boundaries defined by the Troy School District Board of Education. Anyone living within our boundaries is eligible to send their child to Wass. Wass is also a Schools of Choice school within the Troy School District. Parents from surrounding cities/school districts can apply to be selected in a lottery to attend Troy Schools and potentially placed at Wass. Fifty kindergarten and first grade students are selected per year based on whether they have a Schools of Choice sibling in the building. Currently, no new Schools of Choice families are allowed to enter the school/district per Board of Education decision.

PART III – SUMMARY

Wass Elementary is located in the northeast corner of Troy, Michigan. Troy is a pleasant suburb north of Detroit and many of our residents are affiliated with the automobile industry. Wass is located near a thriving business community that attracts families from around the world that encourage and value a world class education. Wass is named after Ruth Wass who was born in Troy 105 years ago. Her family participated in the development of our community. She herself was a reading teacher in the district for many years, and Wass is located on land that once belonged to her family. The mission of our school is to ensure that each child reaches his/her highest learning potential.

Wass Elementary is located in the middle of a subdivision and has an eighteen-acre playground. We have a varied and enriched curriculum. Our community, which is very supportive of education, has kept us well supplied with the latest and best curricular materials. Even though the building is only forty-one years old, we have benefited from major renovation work which is the result of the passage of multiple bond issues. The bond issues have provided us with a new art room, Large Group Instruction room, additional parking spaces, a new drop-off loop, new roof, and new heating and cooling systems. We also enjoy the latest in technological improvements. Each of our rooms has a SMART Board to enhance direct instruction to all students. Classrooms in grades K-2 have 15 iPad minis for student use, while students in grades 3-5 are issued individual iPads. We also have 30 wireless laptop computers that can access the Internet. At the core of Wass, our emphasis is on developing and promoting a Culture of Thinking in conjunction with the Harvard Project Zero research department. Critical thinking is promoted and visible throughout the building. Our reading and writing curriculum is the spine of our teaching and learning. We use the workshop approach and balanced literacy as evidenced in the Lucy Calkins' units of study K-5. Math Expressions is our math program aligned with the Common Core State Standards. NGSS strategies are used within a kit-based curriculum to support the teaching of science.

Wass is a school that can boast excellent parental support. Our Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) is very active and these parents enhance both the learning and enjoyment for Wass students. Parent volunteers are a visible aspect of our school. School-wide community events include: Diversity Night, Science Night, Wellness Night, staff and parent book clubs, family picnics, Running with the Wolves, student recognition programs, and curriculum based field trips. Along with community events, our students are provided with enrichment opportunities to enhance daily instruction. Such activities include: Service Squad, Safety Patrol, Fifth Grade Camp, Fourth grade Trip to Lansing (state capitol), 3rd Grade Robotics program, 5th Grade Detroit Institute of Art Trip, 2nd Grade Field Trip to the Troy Historical Museum, & the Kindergarten Trip to the Nature Center. We also have some very innovative initiatives including our character education program - The Wass Wolves' Way, based on the national 11 Principles of Character Framework. Our students love our monthly Wolf Pack meetings where we deepen and further our core values of Responsibility, Respect, Integrity and Perseverance. Our school has recently been recognized as a State School of Character by Character.org. We also have a Star Center that recruits parents and senior citizens to work during the lunch hour with the children who need extra assistance.

The best part of our school is our children. As of the writing of this article, we have 427 children who represent just about every race and ethnicity that you can imagine. It is truly remarkable to see how our children with such diverse backgrounds, cultures, religions, and appearances are able to get along so well with each other. That's the Wass Wolves' Way!

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

1a. Reading/English language arts:

Lucy Calkins Units of Study in Reading and Writing are used to teach literacy in a balanced literacy approach using whole group, small group, and one on one conferring. Learning progressions were identified for each grade level and then the units of study were developed to teach for high stakes comprehension, skills, and multiple genres. A K-5 lesson will consist of a mini-lesson to teach specific learning objectives, independent reading/writing time where teachers are conferring with students one on one or small groups using formative assessment to determine the needs of the class, a mid-workshop teaching point to push the learning further, and a share opportunity to culminate the day's learning.

Reading Recovery is another component of our English Language Arts curriculum as an intervention for first grade struggling readers. Leveled Literacy Intervention is another form of support provided to students struggling in the areas of literacy K-5. In both of these interventions, data is collected to determine student rate of growth and future instructional goals. Teachers also meet with students in small groups using the Lucy Calkins toolkit strategies to give students what they need, when they need it in real-time.

All teachers in grades K-5 use the Fountas and Pinell assessment system three times a year to progress monitor their students to identify if they are below, on, or above grade level. This information is used to give students interventions and support to be on grade level.

1b. Mathematics:

In math we use Math Expressions by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt as a guide for our instruction. Our math program is very language based, providing students with many real world problems to tackle on a daily basis. This typically comes in the form of word problems. Students are encouraged to use “math talk” to share their thinking and various methods of problem solving. Students often become the teachers in these lessons and benefit from the collaboration of sharing multiple strategies. In addition, some of the word problems purposely show incorrect work, allowing them to work through common misconceptions that might occur for specific learning objectives. One instructional approach is encouraging students to justify their thinking. This can be done through words, diagrams, pictures, or examples. Teachers also supplement the Math Expressions program with additional resources for certain math objectives, such as fact fluency, that require more repetition for student mastery. Teachers have also individualized instruction through the use of student iPads using apps such as Freckle and Prodigy. These apps have diagnostic testing that places students in a program that matches their ability level. Many of the teachers have begun using the math workshop approach to form small flexible group intervention. These groups are based on formative assessment. Teachers give pre and post assessments in each unit to check for student growth as well as to determine areas for remediation, reteaching, or to guide further instruction.

1c. Science:

Our Science curriculum uses the FOSS (Full Option Science System) program. This is an active learning science program where students are able to explore through meaningful experimentation. Students build intuitive knowledge through exploration, observation, and open-ended activities. Students are encouraged to ask questions, look for evidence, record observations, and make predictions. Our science instruction seeks to harness the natural curiosity our students bring to the classroom and as teachers we mold this curiosity into deep understanding of critical scientific concepts and thinking. Students are exposed to the scientific process in each grade level. We are currently shifting our instructional model to integrate Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) strategies and practices. Critical thinking in both oral and written expression is an important part of our science instruction in all grade levels. Common assessments have been created and implemented in all units in each grade level to monitor student learning and progress.

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

Our social studies curriculum centers on the idea that children learn best when concepts are brought to life. Teachers create activities that incorporate role playing, games, simulations, creative projects, group problem-solving, and reading to learn about the world around them. Audio text is available for students who are reading below grade level as well as our English Learner (EL) population. The Culture of Thinking routines are used across all grade levels as a means of formative and summative assessment for student learning. Along with the curriculum, perspective taking and respectful debate are used as strategies to deepen the students' understanding of historical topics and how they have shaped our lives today. Teachers administer common assessments for all units in all grade levels to monitor student learning and progress.

1e. For secondary schools:

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

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Our special area classes expose our students in all grade levels (kindergarten through fifth grade) to essential life skills through vocal music, instrumental music, physical education, media, Spanish, and art. The physical education program (45 minutes once every four days) is centered on five physical assessments: cardio vascular endurance, speed and agility, flexibility, core strength, and upper body strength. Students are tested throughout the year on these physical skills. Research shows that having a physically active life style is essential to brain development. Our physical education teacher promotes and models this life style through Field Day, Troy Fitness Run (5th Grade), Running with the Wolves (K-5), monthly health and fitness calendars, weekly Waking Up with the Wolves, and On Your Mark (after school program).

Vocal Music (45 minutes once every four days) focuses on the four creative processes of creating, performing, responding, and connecting. In grades one and three, students have a yearly performance showcasing their musical talents! In addition to regularly scheduled music class, students can participate in.

Our visual arts program (45 minutes once every four days) develops problem solving and critical thinking skills needed for the 21st Century. Students are taught to use the creative process to communicate and express themselves. Appreciation and exploration of various cultures and historical periods are also covered. Students learn to respond visually, verbally, analytically, and creatively through a wide variety of materials. Students' growth is monitored through teacher observation and self-evaluation. The overall goal is to respect and value diversity.

The media program (45 minutes once every eight days) teaches students digital literacy and digital citizenship. Students learn to locate and evaluate appropriate print and non-print information as a 21st Century skill. There are two book fairs a year to promote literacy in the classroom and at home. Students learn about coding and receive database training as well.

In addition to the fine arts programs, the Troy School District provides students with an experiential world language class (45 minutes once every eight days) . Research has shown that children who receive world language instruction benefit in many ways from early exposure to a second language. Students learn through various types of media and hands-on activities.

Our 5th graders have the special opportunity to be a part of the band or orchestra program. All 5th graders receive instruction throughout the year (35 minutes twice per week) on how to play an instrument and conduct performances. Many of our students continue to play their instruments through middle and high school.

Throughout the year, students in grades K-5 receive instruction in vocal music, art, Spanish, physical education, and media for forty-five minute sessions, forty-four days throughout the year. All students receive media and Spanish instruction for forty-five minutes, twenty-two days during the school year. We feel these curricular areas allow students an opportunity to shine in other, non-academic, areas. Students have shared with classroom teachers how much they enjoy and look forward to participating in these classes. Through these specials, students have become more confident and comfortable within the school setting.

As educators, we feel these special areas support our academic goals by promoting language and reasoning, increased coordination, emotional development, imagination and intellectual curiosity, discipline, risk taking, and teamwork. More specifically, students who struggle with fine motor skills benefit from skills learned and practiced in physical education and the arts, which helps them with writing in the classroom. When students have opportunities to practice teamwork skills outside of the classroom, they can bring those skills back and apply them to rigorous academic tasks that require collaboration. When students are encouraged to use their imagination and natural curiosity through music and art, they are more apt to think deeper as writers and scientists.

One of the greatest strengths of our school is that our specials teachers connect their instruction with the core content of what's being taught in the classroom. One example of this is our art teacher has students create clay owls to support their unit of study on Structures of Life. Also, our music teacher writes and teaches music that supports our March Is Reading Month school-wide themes. This collaborative piece between classroom and special area teachers supports our school's goal of ensuring learning for all members of the school community.

3. Special Populations:

In our school, we have some main sources of intervention to support students below grade level and English Language Learners. We have identified interventions in our K-5 Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) for general education, support staff, and special education teachers to administer. The first level of intervention happens within the classroom with the classroom teacher. For students that need extra academic support, they may receive services from our reading specialist for Reading Recovery, Leveled Literacy Intervention, or literacy groups. They may also qualify to be pulled out of the classroom for special education services or help from our teacher consultant. Hours and times vary based on their Individualized Education Plan. These interventions support the learning objectives in the general education classroom. However, the methods to master these objectives vary based on student needs. The curriculum is often modified; however, our end goal is for students to return to the general education classroom after intensive instruction.

Our school has a high English Language Learner population. Students receive support from EL teachers either as a pull-out or push-in service. This program also supports the general education classroom by frontloading important vocabulary for upcoming units, reviewing key concepts, and providing basic English instruction.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

Our school works tirelessly to create a culture in which all students and teachers feel accepted and valued in order to promote the highest academic success and overall enjoyment of school. The mission statement of our school is, “The purpose of Wass Elementary School is to ensure that each student reaches his or her highest learning potential.” This mission is not just to ensure academic growth, but to help mold the social and emotional side of our students and staff as well.

Over the past eight years, we have researched and implemented school-wide character education practices. Students are placed into multi-age groups (Wolf Packs) and assigned to a Wolf Pack teacher who stays with them for the duration of the elementary experience at Wass (up to 6 years). During monthly Wolf Packs the lessons always focus on needs that we see in our school, ranging from academic strategies to social-emotional topics. We have five core values in our school: responsibility, respect, integrity, kindness, and perseverance. Students look forward to our monthly Wolf Pack meetings, have developed friendships in different grade levels, and now have multiple adult relationships that last throughout their years at Wass. These five core values are embedded in the monthly lessons, but more importantly in the daily practices throughout our school community. Based on our character education practices known as the Wass Wolves' Way, we have been recognized by Character.org as a State School of Character. There is a video on our website that shows our community exactly what our character education practices are all about.

A foundation of our culture that is paramount to our school's success is the implementation of the 8 Cultural Forces by Ron Ritchhart. This allows our students to use thinking routines to deepen learning in all curricular areas. The 8 Cultural Forces promote active engagement in the classroom and provide students opportunities to be collaborative, reflective problem solvers. We focus on a deeper understanding of content versus rote memorization of information.

Our school culture comes alive every morning on our morning broadcast. Our media specialist and fourth graders provide morning news pertinent to our school like weather, birthday announcements, shout outs for intentional acts of kindness, and upcoming school activities. Starting the day off with this message adds to the positive learning environment throughout our school.

We have begun annual surveys to gauge the culture and climate of our school for students, staff, and parents. Our results have come back at an extremely high and positive level. In 2018, the Troy School District staff voted the TSD as a Top Place to Work in Michigan. Our results showed that the staff at Wass highly value the positive teaching environment daily.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

A strong sense of community between our school and our families is a key element that we believe plays a major role in the success of our school. The entire staff at Wass Elementary believes this to be true, which is why we strive to bridge a partnership between the school and the home. One way we engage families is through our multiple modes of communication to involve families and keep them informed on a daily basis. Weekly digital updates using Adobe Spark are sent out to parents titled, The Wolf's Howl, outlining upcoming events, school accomplishments, district news, tips for parents, curriculum updates, and much more. In addition, we have a website, Twitter feed, and PTO Facebook page that give parents opportunities to gain a glimpse of their child's learning without stepping into the school. When you do step into our front lobby, we have a large TV that displays our school's Twitter feed. This captures the heart of the learning that takes place at Wass. Parents are also invited and encouraged to share extensions of learning from home using our @WassWolves, #WassReaders, and #BeWassKind.

At the start of the school year we begin to develop our relationships with families through our Curriculum Night in which all grades welcome parents into their classrooms. This is an opportunity for teachers to share with families an overview of the year, build relationships with families and see their child's learning

environments (two of the Cultural Forces). Prior to this, the building principal hosts a new family orientation night and the kindergarten teachers host a Meet & Greet event for our youngest Wolves and their parents. Throughout the year as new families enroll at Wass, you will often see our principal and other staff walking families around the building forming new relationships and welcoming our new families into our community. Annually, parents are invited to join a Wolf Pack lesson and participate in our character education practices.

Each winter, the parents and students are invited to participate in a learning night. Past learning nights have included science, wellness, reading, writing, illustrating, diversity, and math. These events are strongly supported by the Wass PTO and they show our students and their parents that we value their involvement in the school.

Every spring the community participates in an annual event called Running with the Wolves. During this event, the students and parents raise money for the Wass PTO. The money directly impacts teaching and learning opportunities, activities, and events that take place at Wass. Running with the Wolves is a one mile run for students in grades K-5. Our physical education teacher along with a local company (Hanson's Running Store) set up a one mile course for students to perform their personal best. The emphasis of the event is for students to improve on their time from their previous year. Parents and the community are encouraged to come out and run along side their children and cheer on the entire student body throughout the event. Our community supports this event by providing food, drinks, music, and entertainment. As a result of our strong family and community ties, our students reap the benefits.

Our English Language Development (ELD) staff communicate directly with families to ensure they understand curriculum, school policies and procedures, and school communications. Our School Messenger communication system can translate information to parents in several languages. We also offer translators for parents during parent-teacher conferences.

3. Professional Development:

The strength behind our school's professional development approach is that our work is directly tied to the needs of all staff members and connected to our work to enhance student growth. At our building level, our teachers play a main role in facilitating professional development sessions. This is due to our building administrator who clearly sets that stage with the message that he wants all of our work to be meaningful and impactful. Our administrator works closely with the teachers on individual goals and school wide goals. He is a resource that teachers can count on and utilize to support their instruction and personal growth. His personal goals are always tied to our school wide goals which helps connect collaboration and professional development opportunities. After setting school wide goals and analyzing student data we work together to create strategies that will be implemented school wide throughout the year.

In the fall of 2011, our school began to study the Cultures of Thinking philosophy by Ron Ritchhart. Over the next seven years we embraced this new approach in our teaching and have seen a tremendous impact on our students' thinking as well as a cultural shift in all of our classrooms. Over this time period we have done many professional development collaborations to support our work on Cultures of Thinking. For example, we have set up lab classrooms in which teachers have opportunities to be released from their classroom to go observe other teachers. Immediately following the observations, all teachers involved would have an opportunity to debrief with the focus being on student learning. Teachers reported that this reflective approach was a key element in helping them improve their practice, which in turn helps students.

Another professional development approach we have implemented are book clubs in which we study a professional text that is supportive of our students' needs and often connected to our school wide goals. We launch our book club meetings in the summer before the start of the school year and continue them throughout the year. The books that have been chosen to study always reflect the challenges that teachers were seeing with our students' achievement. One of the books we chose was *The Book Whisperer*, by Donalyn Miller, which focused on fostering a love of reading within students. As a staff we had noticed that in a world driven by standardized testing, we needed to work on balancing our instruction to ensure a

love of learning within our students. This book helped us do just that! Other books include: Making Thinking Visible, Growth Mindset in the Classroom, and UnSelfie.

4. School Leadership:

Our school's leadership philosophy is centered around each staff member having opportunities to be involved in and lead school initiatives. Our principal ensures that there is a shared leadership culture by encouraging all staff members to participate equally and work alongside the building leadership team. District wide, our Teaching and Learning Department works to establish a shared leadership philosophy that is guiding our work at the school level. Teachers across all buildings and grade levels are serving on Content Area Teams (CAT) to identify ambitious learning outcomes and key performance assessments for all students. All Wass classroom teachers serve on these CAT committees giving everyone an opportunity to have a voice and role in the decision-making process. Our principal also strives to make us a part of the decision making process at Wass. Before making school wide decisions, our principal often surveys the staff to get their feedback and opinions. This has a huge impact on our school's success because all staff members have a voice in the decisions that are being made.

The School Improvement process at Wass is based on a shared leadership philosophy. There is a seven-person leadership team (including the principal and representatives from different departments and grade levels) that meets monthly to develop and carry out the school improvement plan. Along with the leadership team, each member of our professional learning community is a part of a strategy team responsible for furthering the work of school improvement in all building goals. Our four strategy teams are: Best Practice Instruction, Character Education, Technology Integration, and Visible Thinking. These four strategy teams are the lanes that we use to support our building wide Science, Literacy, and Math goals. All of our building level professional development is tied to this shared leadership and school improvement initiatives.

Based on student data, the teachers' and principal's student growth goals are the same. These common goals allow us to focus our collaborative efforts to deepen learning for students. Our building outcomes reflect that this is taking place at a high level. This also allows opportunities for us to have cross grade level conversations and meaningful professional development for all members of our learning community.

The Wass Student Assistance Team (consisting of social worker, literacy specialist, resource room teacher, speech pathologist, teacher consultant, psychologist, English Language Development (ELD) specialist, and principal) meets weekly to discuss students struggling academically and/or socially-emotionally to develop strategies that support each student's progress and needs. This is a huge leadership role in our MTSS plan (multi-tiered system of support).

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

The Wass Wolves' Way is the one practice that has been the most instrumental in our school's success. We feel it is successful due to core values, common language, collaboration, shared vision, and relationships. Eight years ago we evaluated our school's self-esteem program and looked to see if we could adopt our own character education program. With a new principal, the staff decided to shift toward a program that would fit our new school vision. Our former self-esteem program was truly based on extrinsic motivation. We wanted to adopt practices that would focus on intrinsic motivation and character.

A character education committee was formed and we spent an entire year researching and observing character education programs throughout South-East Michigan. After observing programs like Leader in Me, 6 Pillars of Character Education, 11 Principles of Character Education, Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS), and several homegrown programs, we decided to develop our own practices customized for the needs of our students. We surveyed our staff, parents, and students to learn if they felt the desire to see a program shift and what core values we would value together.

After a year of learning, we developed and created our own character education practices called The Wass Wolves' Way. In collaboration with the community and staff, we defined our core values of Responsibility, Respect, Integrity, and Perseverance. We integrate our character education values and program into every facet of our school life, but also ensure its consistency and common language through our Wolf Pack program. What we created is being emulated in many schools in Southeast (SE) Michigan. Over the years we have observed more patterns of desired behaviors in the classrooms and throughout our school, because of this, we gain more time for quality instruction and learning.