

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. Jason Phelps

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

Official School Name Hills-Beaver Creek Elementary School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 404 South 4th Street P.O. Box 49

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

Beaver Creek MN 56116-0049
City State Zip Code+4 (9 digits total)

County Rock County

Telephone (507) 673-2541

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Web site/URL http://www.hbc patriots.com/

E-mail t.holthaus@isd671.net

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*Mr. Todd Holthaus

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other) E-mail t.holthaus@isd671.net

District Name Hills-Beaver Creek School District Tel. (507) 962-3240

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. Arlyn Gehrke

(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):
- 1 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 0 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 1 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 2 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	19	16	35
K	10	17	27
1	6	21	27
2	10	12	22
3	14	17	31
4	9	15	24
5	21	14	35
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	89	112	201

*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
 - 0 % Asian
 - 1 % Black or African American
 - 5 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 90 % White
 - 4 % 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	2
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	7
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2017	166
(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: 0%
0 Total number ELL

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 12%
Total number students who qualify: 25

8. Students receiving special education services: 7 %
15 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>1</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>5</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>8</u> Developmental Delay | <u>6</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>2</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>3</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>2</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: 5
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.	10
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	3
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	7
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 17:1

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 mission of the H-BC schools is to empower students to develop the skills, attitudes, and desire to reach their potential and achieve excellence.

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

Hills-Beaver Creek School District (H-BC) is located in Rock County in the far southwest corner of Minnesota. Our district is bordered to the south by Iowa and to the west by South Dakota. We serve approximately 350 students in grades K-12 from the communities of Beaver Creek, Hills, Steen and the surrounding rural areas of Rock County. Along with our K-12 classes we also offer a pre-school and Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) courses for students and families from birth to five years-old.

Hills-Beaver Creek schools consolidated form independent school districts in Hills and Beaver Creek. The schools consolidated in 1965 and have functioned as H-BC schools since that date. Our elementary and early childhood programs are currently housed in the elementary school in Beaver Creek. This currently includes students in grades K-5. Students in grades 6-12 are housed in our secondary school located in Hills.

H-BC School district has traditionally been a strong academic institution and has consistently performed above state average on MCA and ACT tests. One of the most influential factors in academic success has been consistent high attendance by our student population. H-BC has been recognized multiple times by the state of Minnesota for high student attendance. This is a product of our outreach to families and strong belief among our community of the importance of public education.

At the elementary level over the past four years Hills-Beaver Creek students have outperformed the state average on Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA) by an average of 20 percent in math and 15 percent in reading. This strong base of learning leads to successes in the secondary school that include high graduation rate and innovative new offerings like the Career Experience Opportunities (CEO) program to make students job and college ready.

At the elementary school level, we have implemented a variety of programs and curricula to help students develop to their fullest potential. We have a strong focus on core academics but also believe in the importance of all subject areas in developing students to their full potential. Many of the programs and curricula will be mentioned throughout the rest of this application. H-BC has made conscious choices to identify strategies that produce proven results and continue to use those things.

There have been a number of school wide improvements over the past five years that have had a positive effect on our staff and students. Specifically at the elementary school, we have implemented a PBIS program, built a new playground, expanded the elementary art program, expanded our Response to Intervention (RtI) program, and secured funding for an increased technology initiative.

All of these improvements are welcomed and supported by our flexible staff. Hiring and retaining quality staff has been the backbone of our school. Due to the variable nature of our class size it is necessary for staff members to be willing to take on new challenges and thrive in unique situations. Our staff has always been willing to find the most effective ways to perform unique jobs with the end result of affecting students learning. Our staff is constantly learning from past experiences and narrowing the focus to individual learning. Our proximity to bordering states has brought an effective mix of different educational philosophies. We are open to new ideas while also maintaining core values.

One core value that has always been evident is the amount of pride that community members, families, and students show in their school. This reflects the general belief that public schools are the cornerstone of a community. The end result is a school, community, and staff that care deeply about students and their learning.

Students that graduate from Hills-Beaver Creek go on to a wide variety of occupations and careers but many of them show strong support for the school that they attended. A vast majority of our current students have a parent or grandparent that attended H-BC. The idea that generations of families are willing to continue to show support is a testament to the consistency of Hills-Beaver Creek School District.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

1a. Reading/English language arts:

At H-BC elementary school we function on the belief that fundamental reading skills are the base to all other learning that occurs throughout a student's career. We work hard to ensure that all students are reading at grade level by third grade. These goals are reflected in our district literacy plan. With that in mind our approach is multi-tiered in assessing and responding to students reading ability.

With the Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards in English Language Arts as a base, individual teachers and grade levels develop course content and organize information through curriculum maps. All students participate in core curriculum instruction for a minimum of 50 minutes per day. The focus of the core curriculum evolves from phonics and word recognition at the youngest levels to fluency in our emerging readers and eventually comprehension in our most advanced readers in the elementary school.

Over the past five years we have developed a Response to Intervention (RtI) program that works in conjunction with our Title I program. The addition of an RtI coordinator has allowed us to set aside 25 minutes per day of true differentiated instruction for students in each grade level. Students are assessed to begin the school year and are assigned to a tier based on screenings, teacher input, and our identification model. We have realized great gains among our students when we have been able to identify specific needs and provide appropriate interventions. The RtI program and 25 minute scheduled blocks have allowed us to meet students at their learning level and monitor progress. Much of our model was based on the successes that we experienced with the Minnesota Reading Corps.

In 2016 H-BC school district began a one-to-one technology initiative for students in grades 3-12. This initiative has provided the opportunity to monitor and assess student learning more frequently. Formative assessments and programs such as Accelerated Reader provide valuable data on student learning and reading skills. This formative data combined with summative data such as MCA results allow us to make informed decisions concerning what content and teaching strategies are most effective. The end result has been a high rate of success on standardized assessments in reading. In the spring of 2018, 80% of students were proficient on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) in reading.

1b. Mathematics:

The approach to math instruction at H-BC is very traditional and has been founded on learning basic math facts that eventually lead into more complex problem solving. The math curriculum is built from the foundation of the Minnesota State Math Standards along with our whole group math curriculum. In 2017 we formalized a tiered system for our math program to mirror our reading program.

Each grade level has a 25 minute block set aside for meeting individual needs during the school day. This 25 minute block is in addition to the 50 minute whole group instruction time. This time has been instrumental in building student confidence in math skills and providing possibility for individualized learning. Our students that require the most individual assistance participate in evidence-based interventions and our most advanced students participate in enrichment activities.

The block has proven beneficial for all tiers of students and we have found that our MCA test scores in grades 3-5 have increased over 20% since the inception of our formalized math RtI program. Much of this growth is attributed to increased student confidence and a better identification process for student needs.

Our ability to gather formative information has been increased over the past 3 years also. With the addition of chromebooks for our 3-5 students we can give formative assessments after each skill that we teach and get immediate feedback. The combination of a tiered system with time in the schedule and more timely information on student learning have helped students become proficient in math skills.

With a more efficient system for teaching and learning we have also found that we are able to be more deliberate about how much time we spend on each standard. Our curriculum mapping and lesson planning process has been influenced in a positive manner by the addition of math RtI and technology initiatives. Our overall proficiency in math was 89% in the spring of 2018 on the MCA test for mathematics.

1c. Science:

Science at H-BC is taught at each grade level in accordance with the Minnesota State Science Standards. The goal of the science curriculum at the elementary is to develop critical thinkers and ask scientific questions. Our focus is on those standards that are centered around scientific questioning.

With these things in mind we purchased new science curriculum in 2017. The interactive nature of the new curriculum allows students to be engaged in learning and build upon basic science information. In as many situations as possible teachers are conducting experiments and using hands on activities to demonstrate scientific principles.

Beginning at our youngest grade levels students are encouraged to ask questions regarding scientific principles and develop solutions to problems. At the highest level in our elementary school individual students can participate in our Horizons program. The program is intended to promote scientific thought and put students in situations to solve scientific problems. Students work on projects such as bridge building, marble chutes, and parachute design. Each project has a goal and students use their base of scientific knowledge to develop and test different designs.

With expanded technology in our 3-5 grades, students have also had more access to scientific information and interactive websites. As in all subjects expanded use of technology for formative assessments has allowed for better use of data and decision making concerning teaching methods.

We like to believe that the scientific mindset is not limited to one subject. We encourage students to apply the problem solving skills and thought processes that are developed in science to all other subject matter at H-BC elementary.

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

Social Studies at Hills-Beaver Creek is taught at each grade level in accordance with the Minnesota State Social Studies Standards. The goal of social studies at H-BC is to engage students in a curriculum that builds informed citizens. Students will need to understand the basic fundamentals of government, history, economics, geography, and civics in order to be future decision makers. Our students are involved in student government and participate in mock elections when elections are held in Rock County.

Another new social studies based project that students participate in is our annual entrepreneur fair. Students in grade 5 study the basic tenets of running a business and develop their own individual business model and product. The products are offered to a group of consumers, students in grades K-4, and we have one day of transactions to demonstrate the principles of a market economy. The entrepreneur fair provides important teachable moments for both the buyers and sellers and has proven to be one of our most tangible social studies teaching opportunities.

As in other subject areas the use of newly incorporated technologies allows us to gather more specific information concerning student learning. The formative assessments given in social studies provide immediate feedback concerning student learning. A majority of our instruction in social studies occurs in the whole group setting but each individual classroom teacher is innovative to find ways to involve students in small group learning.

The overriding theme of participating in a community is one of the fundamental concepts that we stress at H-BC elementary. All students participate in a Positive Behaviors Interventions and Support (PBIS) system that is based on being a productive part of our school community. We believe that after students are finished

NBRS 2019

at H-BC elementary they have a base of knowledge and experiences in the area of social studies to lead them into future experiences as community decision makers.

1e. For secondary schools:

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

At Hills-Beaver Creek Schools we consider preschool an integral part of our overall philosophy and model for having students achieving at grade level by third grade. A major portion of that philosophy relies on students being prepared to enter our kindergarten program as ready learners.

Much of the work in our preschool program is to help students develop healthy social and emotional relationships that allow students to function as a part of the larger group. We are invested in the idea that students must first understand how to behave and treat each other before effective learning in school is possible. Because of this, many of our learning activities at the preschool level involve students working in centers and groups to develop healthy relationships.

Once we have students that can function as a part of a larger group we also look at specific academic skills that make students prepared to enter our kindergarten program. The close physical nature of preschool and kindergarten have proven to be successful in effective transitions. Over 80% of our students that attend kindergarten have been participants in our preschool program. This continuity allows us to get to know and understand our individual students needs as they enter the kindergarten program.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

It is always important to keep in mind that students at H-BC elementary and their success are not limited to core subjects. We find that individual interests and success in other areas such as arts, physical education, technology, library, and general music are often the catalyst for learning in core areas. Educating the whole child and allowing for as many learning opportunities as possible is a major component of our overall educational philosophy.

The art program at H-BC elementary includes a shared teacher with our secondary school. Students in grade 1-5 have a 50 minute art block each week. Our art instructor focuses on visual arts and students produce a variety of artwork throughout the year. As a culminating event, in the spring we host an art festival in which students and families can view artwork from throughout the school year. Along with the displayed artwork, students have a chance to participate in a variety of art activities on that night. The elementary art program provides a base of learning for students to move on to the secondary school art program.

Students at H-BC elementary participate in physical education five days per week for 25 minutes per day. Despite pressures from core subjects we have maintained the importance of physical activity for all students every day. The program helps students to build sound physical habits and promotes skills in sportsmanship and team building. The immediate impact of physical activity is apparent in other areas. We believe strongly in the fact that learning in other areas are influenced by the benefits of physical activity.

Students participate in our music program three days per week for 25 minutes per day. The program includes an online curriculum that builds skills in music and allows for student participation in hands-on activities. The interactive nature of the music class makes it one of our students' favorite classes to participate in. General music at the elementary school is a building block to our middle school music and band programs. Students have also been given the opportunity to participate in an elementary honor choir over the past 3 years. The honor choir is a volunteer activity that allows students to be a part of musicals and shows outside of the general music curriculum.

Our library and technology programs are connected and take place once per week for 25 minutes per session. The library program promotes reading to support the overall philosophy of the school and

classroom teachers. Beginning in second grade students participate in the Accelerated Reader (AR) program. The program is generally self-directed and students have a choice about what books they read. The program also promotes comprehension and students work towards a quarterly goal. The free reading that occurs through the AR program helps to build confidence and lifelong readers. We rely on our media staff to help students find books that speak to their individual interests

Students participate in computer/technology class for 25 minutes per week. The program is designed to build skills that students can readily apply during other parts of the school day. We strategically teach skills that will translate to assignments and projects in other classes. Our technology initiative has allowed all students in grades 3-5 access to chromebooks throughout the school day. Our direct instruction in technology has made our chromebooks more useful and powerful during the rest of the school day.

3. Special Populations:

With a small total population we have insight on the learning and individual needs of all students at Hills-Beaver Creek Elementary. We have a process designed to screen and monitor student progress throughout the year and put interventions in place to assist students that may be performing below grade level.

Our RtI process has proven effective at reaching students at their learning level and identifying students that may qualify for special education. Over time our process has become more refined and gaps in learning have been closed. We begin the year with a screening for all students. This data is often combined with teacher input and any other data in order to determine what RtI tier students fall into. Students that are categorized as Tier III by our screening and RtI process participate in direct research based interventions in the Title I program. These students are monitored on a weekly basis to measure growth.

Once per month our intervention team meets to discuss student progress and consider any changes in interventions. Students that are deemed not to be making progress can be referred to the child study team. The child study team also meets once per month to determine the need for assessment of special needs. From the child study process, students may undergo assessment for special education. If a student qualifies for special education an IEP is developed to meet individual student needs.

Over time we have found that our process is effective in identifying the needs of individual students. Even in cases that a student may not qualify for special education we gain a wealth of information about student learning from the process of evaluation. Also, in many cases we are able to find unique learning strategies that help students by working closer with them.

In the past five years we have looked more closely at specific reading disorders such as dyslexia and convergence insufficiency. We have developed screeners for each of these reading disorders that have helped us to dig into specific reading challenges that students may have.

Most importantly, we have a staff that is attentive and perceptive to student needs. Our problem solving team is often working to find the exact method, strategy, or intervention that will help an individual student. Every issue that we solve seems to build student confidence and helps to create an atmosphere that values learning. We often refer to the problem solving team as "confidence coaches" and over time we have taken seriously the role that confidence plays in learning.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

At Hills-Beaver Creek schools we believe that culture and climate underlie all of the academic activities that we engage in. Educating the individual student and dedicating an equal amount of energy to academic and social growth is important to our core philosophy. To that end, we spend much of our time at the elementary school focusing on teaching behaviors and expectations. The ultimate result is developing a caring and understanding culture among all students and staff.

We promote culture and appropriate behaviors through our Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program. Over a two year period, team members participated in a training that helped to lay out our PBIS plan. Since implementing our "Patriot Pride" program school-wide at the elementary we have experienced a reduction in office referrals and have formalized a process for recognizing positive behaviors.

Currently students at the elementary school can earn pride points for a wide variety of behaviors throughout the school day. Our PBIS team and student council work together to help fund and stock the pride store. The pride store is open once per month and students can spend pride points that they have earned over the month. The consistent recognition of positive actions encourages and motivates our students and staff to look for opportunities to show appropriate behaviors.

Focusing on motivation has been a key component to improving test scores on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA). Our staff recognized the importance of motivation and have worked on finding creative ways to motivate students to engage in their learning throughout the year. Goal setting has become a major portion of our motivation strategy. We have compared our grade level scores with peers around the state and have used that data to set grade level goals early in the year. Making students more aware of their individual influence over our overall test results has produced positive gains. Our total proficiency on reading and math state assessments has grown 25% over the past five years.

The end result of improved assessment scores is a culmination of creating a culture that promotes and believes in learning each day. Culture is developed from the combination of small behaviors that students exhibit each day. Through meeting with staff and recognizing success we have promoted a culture of learning throughout the school year. The school and community have shown their support of staff and students through activities such as American Education Week, recognizing teacher of the year, and homecoming. It is sometimes difficult to explain but our small communities are proud supporters of the school and would do anything to help support our public school.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

As a public school we have an obligation to involve our community, parents, and families in the educational process. As much as possible we like to inform parents and keep them up to date concerning activities within our school. Over the past five years our ability to reach out to parents has been expanded by social media and digital technologies. With that said, for all of the possible modes of communication we still find that the most effective is direct face to face contact.

One of our effective strategies for engaging families has been our prior to school conferences. Rather than an open house we have a scheduled 30 minute conference for each student and parent before the start to the school year. These conferences have proven to be a key component for collecting data and information about students. The conferences are based on a true two-way communication model in which teachers can share expectations and parents can share important information about their child's learning. The conferences typically have a positive and optimistic tone to them that help students to get off to a good start to the school year. Over the past five years we have averaged over 95% attendance at our prior to school conferences.

Throughout the year we look for other opportunities to invite families and the community into the school. The most notable occasion that we do this is during American Education Week. Over the years we have recognized educators through a variety of ways during that week including participating in the “Educator for a Day” program. Our most consistent events from year to year are “Pastries with Parents” and “Grandparents Day.” Both of the events are sponsored by local businesses and invite parents and grandparents into the school to celebrate the importance of public education. These events coincide with American Education Week. On a typical grandparents day we serve over 400 meals. It is clear that the students love having grandparents and parents as a part of their school day and we feel that it is a great way to connect with our community.

On a more practical note we do take conscious efforts to be transparent with parents concerning academic issues. We use our student information system to record and update grades on a regular basis. We encourage parents to monitor student progress through the online system. Mid-terms and quarter grades are sent out electronically and any necessary progress reports are shared digitally with parents.

Our district recently rolled out our own application and website that are connected to other forms of social media. All pertinent information is shared through the app and most urgent information can be sent to parents by direct notification. The combined app and social media service has allowed us to share more things going on in our school and is often used to promote our successes.

In the way of traditional media, we have a very close relationship with our local newspaper and radio. The newspaper frequently attends and reports on school events and the district has a once per week radio show that highlights the events of the week.

3. Professional Development:

In 2016 H-BC schools participated in a strategic planning process that was offered through the state department of education. A goal of that process was to create a system for professional development that allows all of our staff members access to best practices in the field of education. Although there is no one specific strategy or plan that overrides the staff development umbrella, we encourage our staff members to seek out and find innovative ways to improve their individual classroom. The practical approach to staff development has resulted in pragmatic improvements by individual classroom teachers.

In many ways our school and district function in a very unique structure. Due to the small size of the district, staff members often take on unique roles that may not exist in other districts. Or often if they are a classroom teacher they may be the only teacher at a grade level or in a subject area. Professional Learning Communities (PLC's) provide a way for our staff members to share information but often they are not dealing with the same students or curriculum. Because of this we have found ways to cooperate with neighboring schools that provide our staff with opportunities for true collaboration.

Over the past ten years the H-BC school district has participated in two such collaborative groups. As a part of the FLY collaborative we learned basic fundamentals of PLC's along with the importance of formative assessments and standards based teaching. More recently as a member of the southern collaborative our staff members have been able to actively collaborate with teachers of the same grade level or subject area from similar sized schools in our region. The collaborative group allows us to bring in national speakers for common in-services and gives our staff members a cohort of teachers to draw support from.

The ultimate goal of all staff development is increased student learning and achievement. School improvement is a by-product of individual student achievement. In our case there is not one specific piece of staff development that has attributed to improvement over the past five years. However, the combined efforts of individual teachers seeking out more efficient methods and encouragement to try new strategies has led to a unique combination of effective practices.

4. School Leadership:

The administration at Hills-Beaver Creek school consists of a superintendent who also serves as the secondary principal, a secondary dean of students, and an elementary principal. The same leadership team has been in place over the past five years and consistency in these roles has allowed the district to grow and improve over time. The working relationship between administrators and the school board is one of mutual respect and vested common interests. When difficult decisions have needed to be made the school board and administration have worked closely together and supported each other. At each level of leadership the key components to success have been trust and support.

Administrators within the district have the mentality that working with staff and students is most effective through respect and teamwork. The small nature of our staff allows for open input and sharing of ideas when dealing with issues in each school. Classroom teachers are given general authority over their domain and have the autonomy to make decisions about their own classroom within a structure that is organized by administrators. There is a mentality that each teacher is the expert in their own classroom and often have the best strategies or knowledge for meeting the needs of individual students. In situations when teachers are asked to modify, change practices, or implement a new program they respond willingly and have practical opinions concerning changes that may occur.

The ultimate goal of all leaders and staff within the district often seem to be in line with the goal of increased student achievement. This is measured in a variety of ways but the goal is never far out of sight. We have been more deliberate over time to pay attention to specific indicators and make strides to improve in identified areas. Programing has been influenced by our effort to improve student achievement. Most specifically we have expanded our Response to Intervention (RtI) program over the past five years and have increased the amount of individual support that students receive. This change was based on leadership philosophy and came out of a combination of financial and human resource factors.

The role of administration has always been to organize, promote, and monitor methods for improving student learning. In our district that has meant a close working relationship between administrators and efficient use of human resources. In many cases staff members are shared between buildings and a shared philosophy is important in these cases. Regular staff meetings and participation in collaborative meetings help to develop strong understanding among administrators as well as shared vision and priorities.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

It is difficult to identify one single practice that is most influential over our staff and students. But if we focus on academic achievement we can identify a point in time when we began seeing significant gains. The gains corresponded in changes that were made in our Response to Intervention model. In 2016 we added a full time RtI teacher to our staff. The position was intended to oversee and refine our RtI process. It was heavily rooted in being more deliberate about using screening data and identifying needs at an early stage in learning.

The program was inspired by a variety of different models and was intended as a way to provide direct support in some classrooms that were experiencing growing populations. One program that inspired our model for delivering RtI was the Minnesota Reading Corps. Previous to expanding our RtI program we had a reading corps tutor that worked directly with student for 25 minutes per day on reading skills. We consistently saw the highest amount of growth among our students that participated in reading corps and wanted to apply the concept to a larger population.

Our RtI model functions contrary to some current trends. Due to our structure, schedule, population, and experience we planned a 25 minute block for reading and math each day in which students would participate in one of three tiered groups. Tier I students are those that understand a concept or topic at the highest level. These students receive enrichment activities with the regular education classroom teacher. Tier II students may need increased practice or confidence and meet in a small group (5-8 students) with our RtI instructor. Tier III students meet as individuals or small groups with our interventionist. With this structure we have been able to most effectively use the 25 minute block.

Once we began implementing our unique RtI model we noticed many unintended positive consequences. One major consequence was our need to plan and prepare more deliberately. In order for multiple teachers to be working on similar skills at the same time it became necessary to share lesson plans and talk about what strategies and lessons were most effective. This practical necessity led to important and productive conversations among teachers. At the same time our identification process for special needs became more well defined and functional. Since implementing the RtI program we have had more analysis into individual student learning and have had more creative solutions for unique learners. Finally, we became more in tune with data to support our curricular decisions. We rely much less on intuition today and much more on data to support decisions concerning individual students.

Overall, our RtI program has had a positive effect on multiple different layers and levels of our school and has provided a sound structure to meet the needs of all of our students.