

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

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Mr. Shawn Huntley

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

Official School Name Montevideo Middle School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 2001 William Avenue

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

Montevideo MN 56265-2200  
City State Zip Code+4 (9 digits total)

County Chippewa County

Telephone (320) 269-6431

Fax (320) 321-8970

Web site/URL http://montevideoms.ss8.sharpschoo

l.com/home

E-mail shuntley@montevideoschools.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. Luther Heller

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

District Name Montevideo Public School District Tel. (320) 269-8833

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. Darin Balken

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

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_

(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

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

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

## Part I – Eligibility Certification

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

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

## PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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

### DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 2 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 1 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 4 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	0	0	0
4	56	52	108
5	48	54	102
6	54	60	114
7	60	54	114
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	218	220	438

\*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):
- 2 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 1 % Asian
  - 4 % Black or African American
  - 20 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 73 % 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: 5%

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

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

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2017 until the end of the 2017-2018 school year	11
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2017 until the end of the 2017-2018 school year	13
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	24
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2017	439
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.05
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	5

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 8%  
34 Total number ELL

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 43%  
 Total number students who qualify: 190

8. Students receiving special education services: 20 %  
86 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>6</u> Autism                  | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>1</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>18</u> Other Health Impaired                |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>37</u> Specific Learning Disability         |
| <u>9</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>8</u> Speech or Language Impairment         |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment      | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>7</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: 4
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	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.	13
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	11
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 26:1

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

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

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

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

Yes  No

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

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

The Montevideo Middle School has a student-centered approach that focuses on student achievement while educating the whole child.

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

## **PART III – SUMMARY**

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Montevideo Middle School (MMS) has a student-centered approach that focuses on student achievement while educating the whole child. The MMS moto is: We are not a good school, we are a GREAT school! MMS is located in rural southwest Minnesota and serves approximately 440 students from diverse backgrounds and socio-economic situations. Approximately 20% are Hispanic, 4% are Black, 2% are Native American, 1% are Asian/Pacific, and 73% White. In addition, 19% receive Special Education services, 8% receive English Language Learner services and 43% qualify for free or reduced lunch.

MMS is unique as we serve students in grades 4-7. Although there are some logistical difficulties this presents regarding the master schedule and teacher licensures in specific areas or grade levels, we experience many benefits from this grade configuration. Our building is set up with two academic wings with a commons area in the middle. Fourth and fifth grade occupy one wing and follow a block style schedule. These students also get to experience having different teachers for different subjects as both grade levels have departmentalized teachers, along with being able to develop relationships with all students in their grade level. This gives students their first experience with having multiple teachers for core subjects to help ease the transition to the sixth and seventh-grade wing that runs on a bell schedule and has mainly one teacher for each core content area. MMS is committed to having high expectations for all students by developing positive relationships and providing a safe and secure learning environment.

Over the past four years, MMS has implemented several new strategies and initiatives to improve outcomes for all students. The biggest shift in our instructional approach began in 2016 as we moved away from ability grouped reading and math classes to a more differentiated instructional approach. Ability grouping at MMS was in place for about 20 years prior to the change. It was widely accepted by various stakeholders as a means to meet students where they were at and move them forward. However, as our demographics began to change during this time, our school-wide data showed that this approach was not meeting the needs of our disadvantaged student populations. An achievement gap began to show and grow. In 2016, an Equity Team was established to review data and research the effects of ability grouping and the effects of differentiated instruction. The Equity Team determined that the best way to ensure all students have equal access to our guaranteed and viable curriculum was to provide a more differentiated approach to student learning.

In addition to adopting differentiated instruction, much focus was given to our Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) academically, behaviorally, socially, and emotionally to meet the needs of all our students. Academically, our Tier 1 focus is a strong core curriculum based on the Minnesota State Standards. In addition to standards alignment, all students are supported through a built-in, daily-scheduled “What I Need” (WIN) time. WIN time provides students the opportunity to get extra help from their core teachers to increase their understanding of our essential learning targets in a timely manner. Students who do not need additional support during this time are encouraged to pursue several options: create a passion project, practice independent reading, refine math and reading skills using various online programs, or complete homework. A wide array of standardized assessments are used to place students with math and reading difficulties in our Tier 2 system of supports. Reading and math intervention classes are designed to provide additional opportunities to our struggling reading and math students and help them improve specific skills. Intervention groups are fluid; assessment data is reviewed at least three times a year and students are placed based on need. Students who continue to have difficulty, despite receiving Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports and interventions, may be referred to special education, which is our Tier 3 system of academic support.

Behaviorally, in 2017, we began implementing Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). HAWK Pride is our school motto which stands for, Have respect, Act responsibly, Work hard, and Keep safe. A behavior matrix was developed to provide students with expected behaviors in each area of the school. All staff strive to recognize students who display positive HAWK Pride by giving students HAWK awards for their efforts. Students who earn HAWK Pride awards are put in a weekly drawing for an incentive. Although incentives are nice, it is the discussions between staff and students, when giving or receiving an award, that have the most impact on positive student behavior. Our PBIS system also follows the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) process for students who need additional supports regarding their behavior. Students who have difficulty meeting our behavior expectations are referred to our Behavior

Assessment Team and a research-based intervention plan is developed with the student, parent(s), and a school staff member. These plans guide students in meeting school expectations. Students who do not respond to our Tier 2 behavior interventions are referred to our individualized Tier 3 interventions. During the first semester of the 2018-19 school year, we had approximately 300 reported behavioral incidents and over 900 HAWK awards for students displaying positive behavior which meets our expectation of three positives for every one negative. As a result, we have had 35% fewer detentions and 30% fewer suspensions compared to the same time period the year prior. Overall, implementation of the PBIS has improved our culture and climate as we focus on students' good behaviors rather than students' misbehaviors.

Montevideo Middle School has been able to support its students' academic, behavioral, social, and emotional successes by using the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) approach. Our efforts in using MTSS over the past several years have allowed for the excellent progress in closing the achievement gap within our disadvantaged student populations while moving all learners forward.

Montevideo Middle School (MMS) utilizes Robert Marzano's Framework of Instruction as a guide for instructional strategies, preparing and planning instruction, and collegiality and professionalism. In addition to Marzano's Framework, MMS uses the DuFour Model for our Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). All teachers post, in student-friendly language, and discuss essential learning targets in their classrooms each day. These learning targets are based on our state standards and benchmarks. Providing students with clear and concise learning objectives provides teacher clarity, which has a high barometer of influence on student achievement. Students gain skills through a variety of learning experiences including direct teacher instruction, flexible groups, and project-based learning. Our differentiated instructional approach allows student needs to be met at the individual level.

Teachers meet as grade level teams weekly to discuss students, activities, and other school business. Grade level and core content teachers also have common planning time during the school day. Teachers use this time to collaborate and align instruction for the week. PLCs consist of grade level teachers that share the same students. Our PLCs meet once a month, or ten times a year, to map curriculum, to development assessments, to evaluate student data, and to modify instruction based on data. The aim of PLCs is to provide teacher clarity, track student progress, make timely interventions, and extend the learning of others in efforts to increase achievement levels and close achievement gaps.

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

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

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

Fourth grade ELA Instruction is designed to ensure students have a solid understanding of the MN standards. Nonfiction, poetry, and realistic fiction engage and teach students reading skills and comprehension strategies. Spelling and writing activities round off all reading assignments. Harcourt Trophies, the current reading series, is supplemented by trade books in whole-group and small-group differentiated literature circles. Lessons and skills are first taught in a whole group setting, then enriched or retaught as needed in class and during WIN time with small groups or individual students. Study Island’s “My Learning Path” helps students practice and reinforces skill knowledge. Fall NWEA and STAR test scores are used as reading comprehension assessments to determine each student’s independent reading level. Online games supplement the learning targets and reinforce reading skills.

Fifth grade reading, writing, and grammar are taught by implementing a systematic and explicit instructional approach. Fiction and nonfiction selections serve to teach many strategies, skills, and techniques to make students effective readers. Teachers use whole group, small group, differentiated instruction, and modeling to guide the reading lessons. Direct instruction allows for an explanation of the skill being focused on, and modeling shows students how to use the skill or strategy. Teachers work directly with students as they apply each skill. STAR testing, FAST testing, and formative and summative assessments are used to differentiate instruction, adapt curriculum, and provide struggling students with supplemental instruction.

Sixth grade ELA follows the required Minnesota State Common Core Standards. Reading teachers meet once a month to develop a common effective curriculum to best meet students’ needs. NWEA and Star testing data are used to place students into “Mixed Up Madness” classes once a quarter. This adds variety to the content and allows students to be challenged or remediated. Wordly Wise, Quizlet, Harcourt basal reading curriculum, Scholastic Action Magazine, Newsela, and other units are used to work around individual novels. NWEA data is merged into Study Island to create individual learning paths.

Additionally, in sixth grade, the 6 Traits of Writing strategy introduce students to the writing process. Students learn writing tools and apply those tools to their own writing. Writing teams are then assembled to peer edit and revise writing. Students work on narrative, persuasive, and expository writing projects. These writing projects include a fiction story, persuasive essay, and a biography. A “How to” paper is used in tandem with a demonstration speech. The Speaking, Viewing, and Listening standards are divided among English, reading, and social studies to enable opportunities for students to grow in their communication skills.

The 7th grade ELA curriculum adheres to the Minnesota Academic Standards. Clear, consistent guidelines, high expectations, and rigor lend themselves to college/career ready students. Students spend the year navigating through all the standard strands. Because many of the ELA standards require literature analysis, there is a heavy emphasis on reading, writing, and language. Fiction is dissected to find and plot main events, nonfiction is studied to identify different text structures, and language is manipulated and revised into precise words, succinct sentences, well-written paragraphs, and publishable essays. Scaffolding is the primary instructional approach; all assignments and course material are structured in a systematic way to support essential learning targets and make objectives and processes transparent to the students. Students work independently, cooperatively, or collaboratively. Close reading, direct instruction, and lectures calibrate lessons. Graphic organizers, modeling, and examples pave way for independent practice. Students are expected to apply and demonstrate an understanding of all teachings. Homework and practice, tests and quizzes, and final projects and compositions are analyzed and evaluated for comprehension. Formative and summative assessments are constant and timely; student work is analyzed and feedback is written on each assignment, and step-by-step instructions and rubrics guide students to success.

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

The fourth and fifth grade MMS math program is aligned with the Minnesota State Math Standards and is delivered to students using a variety of best practice strategies. Flexible grouping allows for whole-group explicit instruction, small-group direct instruction, and partner work. Embedded into our instruction is the use of manipulatives for hands-on learning which gives students a more concrete understanding of the concept being taught. We teach multiple problem-solving methods to meet various learning styles. We utilize flexible grouping based on formative assessments to best reach the kids at their learning level. In addition, lessons are delivered using a broad range of strategies by utilizing drawings, conceptual language, real-world situations, and technology. Finally, our lessons are designed to reach a depth of knowledge beyond basic application and we give our students the opportunity to apply and extend their learning.

Our sixth and seventh grade math program is a student-centered, problem-based, active learning, collaborative environment. We utilize a variety of resources (English and Spanish) specifically aligned to Minnesota's math standards. Much of this work is done in heterogeneous (mixed ability) teams, though each class session also includes whole class and individual instruction. While working in teams, each student plays a defined role as either a facilitator, task manager, resource manager, or recorder/reporter. This mitigates the tendency for one team member to quickly solve the problems and then "tell" the other students how to complete them. Within their study teams, students solve complex problems so all can access higher-level, more sophisticated tasks. Working in teams pushes groups to grapple with their respective "weaknesses" in ways individual and whole group instruction does not. Thus, historically "weak" students access richer material and historically "strong" students verbalize their thinking.

Beyond the use of teams, differentiated instruction is also delivered periodically in homogeneous (like-ability) groupings. Remediation is delivered to underperforming students, reinforcement to standard level mastery students, and extension to students who exhibit above standard level performance within the unit. Most days students receive a short homework assignment comprised of five varied problems. Each homework set contains topics just introduced, as well as problems to practice, extend, and apply previously-learned skills and concepts. The mixed, spaced practice structure of the homework assignments assures that students practice ideas and skills over time for long-term retention. Several types of formative assessments are utilized to provide student feedback on unit specific topics and drive teacher instructional objectives for future class sessions. Students are assessed summatively at the end of each unit in various ways; a standard paper and pencil test taken within a class period, an open-ended, non-timed performance task, and a math notebook students update daily with classwork, learning targets, math notes, and completed/corrected homework assignments.

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

Montevideo Middle School implements a standards-based science curriculum at all grade levels through explicit instruction and a variety of inquiry-based, hands-on lab activities. Grades 4 and 5 engage in physical, life, and earth science. The sixth-grade curriculum focuses on the physical sciences, including the study of topics related to physics and chemistry. Students have an opportunity to apply their knowledge regarding physics concepts to one or more engineering design projects. A few unique lessons that 6th-grade students get to participate in are the Forensic Crime Scene Investigation, Iditarod Dog Sled Speed Project, and Marble Roller Coasters STEM Project.

Seventh grade science is an introduction to the subject of biology with units in basic chemistry, cells, human biology, genetics, evolution, diversity of life, and ecology. A few unique lessons students participate in are different types of dissections to learn about human anatomy and animal diversity, as well as outdoor investigative activities during the warmer months of the year with a pond and wildlife area nearby. Students are assessed for learning in a variety of different ways including formative and summative assessments with a focus on project-based assessments.

All Montevideo Middle School students get the opportunity to learn collaboratively with many activities, labs, and projects throughout the course of the year. Not only is the grade-level content important, but more STEM-based curriculum is being incorporated throughout the pre-existing curriculum. Problem-solving, research, and design and collaboration are key skills that the science program focuses on teaching Montevideo students.

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

Montevideo Middle School implements a standards-based social studies curriculum that focuses on geography and history. Students are required to understand facts, concepts, principles, and perspectives. Our students are expected to apply their knowledge to think critically about important issues, to communicate their findings, and to engage in problem-solving and discipline-based inquiry. Grade 4 students focus on the geography of North America. Grade 5 students study the history of North America up to the 1800s. From this foundation, the context for learning moves from local to global.

The social studies curriculum in 6th grade is a well-rounded overview of Minnesota History. Areas of study include the early history of the land, and the people who influenced the industrial growth that built Minnesota into being today's world leader economically. Students use today's technology, such as Chromebooks, Powerpoint Presentations, and Smartboards to help build these learning blocks and gain the knowledge that continues to keep Minnesota in the lead. Students are assessed on computer presentations, detailed reports, and Quizizz and Google Forms. Artistic designs and handmade projects are also assessed. We use advanced thinking skills to demonstrate our knowledge as to how Minnesota played a major part in the development of the United States.

The Minnesota Academic Standards in social studies are the driving force of the curriculum in seventh grade. Students focus on United States history from 1800s-World War II. The standards address not only history, but also include citizenship & government, economics, and geography that coincide with the historical events during the time periods taught. A common thread throughout the year revolves around the United States Constitution. All discussion of historical events ties back to the Constitution and how the document has shaped the U.S. government throughout the country's history. Information is presented using a variety of teaching strategies, including large group discussions, cooperative group activities, partner collaboration, and individual learning. Students also create several projects throughout the year to gain a greater understanding of major historical topics, such as the Civil War. Students practice their presentation skills when presenting their projects to the class. Technology is incorporated in all of the teaching strategies to assist students in their learning and understanding. Formative and summative assessments are used throughout each unit to gauge student understanding and mastery of the material. Students needing more assistance or individual assistance work with the teacher during WIN time to guide them to proficiency.

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

Providing our students with the necessary knowledge and skills to be college and career ready fits nicely within the Montevideo Middle School Mission of having a student-centered approach while educating the whole child. We believe that having a strong core academic program gives our students the knowledge to pursue their post-secondary aspirations, along with providing all students access to our exploratory class such as band, choir, art, technology, and family and consumer science. These exploratory classes provide our students with an introduction to a variety of experiences, of which many of our students develop a passion in one of these areas to pursue after they graduate high school. Additionally, all sixth through twelfth grade students are given a district issued Chromebook to access information quickly and develop their creativity using technology resources, which are necessary skills with today's job fields. Finally, we offer many additional activities after school, such as robotics, to give our students additional experiences.

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

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

All 4th and 5th grade students participate in a music course during the school year. Fourth graders learn dynamic vocal music from a variety of cultures and time periods. Students also learn how to play and perform recorders and simple percussion instruments. Science and math are woven into this music course to show how the subjects work together. Students incorporate choreography that they have created into their music that is relevant to the music they are singing. Our 5th grade music class performs three times a year.

The focus of 5th grade music is to become more confident with their own voice and sing parts independently to create more melodic and complex music. Fifth grade students learn how to combine sign language into songs to be able to communicate with others and incorporate emotions into songs with more than just their voices.

All sixth and seventh grade students are required to participate in either band or choir, or they can be in both. Students involved in band have the option to be in band rehearsals every day or every other day. Band students receive a weekly, small group, or private lesson during the school year. Additionally, we offer private and small group summer lessons during the month of June for all beginning and developing middle school instrumentalists. While at MMS, band members have the opportunity to play in small ensembles, jazz band, and many regional honor bands in southwest Minnesota. Throughout the school year, the sixth grade concert band, seventh grade concert band, and MMS jazz band give three public concerts at our Fine Arts Center. These ensembles also perform many other times for the students and staff at MMS for various school assemblies and events.

Choir is open enrollment. It is one of the few courses where specially-abled learners are not assisted or accompanied by a paraprofessional unless required by a student's Individualized Education Plan. Similarly, ELL students may or may not be accompanied by an adult. Choir is a space where students can utilize their peers as resources and as support. Students can flourish in a less stressful and evaluative atmosphere through observation-based, formative assessments of individual and group participation. Summative assessments are done through group performance and without the weight of individual academic evaluation. Collaboration, cooperation, and work ethic is the goal in choir.

Physical Education (PE) classes at Montevideo Middle School address the Minnesota Department of Education's state statutory requirements. "Physically literate individuals who have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to enjoy a lifetime of healthful physical activity," is the goal. Formal and informal assessments are used to modify activities to meet the needs of a diverse population. We collect fitness data within our school and district. The K-12 PE staff works collaboratively to reflect on and streamline the physical fitness expectations and goals district-wide. Chromebooks, which are a district-wide initiative to incorporate technology into our classrooms, are used. Google Classroom is used to assign handouts and tests and apps such as Plickers are used for formative assessments.

Fourth grade health class teams with physical education classes, mental health programs, and 4th grade science teachings. Students study and explore body systems, stressors, and germs. It is a hands-on, real-life experience that includes dissecting a deer heart and a fetal pig. We partner with parents for the stress unit by having students record daily stressors in a journal and having conversations with parents about their daily stressors. By the end of 4th grade, our hope is that all students have an appreciation of their physical and mental well being and have the skills necessary to make good choices to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Health 7 is a companion course to Physical Education and is a course requirement for all 7th graders. Our curriculum emphasizes developing life skills and decision making to be carried over into a lifetime of healthy living. Major units include: Concepts in Mental & Emotional Health, Nutrition, and Sexual Health and STI Prevention. Students explore these topics through class discussions, lectures, research, guest speakers, projects and cooperative learning.

The MMS Art Program is based on essential learning targets formed from the Minnesota Visual Arts Standards. All grade levels have Art every other day for either a trimester or a semester. Students use the Artist Habits of Mind to develop their craft by learning how to use specific art mediums such as painting, drawing, ceramics, sculpture, collage, and oil pastel. They envision what their artworks will be through brainstorming and sketches. They express their creative thoughts by having choice integrated into their projects. Students also learn through observation of the teacher and their peers. They engage and persist by using problem-solving skills to overcome challenges and reflect on their work through artist statements and critiques. Students also are introduced to a variety of artists to help them better understand the art community. Students grow in their artistic knowledge, skills, and appreciation. They also have their art displayed at our annual local Letters and Arts Night. Finally, every year a group of 7th-grade students helps to create a new mural that is displayed in the Middle School halls.

Montevideo Middle School offers a 7th Grade Family and Consumer Science (FACS) class to all 7th-grade students. The class meets every other day for a semester. This hands-on class provides an opportunity for students to develop important life skills, which will help them be successful now, as an adolescent, and later as an adult. The class covers topics such as recipes and measurements, food and kitchen safety, kitchen tools and appliances, microwave cooking, nutrition, meal planning, communication, table manners, table setting, and laundry. Students work together in kitchen groups to prepare healthy and delicious snacks while practicing teamwork and proper cleaning procedures. This introductory level class prepares the students for future FACS classes in high school, in which they will continue to build on these vital skills.

Technology is required for all students in grades 4-6. It meets every other day for a semester. Fourth-grade students learn basic keyboarding skills, an introduction to Google Apps, and Digital Citizenship. Students learn about security measures, data privacy, and respectful online behaviors. Fifth-grade students use code.org and begin coding. They learn what coding is and how it can be used. In addition, MMS uses the Google platform for most classes and students are able to learn various Google applications and demonstrate their understanding using non-linguistic representations. A site called Everfi is also used to reinforce previous Digital Citizenship lessons. In this program, students need to complete seven “worlds” that have to do with digital citizenship. They consist of: how to buy a computer, wireless communication, the viral world, internet resources and credibility, creating multimedia products, digital relationships and respect, and the future of technology and you. This course is a semester-long class. In 6th grade, students are introduced to new sites and programs that they may have never used before and generalize these skills to use as in other classes to create artifacts to demonstrate their understanding.

Montevideo Middle School provides a variety of mental health and social work supports for our students in grades 4-7. A highlighted program that provides mental health support is our Discovery II mental health program. Students who have a mental health diagnosis and/or are having difficulty in two of the three following areas: school, home, and community are eligible for this program. Oftentimes this program is provided two days per week in small group sessions. Students receive academic credit for participating. Some of the topics that are covered are social skills, time management, stress management, friendship skills, problem-solving skills, and managing their own mental health challenges. This program is partially grant funded in cooperation with the county mental health collaborative to provide direct service and early intervention to students. Frequent parent contact is an integral component of this program.

Weekly supports and “check-ins” are provided for many students who are navigating the difficulty of their adolescent years. Middle school years can be difficult. Students experience many social-emotional changes, which can be coupled with family hardships such as parental separation or divorce, death or loss, and illness or addiction. Social work support is available on a one-time basis or ongoing weekly support. Crisis management is available for all students daily. Collaboration with area agencies such as the mental health center, corrections, family services, community action agency, public health, and local hospitals are a vital part of the success in working with partnerships of area agencies. An example of working with the local mental health center is the school-linked mental health program where students may receive therapy and skills in the school facility.

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

Montevideo Middle School has a strong English Language Learner (ELL) program. MMS was recognized by the Minnesota Department of Education in 2018 for being in the top 5% in the state for progress towards English proficiency. Students are placed in an ELL class based on their English language acquisition skills. Students new to the country receive an hour and a half of English as a Second Language (ESL) time each day. Students who received above a 2.5 on the ACCESS test the previous year receive 45 minutes of ESL time each day. During this time the students use a variety of technological tools to help with language acquisition. The students use virtual reality goggles to build background information about topics they learn about in ESL and in content area classes. The goggles allow the students to explore different areas of the world. The class also uses 1 to 1 Chromebooks to access a variety of online tools such as the Google Suite and Nearpod. The Chromebooks prepare the students to use technology in their other classes as well as in their future. The class uses National Geographic Learning to work on listening, speaking, reading and writing in an academic context. With all of these tools, the ESL program uses game-based learning to

engage students while learning English. This program uses culturally relevant texts to teach students about their US culture, their own culture, and cultures from around the world. Over the past two years we have been able to decrease our ELL achievement gap in math by 25.3% and reading by 13.1%. Although we have made excellent strides with our ELL population, we have more work to do as our achievement gap is still above 10% in both reading and math. We will continue to identify and monitor student progress at the individual level and provide the necessary interventions, including summer programming, until we eliminate the achievement gap.

Over the past twenty years our Hispanic population has increased significantly and now represents 19% of our student body. These students bring various experiences that add to our curriculum. We have been mindful of our increased Hispanic population by updating our books in the library and reading passages throughout our ELA curriculum. It is very important that students see others like themselves in text to make those connections. We also value the Hispanic culture and provide opportunities for students to continue to grow and learn about the Hispanic culture by providing an after school Hispanic Culture Club. Over the past two years we have been able to decrease the achievement gap for our Hispanic students by 19.4% in math and 15.6% in reading. This population still has an achievement gap above 10% in both reading and math. Continuous monitoring and interventions will be provided until we eliminate this achievement gap.

In addition to our growth within the Hispanic population, we have experienced a socioeconomic shift within our community over the same time period. We currently have 43% of our student body qualify for free or reduced (FRP) lunch. Closing the socioeconomic achievement gap has been a district priority for the past several years. Our Achievement and Integration (A&I) funds are allocated to support these efforts. We also provide our less fortunate students with food every Friday through our Backpack Program. Over the past two years we have decreased our achievement gap for our FRP students by 4.6% in math and 2.6% in reading. Our overall gap in math is below 10% and reading is at 12%. Interventions and supports will continue with our FRP students until we eliminate the achievement gap.

The Montevideo School District has an Indian Education program devoted to seeing our students of native heritage succeed. We offer a multi-tiered approach to this goal that includes academic support, cultural acceptance and education, and extracurricular activities. Closing the achievement gap of our indigenous students is a priority. We have success coordinators for academic assistance. If a student is struggling, we meet with them and formulate a plan for success. This may include homework help, one-on-one time with an instructor, or other options. We have a home-to-school liaison as a contact person for parents and students. Furthermore, teachers are encouraged to ask questions and create a culturally sensitive curriculum and lessons for their courses. Our media center has a large section devoted to culturally appropriate literature by Native authors. Traditional flutes and drums are included in the music department here at MMS. We offer opportunities for students to learn more about different native cultures including art, hand games, dances, and history. Students get together once a week to work on projects, learn, and collaborate. Students enjoy making traditional Dakota style moccasins, Annishinabe snowshoes, many different styles of beadwork, and learning the Rabbit Dance. This spring we look forward to making Fancy Shawl Regalia and collecting sap to make maple syrup. Finally, we bolster pride in Native heritage by exposing students to Wacipis, college visits, encouraging participation in new activities, and acquainting students to Native people that are thriving in our communities. Prospective plans include a book reading with Author Redwing Thomas, holding an inner school Wacipi, and making traditional hand drums. Activity participation is open to students, both native and non-native. Even though our native population is below 10%, we feel that it is important to provide these experiences to our students.

Montevideo Middle School provides a variety of services and programming for students with disabilities. The majority of our students that receive special education services are taught alongside their nondisabled peers in the general education classroom. For students that need additional support for academic or behavioral needs, a special education teacher or paraprofessional are in the classes as well. These students receive what is called "push-in services." Push-in-services allow all students access to a classroom setting and instruction. Class work may be modified depending on student need. Accommodations are also provided to students based on needs identified within their Individualized Education Plan (IEP). If a student, or a small group of students, are struggling with a concept, they may also work with a classroom or special education teacher. These teachers can re-teach concepts directly during intervention time or resource-room

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time to the student(s). We do have some students that are significantly below grade level and the general education setting is not always appropriate. These students can go to the resource room and work with the special education teacher for pull-out services. These options provide students with the opportunity to work on their IEP goals in a smaller setting. Although our data for special education students is 10% above the state average in both reading and math, we have an achievement gap of 25% in both areas. Our special education PLC is currently working on implementing additional reading interventions that align with grade level expectations to decrease the gap for our special education students.

## PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

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### 1. School Climate/Culture:

Providing our students and staff with a positive school climate and culture is at the forefront of everything we do at MMS. It's all about relationships; students learn best from the people they like, and staff commits to an organization if they feel valued. Much research has been done to show the correlation between positive school culture and improved outcomes for students. It is for this very reason that we monitor our school culture and climate through student, parent, and staff surveys. Collecting data is essential in identifying areas of strength and areas of growth. Parent surveys indicate that we do a great job providing students with a safe learning environment, communicating with our clients in an open and respectful manner, and welcoming parents and guardians to our school. Student survey results show that MMS teachers treat students with respect, are available for extra help, and model positive actions. Our HAWK Pride initiative is a key component of creating a positive climate and culture. We take pride in the survey results that show we are indeed providing students with a safe and secure learning environment. In addition to providing our students with a positive school culture, it is just as important for staff to feel valued and supported within our culture. Just as students receive HAWK awards for displaying positive behaviors, staff are recognized for their positive actions with staff HAWK Pride awards. Additionally, the MMS Social Committee provides many opportunities throughout the year, such as potlucks, to show our appreciation for the hard work our staff put in each and every day. The MMS Social Committee also collects funds from staff at the beginning of each year to use towards celebrations, such a new baby, or to share our sympathies to staff who have suffered a loss in their family. The Montevideo School District also provides all staff with an end of the year staff appreciation dinner that recognizes staff for their commitment to our students along with recognizing staff for their longevity, selection of the district teacher of the year, and the selection of the non-certified staff of the year.

At MMS we want all of our students to have as many experiences as possible. For that reason we allow ten students from 6th grade and ten students from 7th grade (for a total of 20 students) to participate in our student council. Student council members are required to attend monthly meetings and are responsible for planning, implementing, and participating in student council events. Council members run our monthly "Popcorn Friday" event where they deliver and collect order forms, pop and deliver popcorn, and count and deposit money. We also hold three dances per year. Council members help in planning and promoting the event as well as work the set-up, door, concessions, and clean-up for the event. Some smaller fundraising events include selling school spirit gear during homecoming week, a caramel apple fundraiser, and a holiday photo booth in December. All funds raised are used to promote a positive culture in our school by providing prizes for student council events and purchasing equipment for our students. We installed a gaga ball (\$1000) pit with money generated from our cookbook fundraiser.

Student council members hold two major fundraising events to benefit others. The first we call "Candy for a Cure." Student council students sell lollipops that have an anonymous note (i.e. I'm a sucker for you, Thanks for being a friend, etc.) attached and are delivered to students. Along with "Candy for a Cure," we sell hat and music passes each day the week of Valentine's day. All of the monies from these two events are donated to Pennies for Patients. The second major event is Dodgeball for Heart. Students fundraise money to enter a team in the tournament. The winning team competes against the local police department. All the money for this event is donated to the American Heart Association.

When we are not fundraising we like to add fun to our school year with several other events. During Homecoming week we hold dress-up day contests. In November we have a door decorating contest followed by a locker decorating contest in December. Snow Daze is held in January, which also includes dress-up contests. Our annual lip sync battle is held the week of Snow Daze. During this week, grade-level teams "battle" it out to make it to the final round. Grade-level final contestants perform on Friday to the whole school at an assembly. We end the year with spring door decorating contest. Student council packs a lot of fun into a school year.

Research shows that students involved in at least one extracurricular activity increase their commitment to

the school and improves outcomes. MMS offers a variety of extracurricular opportunities including athletics, jazz band, knowledge bowl, LEGO robotics, and countless Community Education offerings. Our student participation rate in extracurricular activities is well over 50% each year.

MMS believes celebrating success is very important in contributing to a positive culture and climate. One way we celebrate success is by honoring 10 students each month who have demonstrated excellence both academically and behaviorally. Each of these students receives a certificate, a decal for a parent vehicle, and gets their picture in the local newspaper. We also honor one student each week as part of our HAWK Pride program. This student receives a note from the principal and a gift card to a local business. At the end of each school year, we hold an assembly in the gym to recognize students for perfect attendance, three-sport athletes, Presidential fitness awards, Presidential Academic Achievement, and Presidential Academic Excellence.

## **2. Engaging Families and Community:**

The Montevideo Middle School understands the importance of engaging families and the community; it takes a village to provide our students with as much support as they need to be successful in the future.

Kids in the Community Day is a tradition each year. All students go out into the community and provide service work as a thank you to the community for its school support. MMS students and staff participate in a variety of activities such as ditch clean-up, painting at our local fairground, and playing games with assisted living residents. It is our hope that by allowing students the opportunity to give back to their community, they begin to understand the importance of service to others which is a sign of a vibrant community.

Another important tradition at MMS is our Veteran's Day program. We invite our local veterans to our school and honor them through an assembly with our entire student body. Our 7th grade band plays the National Anthem and several other patriotic pieces. Sixth grade students who participated in our Patriots Pen Essay writing opportunity have the chance to read their essay to the audience. Finally, the commander of our local American Legion delivers a teaching or a message to our students. Teachings have included how to fold a flag, and messages include the symbolism behind the fold of each flag. This event allows us the opportunity to honor all of the men and women who have served our great country.

The 6th grade social studies wax museum and grandparent interview displays are coupled with our 4th and 5th grade Grandparents Day. The wax museum consists of all 6th grade students dressing up as a famous Minnesotan and memorizing a speech to deliver as the public drops money into their coffee can. The money raised during this event goes directly to a scholarship for a local senior each year.

Just as teaching students today is much different than in the past, the same is true for how we engage parents of today. We understand that time is a valuable asset for everyone, so communication with multiple modalities is very important. Montevideo Middle School not only practices traditional communication methods such as email and phone calls to parents but also shares the amazing things students are doing via our school Facebook and Twitter accounts. Furthermore, a new initiative to extend communication to parents has MMS teachers mailing handwritten postcards to each of their students, or to the parents of their students, at least once during the school year. Each note shares a positive attribute that has been noticed about the student and appreciated by the teacher. Simple acts of communication have been successful in engaging the parents of our community.

Parents of MMS students are very supportive and care about their child's education. This is evidenced by a 90% parent attendance rate at our Back-to-School Jamboree prior to the start of each school year. MMS also records an amazing 98% turnout at our student/parent conferences each year. An exuberance of parent volunteers to chaperone student activities and field trips throughout the year further affirm the support and care parents have for their child's education.

Another important member of our staff is our Student Success Coordinator. This staff member is a liaison to our growing Hispanic population and serves as an interpreter, both spoken and written. Students are also

referred to this staff if they are failing two or more class at any given time. This person sets up a parent meeting with an administrator, the student's advisor, and the student. Barriers to success are discussed and additional supports are put in place. Supports include attending Homework Help before school for 30 minutes on Mondays and Wednesdays or Homework Help after school for one hour on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Transportation is provided to students who attend our after-school Homework Help program.

The principal at MMS shares the school's academic achievements with all stakeholders through several mediums including, but not limited to, a local radio show every six weeks, the local newspaper, school board meetings, staff meetings, assemblies, and parent presentations. Sharing success is our reward for all of the hard work everyone puts in every day. Our culture of positive student relationships and high expectations for our students allows us to appropriately challenge our students to strive for their best. This is evident by all of our amazing school staff, from our head custodian sitting with kids at lunch to the teacher who meets with kids in their classroom well beyond contract hours. We do not do this because we have to, we do this because we care so much for our students.

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

Professional Development is a valued part of the MMS culture. School Administration strongly encourages and readily approves professional development opportunities for staff. We are all teachers, and it is important we encourage all teachers to continuously grow into lifelong learners. In the past couple years the principal and several teachers have attended national conferences and state conferences. These conferences offer valuable information on improving our craft as well as participating in networking opportunities with other educational leaders. Additionally, many staff attend local workshops, participate in book studies, and attend online workshops. Just as we differentiate learning for students, we also differentiate learning for our staff.

Our Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) has proved important in improving outcomes for kids. Faculty participate in PLCs once a month during the school year to review learning targets, to discuss assessment methods, and to recommend students to interventions. Extension activities, to reach out to our students who already know the content, are also discussed and developed. Students are dismissed early on these days so teachers can meet for an extended amount of time to improve our universal instruction.

Our technology initiative provides all students with Chromebooks. Each student in 6th and 7th grade is issued a Chromebook to use at home and at school. Sets of Chromebooks are issued in the 4th and 5th grade classrooms. This initiative gives students access to a wealth of information. Teachers have been given the support necessary as to how technology can be a valuable tool to enhance instruction. The technology integration specialist in the district offers personalized support to teachers through professional development and just-in-time training. Teachers can participate in summer professional development on topics of their choosing or attend job-embedded training where substitute teachers are provided to cover classroom learning. Follow-up visits by the technology integration specialist to the classroom teachers help to integrate learning gleaned from professional development training. The technology integration specialist also supports learning by routinely observing MMS classrooms and offering instructional suggestions. The technology integration specialist is available to teachers who need questions answered, technologies incorporated, or strategies digitized just-in-time for the class to begin!

The Montevideo School District participates in the Minnesota River Valley Education District (MRVED) along with several other area school districts. All participating districts contribute funds to MRVED for professional development opportunities for staff. Each year all MRVED districts attend three professional development days as a group. This allows teachers to network with area educators, attend various sessions for teacher licensure areas and other education-related topics. Nationally known educational leaders including, Todd Whitaker, George Couros, Kayla Delzer, and Dave Burgess, have been brought in to inspire and provide teachers additional teaching strategies to add to their toolbox.

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

MMS believes in a shared leadership approach. All stakeholders are allowed the opportunity to share his/her voice. This “voice” begins with our MMS Advisory Team. Advisory consists of a grade-level representative, a special education teacher, a social worker, and the principal. This team meets monthly to discuss current happenings, share ideas for school improvement, and give updates. Information is shared out from the MMS Advisory members to their respective grade-level or building teams. Teachers can also serve in other district and building teams such as district staff development, health and safety, technology, and teacher evaluation. Sixty percent of MMS full-time staff participate in at least one district or building team. Additionally, about half of our full-time staff coach at least one extracurricular activity. The principal at MMS sits on all district and building teams in order to listen to all “voices.”

The principal also meets with a group of parents each month. This team is known as the Parent Advisory Team. Together, parents and principal gather input on how to better engage all parents, as well as gather their perspectives on a variety of other topics including curriculum. The principal also leads a Student Leadership Team that consists of 7th grade students. The Student Leadership Team gives students the “voice” to offer suggestions about how to improve all students’ overall experience at MMS. All of these opportunities allow others to develop their leadership skills and contribute to the greater good of the school. The principal is considered the school leader. However, successful schools need teacher, student, parent, and community leaders to assist in making sure our students are well prepared for high school. The MMS principal believes in the servant leadership approach. Sharing power, putting the needs of students first, and providing teachers and staff with the necessary resources help support and develop all stakeholders which contributes to our success.

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

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The one practice that has been the most substantial in Montevideo Middle School's success in closing the achievement gap is our positive school culture and climate. We invest great amounts of time in developing relationships with our students, parents, community, and each other. Having such great relationships with all of our stakeholders allows us to have high expectations of all of our students. Great teachers not only have high expectations of their students, but have high expectations of themselves, which we have many.

Communication and collaboration is a vital component within our culture. A great example of this is that our interventionists collaborate with core content reading and math teachers by aligning their interventions with grade level learning targets so student can progress through the curriculum and spiral back to skills students have not mastered yet. Communication with parents is also very important to us, whether it is nice note home or phone call to talk about a concern. Parent participation and support by working together for their child is a key to our culture and climate.

Providing students with a caring and nurturing learning environment allows our students to take risks and not only make mistakes, but celebrating these mistakes as part of the learning process. A wonderful example of this is walking into a classroom and the teacher has posted on the board, "My favorite no." During this activity the teacher reviews student answers, then selects a wrong answer to serve as a learning tool for the entire class. We believe in having a growth mindset as a staff and instilling this belief in our students.

Our staff commitment is second to none. This is evident by teachers preparing for the day well before school starts and frequently working with kids after school. In addition to meeting the academic, behavioral, and social emotional needs of our students during the school day, over half of our teaching staff also coach or supervise one or more extracurricular activities. Ultimately, it is people, not programs, that we believe has had the greatest impact on our student achievement.