

**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) [ ] Title I [ ] Charter [ ] Magnet [ ] Choice

Name of Principal Mr. Jory Thompson

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

Official School Name Fort Benton Elementary School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 1820 Washington Street PO Box 399

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

Fort Benton MT 59442--0361  
City State Zip Code+4 (9 digits total)

County Choteau

Telephone (406) 622-3761

Fax (406) 622-5408

Web site/URL https://www.fortbentonschools.com/ E-mail jthompson@fortbenton.k12.mt.us

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent\*Mr. Jory Thompson E-mail  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other) jthompson@fortbenton.k12.mt.us

District Name Fort Benton Public Schools District Tel. (406) 622-3721

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board  
President/Chairperson Mrs. Joellyn Clark  
(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):
- 1 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 1 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 3 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	10	10	20
K	15	10	25
1	11	7	18
2	12	8	20
3	10	13	23
4	13	14	27
5	17	9	26
6	12	10	22
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
<b>Total Students</b>	100	81	181

\*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):
- 1 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 1 % Asian
  - 1 % Black or African American
  - 4 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 90 % White
  - 3 % 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.

<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	6
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2017 until the end of the 2017-2018 school year	7
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	13
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2017	304
(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: 51%  
Total number students who qualify: 92

8. Students receiving special education services: 11 %  
20 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>1</u> Autism                  | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>3</u> Other Health Impaired                 |
| <u>1</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>14</u> Specific Learning Disability         |
| <u>1</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>0</u> Speech or Language Impairment         |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment      | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>0</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 8
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	<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.	7
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	6
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	8
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 25:1

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	95%	95%	95%	95%	95%
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 mission of Fort Benton Public Schools is to provide an enriching, rigorous, and diverse learning environment that allows students to achieve at their highest potential, inspires a passion for lifelong learning, and prepares them for success.

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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Fort Benton is a beautiful rural community located on the Missouri River in North Central Montana.

Some folks may call Fort Benton a "sleepy little river town." Yes, Fort Benton is a small community...and that's a big part of what makes it such a special place. Here...everybody knows everybody. And even if we don't know you, we'll wave, we'll stop and chat, we'll tell you our stories and boast about our great little town.

You will find that the History of the West is a rich theme in Fort Benton. Known as the "Birthplace of Montana", Fort Benton is situated on the banks of the Missouri River, and is a haven for history buffs as well as canoeists seeking the solitude and unique beauty of the Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River. Fort Benton is also located along the Lewis & Clark National Historic trail, the Nez Perce National Historic Trail, and is the gateway to the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument. Fort Benton first gained fame as a robe trading post. The discovery of gold in the Montana and Idaho Territories brought countless fortune seekers, outlaws, merchants and madams to this riverside town. Whiskey followed gold, and infamous trails were forged into Canada, including the Whoop-up Trail into Alberta and the Fort Walsh Trail into Saskatchewan. As the terminus for the 642-mile long Mullan Wagon Road, Fort Benton became a crucial link between Missouri and Walla Walla, Washington along the Columbia River. Steamboats plied the Missouri River to Fort Benton for thirty years, until the railroad signaled an end to this towns' prominence as the "Worlds Innermost Port". This once feisty outpost played such a vital role in the expansion of the West, that it is now registered as a National Historic Landmark. "Fort Benton: The Birthplace of Montana TM."

The town population is approximately 1400 people that depend on agriculture as the biggest economic employer. The region is known as the Golden Triangle of Agriculture and the town is surrounded by endless acres and miles of crop fields that support predominately different varieties of wheat with occasional other crops such as peas, corn, mustard, and other more specialized crops. Other than agriculture, the next biggest employers in the town of Fort Benton are the local hospital and the school system.

The school population has dropped significantly over the past 30 years due to the improvement of farming technology and equipment, farm consolidation, and smaller families needed to farm the available land. The largest majority of our students reside in the town, however a significant portion of our students live outside town on a farm and ride the bus to school.

As one of the most significant employers in town and as a great source of pride for our community our school system is clearly the heartbeat of our great town. The community has a long history of supporting our school system by voting in funding levy increases and showing up to watch, cheer on and support our students in sports, music, drama and other passions. The school buildings are well taken care of, clean and although older, (the elementary school was built in 1938), are functional and serve as a gathering place for many community events from concerts to meetings. The Elementary School houses twenty two staff members and 180 students pre-kindergarten through sixth grade. We only have one class section for each grade level. The seventh through twelfth grade students are instructed in the high school building four blocks away. The superintendent of the district is also the elementary principal and spends the bulk of his day in the elementary.

In the last five years our schools have made technology a priority. This is demonstrated with the purchase of classroom projectors and interactive whiteboards for all classrooms, 1 to 1 Chromebooks for all students in grades first grade through twelfth grade. Computer labs in all schools and Ipad carts in the elementary and the high school. We have also provided professional development to support the implementation of all new technologies and recently our teachers have been diving into the Google Classroom arena.

Fort Benton Schools has successfully met AYP (Annually Yearly Progress) every year and have been a Montana OPI Accredited school for as long as anyone can remember. We are also a member of AdvancED and we undergo a rigorous external review every five years and successfully received our most recent

AdvancED accreditation in April of 2018. The elementary principal/superintendent also serves on the Montana AdvancED State Council and understands the importance of continuous improvement.

Fort Benton Elementary has poured a lot of time and energy since the fall of 2011 into becoming a Montana Recognized Sustaining RtI School. We successfully earned this distinction in the summer of 2015 from the Montana Office of Public Instruction. It was also no coincidence that the adoption of the RtI (Response to Instruction or Intervention) guiding principles coincided with the transition to Common Core state and national standards and the adoption of research based and proven educational materials that supported our journey toward standards-based instruction.

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

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

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

We utilize Journeys and Ready Common Core kindergarten through sixth grade as our core curriculum. The staff and administration team together to ensure that the reading curricula we use is research-based and aligned to the state standards and teachers execute the instruction of that curricula with fidelity. Our school is an RtI school, meaning that students in kindergarten through sixth grade receive differentiated and targeted instruction through research-based intervention programs in a small group setting for reading. In order to determine what intervention program and the frequency of that support, we utilize DIBELS, which is a standardized reading assessment that targets foundational reading skills and their progression based on different grade levels. This benchmark assessment is administered three times a year. Once the benchmark assessment takes place, we review the data and implement a 30 minute reading intervention for students that score strategic and an hour intensive reading intervention for students that score intensive during our morning RtI time. We have different research based intervention programs used for each grade level for strategic and intensive groups and we track the intervention programs used as well as the targeted instructional interventions that might be added for each individual student throughout their education at Fort Benton Elementary. Students that are identified as strategic and/or intensive based on the benchmark assessment are also progress monitored once a week to ensure that the instruction they are receiving is targeted to their missing skills. If students are not making adequate growth on their progress monitoring for a series of four weeks, then an additional instructional change is made. Our review process of student data and interventions that need to be made is continuous throughout the year. If a student is above their targeted goal for six weeks then the grade level instructional team will make a recommendation in terms of pulling back on support provided with the goal being to move students back to mainstream classroom instruction. Progress monitor data, instructional interventions, as well as the student's classroom performance are evaluated weekly at common planning time. All grade levels also receive Title support for reading which focuses on targeted instruction for students that are not performing on DIBELS or their classroom assessments four or five days a week in the afternoon. Each grade level meets once a week with the paraprofessional/s, main classroom teacher, the title teacher, and any other individuals that specifically support or provide interventions for students in that grade to evaluate individual data using the progress monitoring data gathered, intervention curriculum data, and classroom data to ensure students are making growth in their reading skills. Also, any student that scores intensive on any sub-test of DIBELS is automatically included in our YIIP (Your Individualized Education Plan) meetings. These meetings occur every six weeks in addition to the common planning meetings and focus on the neediest and lowest students. The YIIP meetings are divided into kindergarten through third grade and fourth through sixth grade teams and provide multiple perspectives and ideas on how we can support the neediest students in reading. In all of our meetings, fidelity is a huge focus so that we have a consistent baseline to measure our interventions and instructional changes with so that any changes in a student's YIIP plan are targeted and calculated. These meetings also provide opportunities for the YIIP teams to discuss any additional interventions that need to be incorporated through the RTI process, Title staff, or any other staff member or paraprofessional that is available for support.

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

We utilize Ready Common Core math as our main core curriculum as well as iReady in the classroom to support math growth for our students. Fort Benton Elementary's ever present math goal is to create students that embrace the challenge of solving difficult problems. Our content goals in Mathematics is to use real-world problem solving as instruction to develop deep conceptual understanding. We work to connect new problems to prior knowledge, demonstrate multiple approaches and strengthen student's ability to use critical thinking and complex reasoning through higher level questioning. Our teachers emphasize the development of persistence and our 2018-19 school theme is Longhorn Grit: Whatever It Takes!" The Ready Common Core Math curriculum emphasizes metacognition and the important challenge of putting their thought process in writing. Our school utilizes the same RTI approach for math as it does for reading, we are

constantly teaming together to review data and provide targeted instruction for math skills. Grades kindergarten through second grade utilize Number Worlds as part of the RTI process in the morning. We utilize the data from the different assessments to place students in our Move to Math program that places students at the level they need to be to challenge them and all them to have the success they need to have. Students at each grade level are divided up into three different groups based on diagnostic assessments through the curriculum and grouped based on results with other students who performed in a similar manner on the test. Movement between these groups is fluid and pacing can be adjusted based on the skill set of the group. This morning math time is used to provide targeted classroom and small group instruction for students in grades 3-6. Title math support is also provided in the afternoon on an as needed basis. During this math title time, title staff work to target missing skills and provide specific instruction to students to help them understand concepts in a deeper and more comprehensive measure. Student progress is reviewed at weekly common planning meetings and also any intensive need for support is addressed at the YIIP meetings.

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

Our school utilizes Scott Foresman science curriculum and utilizes formative assessments administered in class to ensure that students are retaining the content that is being presented in the classroom. Teachers use assessments from the curriculum as well to help guide instructional decisions made in the classroom. Fourth grade students participate in the state required CRT each year to ensure they are proficient in their understanding and retention of science information. Teachers use this assessment data in combination with our classroom assessments and GTCC curriculum committee work to drive instruction. Montana has adopted the NGSS standards in science, so our teachers plan lessons built to meet these standards in conjunction with the Golden Triangle Curriculum Consortium (GTCC) curricular guidelines. As a small school in northern Montana we belong to the GTCC and benefit from curriculum planning, and professional development opportunities tied to all subject areas in education. Our teachers also utilize many programs to guide and supplement their science instruction including: STEAM, Scott Foresman textbooks, BrainPop, national geographic, and discovery online programs. Our teachers are also encouraged to blend science education with the great resources we have available in our community including the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Forest Service, Fish Wildlife & Parks, and the local Agricultural extension office, local farms, USDA & NRCS(Natural Resource Conservation Service) offices. We have great partnerships with many of these local government agencies, with the greatest example being the partnership with the BLM. Our students benefit from BLM led exploratory learning canoe float trips down the Marias (2 day) and Missouri River (4 day) that are full of hands on scientific, historical learning. Our students also benefit from a very strong robotics group led by local community members in which our students starting in third grade get the opportunity for after-school robotic and scientific exploration through a club that practices two days a week and competes at the state and national level each year.

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

Our Social Studies is driven by the Montana Social Studies Standards in conjunction with the guidance and instruction we receive from the Golden Triangle Curriculum Consortium. Two teachers from the elementary have an opportunity to sit on the Social Studies curriculum committee through GTCC and they meet three times a year to learn and ensure we are meeting the standards. This committee curriculum work along with in-class assessments factor in to effectively assess our students and their learning. Montana believes strongly in placing an emphasis on local relevance in all curricular areas. Therefore, we place a heavy emphasis on Montana History in the upper grades and the Lewis and Clark exploration seeing that we live on the Missouri River and in an area rich with historical happenings. We are located in the actual spot on the river in which all steam boat traffic was forced to turn around. Fort Benton was a very busy port during the westward expansion and our community has a number of museums that share the story with our students and visitors to our community. We also have many community members who care passionately about the historical significance of Fort Benton and embrace opportunities to voluntarily share this with our students.

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

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

Fort Benton offers early childhood education to students that are four and five years of age. The District believes so wholeheartedly in early education that we offer it to our community in the elementary school and we hired a certified teacher to lead the program even though we receive no state funding. The early childhood program at Fort Benton focuses on providing a developmentally appropriate educational environment that focuses on the acquisition of early foundational academic and social skills. The early childhood staff focuses on utilizing a creative curriculum approach to instruction and works to provide enriching play environments for the students that are based on student preferences and interests. The preschool staff and early elementary staff communicate and review the overall skill-set and knowledge base of students transitioning from early childhood to kindergarten to ensure that students are as prepared as possible. The preschool as well as the early elementary staff work to review the current pre-school program and build in instructional changes and developmentally responsive alterations to the program to ensure that the preschool students have the necessary foundation to experience success in the elementary grades. The early childhood teacher and support staff work diligently to develop relationships with the students and their families to ensure that each student is treated as an individual and that their needs are being met. Conferences are held throughout the year with families to ensure any concerns, questions are discussed and the child's progress is celebrated.

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

We are blessed to extend a thorough and rich offering of other very important curriculum areas for all of our students in grades K-6. We believe strongly in the whole child and the importance of offering opportunities for all students to explore their strengths or interests and in the process develop and engage both sides of their brain.

Our students in K-6 have physical education, art, music, technology and library media classes twice a week for a minimum of thirty minutes. We also provide character development opportunities for whole class, small group or individual settings on a regular basis through the leadership of our counselor.

We are very proud of the arts programming we offer through our art and music teachers. Our students love creating visual arts and performing musically as evidenced in the displays at our school. Our art teacher utilizes the hallways of our school as a beautiful canvas to display the amazing works of all of our students which also creates an inspiring and artistically welcoming atmosphere in our school. Our music teachers work hard to put on a number of wonderful programs throughout the year including the traditional Christmas and spring programs paired with an inspiring senior citizen dinner show in which we feed 200+ seniors and grandparents and showcase our talented students in a 30 minute musical performance that brings down the house. The students conclude the performance by dancing with the seniors and place-mats are made in art class that the guests get to take home. Our students also jump at the opportunity to get on stage and entertain their peers with many differing performance genres during the "Longhorns Have Talent" portion of the monthly assembly. We also partner successfully with the Chouteau County Performing Arts committee (CCPA) that utilizes our stage and wonderful auditorium for seven different concerts or performing art events each year. These performers are brought in from all over the country. Our students benefit from this partnership because with each show that comes to town we receive a matinee the day of the show and our students revel in exposure to such performing arts as orchestra, opera, band, dance, magic, mime, comedy, and other vocal or instrumental groups.

Our Physical education / health offering allows our students to explore a variety of sport and movement. During the scope of the year we cover the following units: basketball, team building, soccer, fitness, volleyball, football, baseball, track and field, yoga, and stretching. The focus of these units is to help our students develop coordination, flexibility, teamwork concepts, sportsmanship, listening and following directions, social interaction and health concepts. Many of these skills carry over into the classroom including a number of exercises that our teachers use to ensure they are incorporating movement into the classroom for maximum brain engagement.

Our K-6 students also receive weekly library and technology opportunities. Our librarian is able to teach

both technology and library media skills twice a week to each grade. This summer we moved the computer lab into the back of the library media center and our librarian has successfully used this arrangement to couple technology skills with library media and research strategies. Additionally, the media center and its staff provide direct curriculum and technology support to teachers so they may have the resources necessary to assist students with proper reading or research material utilized in the classroom.

Our library is also the hub of the AR (Accelerated Reader) program and we track each student's success and award them for their reading accomplishments on stage each month. We also have a February "I love to Read" challenge in which our principal agrees to accept a challenge when our students reach their lofty goals of up to 2000 AR points for the month of February. Our students are successfully motivated and love watching the principal endure the shaving of his head, multiple ice baths, pies to the face, sleeping on the roof of the school and Hot Dog eating contests all for the love of reading.

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

Our RtI (Response to Instruction) process partnered with our special education program allows us to meet the diverse and individual needs of special student populations. This is evident in our impressive scores by the Economically Disadvantaged subgroup in the SBAC testing in the spring of 2018. This group scored 79% proficient or advanced in the ELA (English Language Arts) section and an impressive 85% proficient or advanced in the Mathematics section. Seeing that this group scored a mere four percentage points lower in ELA and mathematics than our total population and the following state comparisons there is no doubt that we are reaching these student's needs.

Fort Benton Low income students scored 39% higher than the rest of the state of Montana in ELA and an impressive 52% higher than the rest of the state in Math.

Impressively, we have fostered an environment in which the students performing above their grade level have opportunities to excel and experience the rigor they need. We offer walk to read and move to math in which our students are allowed to participate in small group instruction at the next grade level and receive the advanced rigor they desire. Our students also enjoy the online I-Ready math and language arts program which allows them to push beyond their grade level peers and learn the importance of working independently. These same students actively participate in our robotics program and complete some impressive projects and presentations within the teacher-led genius hour. Our 5th and 6th grade students also compete and have placed in the northwest academic thinking cap quiz bowl against their peers from other states.

Our success for all student populations is the result of teacher cooperation, instructional interventions and of course it all begins with the collection of data and the analysis of the data in an effort to utilize data to drive our instruction. The Title/ RtI teacher and special education teacher work very closely to ensure that any students in need of additional help in reading and math get exactly what they need to be successful.

Our RtI leadership team meets monthly to reflect on our progress. Our YIIP (Your Individualized Instructional Plan) teams meet every 4-6 months to review and reflect on the progress or lack of progress of any student in the Intensive and or strategic group. This very efficient and useful collaboration has resulted in very successful student growth through implementation of new, creative or already proven strategies and instructional changes.

We also have built in weekly common planning time for our teachers and paraprofessionals which is jointly facilitated by the teacher and RtI coordinator. All of this scheduled time set aside to collaborate, reflect and plan has proven to keep the goal and focus on reaching each individual student's needs for success. This time spent meeting together has also created an enjoyable and collaborative team approach to any challenge and we work hard to be solution oriented.

## PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

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### 1. School Climate/Culture:

Fort Benton School's mascot is the Longhorns and we have created an environment in which our students feel proud to be a Longhorn. Each month we recognize Longhorn reading, academic, sports, talents and all extracurricular success during an all school assembly. Our students strongly desire to best represent the Longhorn Brand, their school and community with their best efforts. Our mantra is "Longhorns are Respectful, Responsible, Ready to Learn and Represent!" Seeing that we have 300 or less total students in K-12, our K-6 students look up and to and truly personally get to know the high school students. They get to watch the older Longhorns on the courts, fields, in their hallways and classrooms and look up to them in the community. We actively seek out opportunities to provide leadership opportunities for our High School students through mentoring opportunities at the elementary. Our High School students spend time at lunch, recess and in reading groups modeling for and inspiring the younger Longhorns at the elementary.

Our teachers love coming to work at Fort Benton Elementary, they feel appreciated by the school leadership including the principal, superintendent, community and the trustees. The principal has worked hard to recognize the teachers and their hard work through the local newspaper, at school board meetings, and through social media. This has made the community aware of how hard the teachers work and what an excellent education is provided for their children and has led to great community pride in the school. The teachers are inspired by the leadership, parental and community thankfulness for them. This inspiration is evident in our teachers work ethic, as it is very common to enter the building at night and find the majority of our classroom teachers here after seven at night. Sunday is also a day that many of our teachers spend at the school planning and preparing for the week. There is clearly a positive peer pressure that encourages teachers to work really hard to be prepared and to provide their best for each student. The budget is also managed in such a manner that the teachers have no lack of supplies, technology and resources at their fingertips. The teachers also feel very comfortable asking for help from peers or administration and benefit from mentoring opportunities and observations in which professional development and a growth mindset is encouraged and applauded.

### 2. Engaging Families and Community:

Fort Benton Schools works hard to involve families in as many ways as possible. We have found social media to be a super effective tool for school communication and have found many parents, and grandparents thrilled by our ability to share quickly on Facebook all that is happening in our school. This has also allowed us to showcase all the great things happening on a daily basis at our school and this has proven very effective in gathering public support. This public and community support has allowed us to run necessary levies for additional funding in which the public has shown great overwhelming voter support. Facebook has also allowed parents and community members to ask us questions and has allowed us to answer pertinent questions.

Each year we kickoff the year with parent open house and this allows us to meet new parents and welcome them into the Longhorn family with open arms. This night also allows us to teach parents how to set up infinite campus accounts, pay for lunch accounts, sign up for free and reduced lunches, meet the teachers and bring supplies and help their students settle in before the first day. We also utilize parent teacher conferences to partner with the Fort Benton Elementary Parent Team and provide dinner, book fairs and educational opportunities for our teachers and parents. Our parents love that they can celebrate their child's school success, grab a dinner together as a family and encourage their child's reading by purchasing a book or two. This is evident in our 95% parent teacher conference attendance. The Parent Team is active in meeting with the school, asking the school what our needs are and they work hard to fund raise the necessary funds to provide teaching materials, financially support the computer lab construction remodel project, playground renovations, etc.

Fort Benton schools also hold a monthly assembly in which the parents and community are invited to attend. We utilize this opportunity to showcase student academic, attendance, extra-curricular and

community service successes as well as deliver messages to students and parents about important educational matters.

Our local newspaper also has weekly articles that fill in our community on school happenings. Many of these articles are written by students and staff.

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

The elementary professional development has been aligned directly with the RtI approach over the past eight years. The principal started up the RtI program in his first year and has worked to provide PD that correlates with the elementary teacher's needs related to instruction and the RtI process. The first three years 2011-2015 the Fort Benton Elementary was part of the Montana state directed RtI grant and the PD was paid for by the Montana OPI (Office of Public Instruction). The teachers desired PD directed at learning how to make the necessary interventions to meet the needs of the students not performing at benchmark. This consisted of Montana experts and reading or math program experts coming from out of state to meet with and provide professional development for our teachers on a number of programs and how to successfully teach using these intervention programs. The district also spent a lot of time researching different supplemental and intervention programs to find the best possible research based and proven programs. The elementary staff also benefited from a number of very effective book studies related to the teaching of math, what works in education, and the importance of a positive attitude and a solution oriented or growth mindset. The elementary principal has worked to provide a voice for his teaching staff that clearly drives the professional development needs. This has led to a very enjoyable environment in which the teachers and staff love coming to work.

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

The overall leadership structure at Fort Benton Elementary has been composed of the principal, the RtI/Title coordinator, the RtI leadership team, and common planning grade level teams. The principal understands the importance of shared leadership and the importance of all stakeholder buy in. The RtI/Title coordinator plays a large role in leading the RtI leadership team and keeping the common planning teams, teachers and paras focused on the fidelity of the instruction. The RtI leadership team is made up of the principal, Rti coordinator, three classroom teachers (teachers rotate every third year) and the special education teacher. This valuable committee provides the core values guiding the RtI process and also works to provide the principal with a vision for the school. The RtI coordinator also leads the problem solving team meetings that happen every 4-6 weeks to ensure we are meeting the instructional needs of any struggling students and leads brainstorming of instructional interventions. She also has all supervisory responsibilities regarding the eight paraprofessionals in our school. The teachers welcome the role of assisting and leading the grade level paras during the common planning meeting time.

From the very beginning it has been clear that the principal has focused on two items and kept them at the forefront in all of his decision-making. First of all he has emphasized the importance of school pride and worked hard to create an environment in which our students take pride in coming to school and esteem to be the best Longhorns they can be. In the first year he arrived in Fort Benton he changed the mascot for the elementary from the Shorthorns to the Longhorns. Our high school mascot is the Longhorns and he worked to eradicate any reference to the moniker shorthorns. Our students eagerly embraced being the little Longhorns and aspired to be like the high school Longhorn leaders. We have worked hard to foster a sense of pride in our school with cleanliness, photos and digital image displays that showcase our Longhorns in action or inspiring Longhorn Art. We have also worked to dress up the elementary with a splash of Longhorn red color in the hallways, lunchroom, and office. Our principal also captured great photos of our students in action and made them into posters that grace our hallways and have messages such as: Longhorns are Hard Working, Longhorns are Persistent, Longhorns are Artistic, Longhorns are Proud, Longhorns are Determined, Longhorns are Focused, Longhorns are Confident, Longhorns are Artistic, Longhorns are Athletic, Longhorns are Community Minded, Longhorns are Champions, Longhorns are Kind, Longhorns are Giving, Longhorns are Fun, Longhorns are Respectful, Responsible and Ready to Learn!

These posters are a daily reminder for our students and teachers of the important characteristics that embody being a Longhorn. Each month we also recognize the students who embody these characteristics and recognize all different types of student success. We begin each assembly by standing and proudly singing the Fort Benton Elementary Longhorn School song that is led by the class of the month. This positive leadership has inspired our students to take pride in their work, their school, and their community. The Longhorn way has also inspired our teachers to be proud of the fact they can ride for the Longhorn brand and teach at such a great school.

The second item that has been the focus of the principal, RtI coordinator and school leadership committees has been the RtI program. Leadership has kept this at the forefront through empowering teacher leadership of this program with the RtI leadership team comprised of teachers that make all the decisions regarding the RtI program and overall instruction and curriculum. School leadership has also utilized a built-in scheduled time for weekly common planning at each grade level and this teacher and RtI coordinator led collaboration has really emphasized data driven instruction, fidelity of programs, and focused on the small group instruction that makes the RtI program work.

The school leadership also leads with an enthusiasm and positive attitude that is contagious and their love for children, education and our school is evident every day in daily interactions with the students and adults.

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

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Fort Benton Elementary School understands that our commitment to ONE practice has clearly been instrumental in creating the student and teacher success that has garnered the attention we have received. Our principal, teachers and staff understand that the RtI process and the fidelity of how we deliver this has been consistent and the guiding principle in our decision making process. The establishment of a full time RtI director and the empowerment of the RtI leadership team and scheduled and structured times for collaboration and planning has ensured that it is the constant focus. Fort Benton elementary believes at the core with 100% classroom teacher buy-in that RtI is not a program. It is a change in the way teachers instruct all levels of academic ability within their classroom. We believe that all students respond to instruction, and that if necessary, we must change the instruction to make sure that each student is mastering the skills necessary for academic success.

We define RtI as a research-based process that involves:

Textbooks and intervention programs that have been researched and proven to have a positive effect on student achievement. Consistent ongoing assessments which are a way to keep track of student improvement and mastery. Teachers and instructional aides working closely together to insure consistent teaching practices. Instructional strategies driven by data-based decision making which uses the information from the multiple assessments to direct the instruction until the best method is found for each individual student. The Fort Benton educational staff works hard to insure consistency and fidelity within the design of the research based materials.

The Impact of RtI on our students and school is best observed in the improvement of the assessment results that include not only our impressive SBAC testing scores, I-Ready diagnostic scores, but most definitely the following (DORF) DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency test scores. We benchmark our students three times a year to assess their DORF scores and this test data drives our Intensive, Strategic and Benchmark Tier formation. Reading Fluency is the ability to read accurately and quickly. It is important because fluent readers comprehend better and it is statistically a strong indicator of future reading success and we know it can be developed by modeling and practice. We credit much of our success to the RtI process and making Fluency the priority and the following test DORF results show our commitment to teaching fluency:

2011(Fall): 29.2% of students were Intensive, 9.4% Strategic, and 61.3% Benchmark

2012(Spring): 11.8% Intensive, 14.1% Strategic, and 74% Benchmark

2012(Fall): 11.5% Intensive, 15.38 Strategic, and 73.07% Benchmark

2013 (Spring): 6.5% Intensive, 11.4 Strategic, and 81.96 Benchmark

2013(Fall): 11% Intensive, 13% Strategic, and 76% Benchmark

2014(Spring) 5.4% Intensive, 10.8% Strategic, and 83.6% Benchmark

2014(Fall) 10.6% Intensive, 15.3% Strategic, and 74% Benchmark

2015(Spring) 6% Intensive, 9% Strategic, and 85% Benchmark

2015(Fall) 13.08% Intensive, 9.3% Strategic, and 77.5% Benchmark

2016(Spring) 5.4% Intensive, 9% Strategic, and 86% Benchmark

And the process has continued with great success with last year's results being:

2017(Fall) 8.1% Intensive, 14.4% Strategic, and 77.5% Benchmark

2018(Spring) 3% Intensive, 11.2% Strategic, and 85.8% Benchmark