

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

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Mrs. Deborah Garrison

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

Official School Name Elkhorn Middle School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 3200 N 207th Plaza

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

Elkhorn NE 68022-1289
City State Zip Code+4 (9 digits total)

County Douglas

Telephone (402) 289-2428

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Web site/URL https://www.elkhornweb.org/ems/

E-mail dgarrison@epsne.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. Bary Habrock

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

District Name Elkhorn Public Schools Tel. (402) 289-2579

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. John Marasco

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

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

Date _____

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

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

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

Part I – Eligibility Certification

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

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

PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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

DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 11 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 4 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 2 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 17 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 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 6 | 96 | 72 | 168 |
| 7 | 91 | 73 | 164 |
| 8 | 76 | 85 | 161 |
| 9 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 11 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 12 or higher | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total Students | 263 | 230 | 493 |

*Schools that house PreK programs should count preschool students **only** if the school administration is responsible for the program.

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 2 % Asian
 - 1 % Black or African American
 - 4 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 1 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 87 % White
 - 5 % 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: 3%

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

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

| Steps For Determining Mobility Rate | Answer |
|--|---------------|
| (1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2017 until the end of the 2017-2018 school year | 8 |
| (2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2017 until the end of the 2017-2018 school year | 6 |
| (3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)] | 14 |
| (4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2017 | 468 |
| (5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4) | 0.03 |
| (6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100 | 3 |

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 0%
1 Total number ELL

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

Bengali, Caucasian, Chinese, Japanese, Pushto, Shona, Spanish, Tamil

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 16%
Total number students who qualify: 79

8. Students receiving special education services: 14 %
71 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>9</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>15</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay | <u>28</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>5</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>6</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>1</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>5</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 5
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

| | Number of Staff |
|--|------------------------|
| Administrators | 1 |
| Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher. | 26 |
| Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc. | 11 |
| Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students. | 12 |
| Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc. | 4 |

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 19:1

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

| Required Information | 2017-2018 | 2016-2017 | 2015-2016 | 2014-2015 | 2013-2014 |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Daily student attendance | 95% | 96% | 96% | 96% | 96% |
| High school graduation rate | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% |

13. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**

Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2018.

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

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

Yes No

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

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

Elkhorn Middle School is committed to providing our students with the skills and knowledge necessary to experience success in high school and beyond.

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

Elkhorn Middle School (EMS) is in the heart of what was once a small Nebraska town located on the old Lincoln Highway. The roots are agricultural, and the town flourished in early years at least partially due to its proximity to the Union Pacific main line. As with most small towns in Nebraska, the thriving downtown began to dwindle after the 1950's. However, unlike other Nebraska towns, Elkhorn's proximity to Omaha resulted in a transition from small rural town to suburb. The district has experienced a 20-year trend of rapid growth, with a doubling of enrollment over the past 10 years. Elkhorn Middle School was the only middle school in the district until 2003; since that time it has become one of four, soon to be one of five middle schools. Relative to other buildings in the district, Elkhorn Middle has a larger number of students who come from poverty and a larger number of families with blue collar jobs. This has not stopped the staff and students from holding the same expectations for themselves in comparison to other schools.

As newer and more affluent schools opened in the district, Elkhorn Middle worked to create a sense of pride in its identity. In order to avoid being called the old middle school, they branded themselves as the "classic" middle school. They re-energized their mission and worked to create a culture of closeness. The staff holds themselves accountable and monitors progress of all students with a goal of maximizing growth. Data is reviewed with the philosophy that "data warts" are only a problem if we don't have a plan for improvement. There is culture that walks the walk of a belief that all students can learn. If students are not working at grade level, the staff is creative in finding ways to provide additional time and support. This dedication is evidenced by the fact that on the most recent state assessments of English and Language Arts, the Elkhorn Middle Schools students who receive free and reduced lunch demonstrated stronger performance than the "all student" category for Nebraska.

The goal for Elkhorn Middle is that all students will have all doors open to them. There was a time in the district's history when ACT non-core averages fell below both state and national non-core ACT averages. This was inexcusable for an affluent district, and leaders worked alongside staff to determine things that could be done differently. This was also at a time when middle school performance was referred to as the "dip in the middle." Many variables were reviewed, but at the end of the day, some difficult truths had to be faced about messages that we were sending to our most vulnerable learners. At that time the district had "general classes" that moved at a slower pace with the goal of addressing the needs of struggling students. Special education percentages sometimes exceeded state averages. We concluded that our general classes provided less reading, less math, and less homework in the same amount of class time. It should have seemed intuitive that we would not accelerate learning for struggling students by simply giving them less. Instead, we were probably widening the achievement gap. We also found that students were sometimes referred to "general" classes based more upon behavioral issues than academic skills. This was a sobering look in the mirror. We were closing the college door for 8th graders by placing them in 9th grade classes that colleges would not recognize. The first step began at the high school level when general classes were removed and all students began to be placed in English and Algebra classes that would keep the college door open. Additional support classes were developed for students who struggled. The initial concern was that we would do students no favors if we placed them in 9th grade classes and they failed. Interestingly, it turned out that failures were reduced across all classes. We do not know, but we believe that we sent the message of low expectations to students the moment we recommended them for a "general" class. We think that they lived down to those expectations. Support classes started with 9th grade and then moved to grades 6 through 11. The staff works very hard to send the message that all students can reach expectations and that we will provide supports to get there.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

1a. Reading/English language arts:

Literacy and numeracy are seen as foundational skills that allow students a springboard to assure that they have opportunities to explore any field that is of interest to them. Strong literacy skills are seen as critical to meeting the vision of keeping all doors open for all students. This focus on literacy is evidenced by the fact that in an eight period school day, two periods are devoted to literacy. Beyond that, additional time is captured via a Support Reading class in order to provide more time and support for students who are not yet reaching grade level standards. Language Arts and Reading classes are focused on developing skills in reading and writing that transcend all types of text. The EPS reading curriculum focuses on both vocabulary and comprehension skills. Vocabulary is taught in context and directly through the use of Greek and Latin roots. Comprehension strategies such as using context clues or activating prior knowledge are taught across all genres of text. Teachers focus primarily on the skills required to read and understand text. Only one or two novels are read collectively per grade. Instead, supplementary reading is required of all students through the use of the program titled Accelerated Reader. The Language Arts curriculum focuses on the writing process beginning with sentence structure and building paragraphs to essay composition and research projects. Grammar and conventions are taught from within the structure of the writing process. The Reading and Language Arts teachers together collaborate on a writing style known as Text Dependent Analysis. This requires students to read and interpret one or more related texts, then write persuasively using evidence from the text to support an opinion.

Because of rapid growth, the district continues to prioritize equity and consistency across buildings. However, the value of teacher leadership is also understood. Teachers from Elkhorn Middle work with teachers from across the district to outline key learning goals at each grade level, to align to Nebraska State Standards, and to develop District Common Assessments. Building teacher teams work to monitor progress of each student and to assure that there are interventions in place for students who need more time and support. This data for each student is compiled in a building spreadsheet that includes growth trend data using Nebraska State Assessment, NWEA Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), District Common Assessments, and additional diagnostic measures when needed. In addition, EMS teachers work with teachers from across the district to complete group scoring of a key writing assessment at each grade level.

1b. Mathematics:

As is true in the area of reading, math teachers also adopt a strong belief that all students can achieve high levels of mathematics skills. There are no lower track math classes that could result in students being shut out of a college option before even entering high school. As with the area of reading, supplemental Math Support class is provided twice each week in order to provide additional time and support for students who have not yet mastered key concepts in their regular math class. Scope and sequence is based on solid preparation for high school level Algebra 1. Through the three years in middle school, students are exposed to a progression of skills within the areas of Algebra Concepts, Data Analysis and Probability, Geometry, Measurement and Numeration. For example, in 6th grade students will compare, order and perform operations with whole numbers, decimals and fractions. In 7th grade, integers are included in these same skills. Then in 8th grade, the concepts of irrational numbers is addressed. Each grade will build upon the skill of the previous. Another example includes the progression from solving one step equations to two-step, to solving multi-step equations with no solution, one solution or infinite solutions over the course of three years of study. Work in all five mathematical strands prepares students for success in high school level Algebra 1 as they exit middle school. For the strongest students, processes exist to allow them to demonstrate mastery and accelerate into more challenging classes. In some cases, this means that students are transported to the high school for college prep Geometry during 8th grade.

Similar to reading and language arts, mathematics teachers develop key learning goals for each course, and common pacing guides that are aligned to state standards. Teachers are careful in the way they differentiate,

and they work to assure differentiation never results in a lowering of the standards. Instead, it is seen as the process by which teachers and students use supplemental time to catch up and recover missing skills.

Elkhorn Middle teachers also work to complete instructional rounds that allow them to see curriculum implementation and to fine tune their use of the district's instructional model. Assessment data is monitored for each student using growth trends from the Nebraska State Assessment, MAP tests, District Common Assessments, formative quizzes, and diagnostic measures when needed. Time is spent in finding creative ways to reteach concepts that have not yet been mastered. Again, the belief is that students can reach learning goals, they just might not be able to do it on the first try.

1c. Science:

Teacher collaboration is a hallmark of Elkhorn Middle School. There is a sense that there is a village of teachers working to assure the success of each student. Science is notable for recent work in thoughtfully approaching NGSS (Next Generation Science Standards) and working to assure that key concepts are taught using three-dimensional strategies. The science team is also mindful that students need strong academic vocabulary that will allow them to access content in high level science courses as they progress. Given Nebraska's recent adoption of standards that are very similar to NGSS, teachers from across the district have come together several times over the past year in order to review changes to the standards, assure a strong understanding of three-dimensional processes, and begin the work of aligning pacing guides with new standards. Perhaps the most pressing work has been around the processes of taking existing units of study to assure alignment with new standards and to create instructional methods that are more three-dimensional in nature, while also aligning with the district's instructional model.

Science has been a more difficult area in which to make strong use of assessment data due to the fact that state assessments do not yet align with revised standards and will likely not be aligned until after 2020. In the meantime, teachers make use of district common assessments and NWEA MAP in order to monitor grade level improvement and the percent of students who meet growth goals. Teachers specifically look at the NWEA MAP learning continuum in order to gauge the degree to which students have opportunities to learn key objectives.

Curriculum and content is focused on four major strands in each grade: Earth Science and Space, Inquiry, Life Science and Physical Science. In sixth grade, the critical objectives in each strand include weather patterns and systems, ethics and technology, ecosystems, and light and sounds waves. In seventh grade, students study the solar system, learn to conduct experiments, study the human body systems and laws of motion. In eighth grade, the curriculum is centered on environmental conditions, experiment design and variables, genetic patterns and an introduction to Chemistry.

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

The social studies teachers at Elkhorn Middle School have been strong advocates for augmenting Nebraska standards in order to assure that middle school students receive a strong foundation in economics and civics beginning in 6th grade. This emphasis has been part of community input regarding the importance of financial literacy and civic responsibility. Elkhorn is a very rapidly growing suburban area and teachers at EMS have worked to assure that there remains a strong sense of community and that the small town roots are not lost as the district continues to grow. The 7th and 8th grade curriculum includes World History and American History.

Nebraska social studies standards are currently under review and teachers from the district have been involved in the process of this review. Draft standards are being used as a template to assist as the district begins preliminary review of new materials planned for a fall 2020 adoption. As with other areas, district social studies teachers work together in order to develop at least four common district assessments per year for each class. Considerable time is spent in assuring that District Common Assessments are of high quality. The process includes alignment to standards, evaluation of depth of knowledge, assurance that there are performance elements and sufficient sampling, review for freedom of bias, strong assessment cover sheets that outline key instructional objectives and assessment administration, and formal processes for reviewing

NBRS 2019

performance levels.

In addition, social studies teachers consider themselves as key teachers of literacy. They believe that much of the reading for students in the future will be in areas of non-fiction, and that there are analysis skills that can be best taught with social studies content. For this reason, student performance in the area of reading is reviewed in order to assure that there is alignment with key literacy objectives for nationally normed assessments.

1e. For secondary schools:

The goal is that students enter high school with all doors open to them. Staff works to assure that students are ready for college preparatory classes in 9th grade. It is not believed that college is the best choice for all, but it is believed that all students should be ready and have this option available. Career awareness programs, internships and cadet opportunities are prevalent in the district's high schools. At Elkhorn Middle School however, our career focus is more introductory. Our students participate in a career inventory that matches interests with self-identified skills. We host a career day during which community volunteers speak to students about their particular job field during short sessions that students select. A Strategic Planning goal for the district includes work in the area of career awareness. Many of the initiatives from this planning group were implemented at the high school level. The next step in strategic planning is to expand that focus to middle school during the upcoming school year and provide more career awareness opportunities for students.

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

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

EMS is structured with an eight-period day. One period each day is allocated to the Exploratory Block which exposes students to a variety of areas via six-week rotations. Courses in the Exploratory Block include: Art, Family and Consumer Sciences, Health, Industrial Tech/STEM, Speech and Drama, and Keyboarding/Computer Skills. All students also take Physical Education on an every other day schedule. Sixth grade students take a language experience class on the days opposite PE; this course exposes students to world languages that are taught at the high school level. In seventh and eighth grade, students have the opportunity to complete the first year of high school Spanish. Band and Choir are offered as electives to all students at the middle level. In addition, the schedule includes a daily eight-minute High Five time. The purpose of this time is to provide each student with a key caring adult who stays with them for all three years of middle school.

Exposure to the arts is provided in a variety of ways. As part of the Exploratory Block, students at all grades participate in six-week rotations through Art, and through Speech and Drama. Students produce a variety of art projects and develop skills in public presentations. EMS is well known for the quality of its annual middle school play presentations. In addition, the school has an exceptionally strong music department in the areas of both vocal and instrumental music, with programs that have been recognized at the state and national level. The music program is supported by having high school directors who come to EMS on a daily basis to help sustain a strong program. There are many opportunities for performances, as well as summer opportunities for students to experience the arts.

Physical education is provided every other day for all students. Recent curriculum renewal processes have focused on working to assure that physical education includes strong levels of active movement for all students, as well as education about life-long fitness. Health and nutrition are included as Exploratory Block rotations, with an emphasis on healthy choices and foundational knowledge about human growth and development.

Sixth grade students are exposed to three different world languages and cultures in order to allow them a taste of courses that they might pursue in high school. During 7th and 8th grades, students have the option

to complete Spanish 1. This allows them to move to Spanish II in high school and provides them with additional flexibility for future electives.

Technology is included in the Exploratory Block. In recent years, the decision was made to begin keyboarding skills at the elementary level in order to expand exposure at the middle level to include more areas of computer use (e.g., data bases, spreadsheets, presentation platforms). Another support system includes media centers that are staffed with a full time media specialist. With changes in social media and the addition of one-to-one Chrome Books at the middle level, the role of the media specialist has changed in recent years. The media specialist continues to be a key resource for encouraging reading beyond the school day as well as a resource to help students learn key research skills. In addition, media specialists also collaborate with classroom teachers in order to add lessons around digital citizenship. Online privacy, use of social media, and evaluation of sources are examples of areas in which curriculum has been added. Finally, the media center has become an area where students can explore emerging technologies.

As noted in previous responses, it is a goal to broaden career awareness among students at the middle level. The district has a Career Awareness coordinator who works to help connect students with opportunities in the community. She also works with staff members to assist with career speakers and use of interest inventories for students. In the area of character building, EMS works to reinforce positive social skills on a daily basis. Speakers are also used to raise awareness of social media issues and to provide anti-bullying strategies.

3. Special Populations:

For all students, the school's primary strategy is a guaranteed and viable curriculum. District standards have been adopted that mirror state standards (Nebraska is not a Common Core state). Curriculum is aligned vertically across grade levels and pacing guides are used to assure common pacing across classrooms. Next, the district has developed an instructional model which includes research-based instructional practices to assure high quality instruction in all classes. Teachers have been and will continue to receive professional development to enhance their instructional skills. Lastly, teachers develop and use District Common Assessments which allows them to gather data and compare student progress toward identified objectives. A belief in solid Tier One strategies for all students exists.

Students who qualify for special education services are assigned a case manager who develops and tracks goals as outlined by their Individualized Education Plan. EMS is a full-inclusion school, so all special education students are enrolled in grade-level curriculum; many with support in the classroom. Classroom teachers and special educators collaborate around a co-teaching model that puts a content area expert and an intervention expert into the same classroom. Co-taught classes provide identified students with support at the point of instruction in addition to necessary accommodations as dictated by IEP's. In addition, special educators provide specialized instruction to address identified areas of need for students whether that be in a specific academic area or focused on executive functioning skills.

Students who qualify for High Ability Learner Education (HALE) are served in a couple different ways. Part of our HALE delivery is voluntary and based on student interest. Opportunities such as Crime Scene Investigation, Zoological Science, or Quiz Bowl are offered on a pick-and-choose basis. HALE students participate in these one-time experiences as they see fit. The greater part of the HALE delivery is designed to enhance and expand upon classroom instruction. Qualified students are pulled from classroom instruction for specific units and then receive instruction from the HALE teacher. This instruction shares the same learning goals as are being delivered within the classroom, but with more depth and more challenge. For example, in 8th grade science, the classroom teacher pre-tests all students on a required measurement unit. Those HALE students, plus any others who test out, are instructed within the HALE classroom with the concept of measurement expanded to scale drawings and 3D models.

For ELL students, Elkhorn is a site-based district. Because the numbers are small, students who qualify for ELL services are transferred to a single middle school (not EMS) and receive direct ELL services there. Any ELL student at EMS has either exited the language program or has refused services.

The remaining sub-group for whom achievement data and trends are tracked, is the group who qualifies for free-and-reduced lunches. Because poverty status is FERPA protected information, staff remains unknowing as to which students qualify and which do not. This drives home the importance of solid Tier One strategies for all students, purposeful interventions when students struggle, and close attention to student achievement data. Teachers must be responsive to all students in order to assure continuous growth for all.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

Elkhorn Middle School is a place in which all staff hold students to high expectations - both in terms of behaviors and academics. It is understood that the success of students in middle school helps to determine success in high school and beyond. It is during these formative years of adolescence that positive habits are formed and students begin to define their values. Academically, students at EMS are supported when they struggle, and challenged when there is an early demonstration of mastery. Late work policies help to clarify the expectations that students will complete assigned work or spend additional time at school. Antler Academy, an after-school program that provides direct teacher support and academic interventions has been created and is in place four days a week. It will be made more uncomfortable for students to disengage from their academic progress than to fully participate.

On the social/emotional front, there exists a responsibility to the whole child. Student programming focused on anti-bullying, drug awareness, positive choices and cyber safety is provided. Behavior expectations are defined across all areas of the building and incorporate incentive programs for positive behaviors. The athletic programming is focused on exposure and participation for all. We do not believe in 'cuts' for those students who need more skill development - instead we provide intramural experiences for those students who are not yet ready for a traveling competitive athletic team.

Elkhorn Middle School is a building in which the teacher voice matters. Teachers are involved in decision making at both the building and district level. There is a positive, collaborative working relationship between the negotiating teacher union and district leadership. Opportunities for teachers to participate on district and state committees is both encouraged and supported as teacher leadership is highly valued in this district. Elkhorn Middle School administration has formed a Principal's Advisory Council - a forum through which staff concerns can be voiced and addressed. The two-way communication within this group has been valuable for staff members as well as administration. The administration of EMS knows and understands that teachers are doing the hard work of educating students; it is the primary purpose of building administration to support teachers in this endeavor and ensure that teachers have all that they need to do so.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

At Elkhorn Middle School, it is understood that parents are an integral part of the learning process. For several years, families were encouraged to set up accounts to view our online grading system but the response was not what was hoped. This past school year, families were required to set up accounts in order to participate in a new online registration system. While the impetus for this decision was grounded in ease of registration, the end result was that all EMS families have access to grades and teacher emails through their online account. This form of communication is now accepted and universal. In addition, parent-teacher conferences are scheduled two times per year in order to facilitate face-to-face communications between teachers and parents. The percentage of participation this past year was 84% in the fall and 72% in the spring. There is a firm belief in teacher-parent communication and a poor grade on a report card should never be the first time a parent knows their child is struggling. Systematic communication prior to end-of-term grades is a vital part of teacher expectations.

There are multiple ways through which parents can get information about the school and its functions. Monthly newsletters are sent via email, homework calendars are kept up-to-date, the school website is active and useful and the school's social media presence on Facebook and Twitter is focused entirely on student achievement. Parents are encouraged to serve as a student mentor through our TeamMates mentoring program, and there is an active and supportive Booster Club made up of parents who choose to directly support the school environment. One example of support from the Booster Club are snack packs provided to each student who travels with a team or group. The booster club purchases supplies and has created a partnership with the district's young adult program to assemble, count and deliver snack packs to the school. The young adult program consists of special needs students aged 18-21 who are developing the

skills needed to be productive in their community. This joint venture has proven extremely beneficial to these students as well as the students of EMS.

Additionally, students are encouraged to participate in community outreach programs. There exists a Giving Tree program during the holidays in addition to a canned food drive. Student organizations, such as Student Council, work with local charity organizations to collect clothing or supplies for the backpack program. One local church donates weekend packs of food that are distributed to needy families as well. Most recently, during the floods of this past spring, Elkhorn Middle School worked collectively with the American Red Cross; we opened our doors and became a shelter location to house and feed victims displaced by flood waters. The amount of support provided by EMS staff and families during this time has been nothing less than overwhelming.

3. Professional Development:

The foundation of teacher development at EMS is to hire and retain high quality teachers and administrators. Upon induction to the district, all new teachers are expected to complete, within three years, a series of pre-determined professional development opportunities. These 'essential skills' include classroom management, reading and writing across the curriculum, assessment development, technology and an introduction to the Elkhorn Instructional Model. Most of these Essential Skills trainings are facilitated by current Elkhorn teachers. Experts in these areas exist within our school community. In addition, all teachers new to Elkhorn are assigned a mentor who will work closely with the new teacher throughout their first year. To encourage ongoing professional development, the district provides a Effective Teacher Incentive that awards financial compensation to any teacher who documents 180 PD hours in each six year cycle.

It is rare in Elkhorn that a speaker is hired for staff trainings. The district believes firmly in the capacity of Elkhorn teachers, staff and administrators to provide focused and appropriate professional developments. The technology department provides multiple opportunities for technology training including aspects of the Google suite and interactive white boards. The curriculum department provides training on curriculum and standards, pacing guide development and group scoring student work. The district supports the idea of teacher collaboration as a means through which to pursue continuous improvement.

At Elkhorn Middle School, and all schools across the district, all departments are expected to administer four common assessments to all students. Teachers are trained specifically in assessment development so these instruments are free from bias and are valid tools to measure achievement. Data gathered from these district common assessments are used by PLC's to discuss and compare student progress. At the middle school level, PLC's are formed on a cross-building basis - teams are formed across all four middle schools. We understand the power of same grade, same course teams of teachers discussing curriculum and making data driven decisions regarding student outcomes. Professional development time is built into the district calendar approximately once a month in order to allow time for PLC and departmental discussions.

4. School Leadership:

Elkhorn Middle School employs only one full-time administrator. The building principal takes full responsibility for all aspects of the building and its functions. A half-time administrative coordinator, or assistant principal, joined the building this school year to assist in the day-to day operation of the building including student discipline and staff appraisals. In addition, the school employs one full-time counselor to function as the building registrar and coordinate response to the social-emotional needs of students.

Comparatively speaking, the building leadership team is minimal. Therefore, teacher leadership is critical at Elkhorn Middle School. The principal knows and understands that teacher empowerment is necessary and important. To this end, the principal must communicate a consistent vision and purpose for the building so that the informal building leaders share the same philosophy as the principal. Two things stand out at Elkhorn Middle School. One is the importance of collaboration and the other is the need for data driven decisions. EMS is primarily grade level structured - at each grade level a team of teachers work collectively to meet the specific needs of the students at that grade. The master schedule allows for at least

two team meetings a week in which teachers are expected to focus on the academic progress of students as well as social-emotional concerns. The expectations are to be solution focused rather than spending time admiring the problems. Because of the grade-level structure, there is a lack of departmental collaboration. Building administration fully supports release time for teachers to meet and plan with their same course counterparts. This collaborative planning maintains consistency across classrooms, assures common pacing and creates a shared work load.

Data-driven-decision-making is also an integral part of the culture of Elkhorn Middle School. We look at data on a systems level, a building level, a department level and a teacher level. The building principal maintains and shares a Data Dashboard that displays trends, celebrations and relative weaknesses shown by student achievement data. This provides one source of information. But to dig deeper in the data provides more meaning. All core teachers at Elkhorn Middle School meet individually with the principal to discuss data on a personal teacher level. We dis-aggregate data down to the level of each teacher so we must all individually face our own effectiveness. Teachers are given personal data on nationally-normed tests and state criterion-referenced tests as compared to building and district averages. It is understood that our demographics have implications, but they will never be an excuse for lower performance. The focus must be on growth and closing achievement gaps. Personal teacher data allows each teacher to address their personal impact on building data numbers. When we own the data, we can make a difference.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

It is rare when a concept from educational literature forms and defines an idea that truly alters the practice within a school. In the book, *Whatever It Takes*, by DuFour, DuFour, Eaker and Karhanek, it states, "Learning will be the constant. In this situation, it is imperative that time and support become variables. Some students will require more time to learn, and so the school will develop strategies to provide students with that time during the school day." This philosophy moved from theory into practice at Elkhorn Middle School. The idea of 'learning being the constant' means that every student is held to the same high academic standards. The idea of 'meeting them where they are' or 'pitching where they can hit it' only causes existing achievement gaps to widen. We reject the soft bigotry of low expectations. All students at EMS are enrolled in on-grade-level courses with rigorous curriculum that will well prepare them for the college-prep courses in our district's high school. EMS is a full-inclusion school so this includes students identified with specific learning disabilities; we keep the bar firmly in place for all students.

The follow-up to this philosophy is the concept of 'time and support being the variables.' Some students will need purposeful intervention in order to meet the high standards we set. Carefully identified students are enrolled in support classes in addition to their grade-level course work. Reading and math teachers within the building utilize Reading Support and Math Support classes for a dual purpose. Teachers first work to identify gaps in knowledge and fill those holes through individualized instruction based upon each students' needs. Second, teachers reteach concepts that are being taught in the regular grade level reading and math classes in order to keep students successful in that setting. For students, the benefit of support classes is shown through increased achievement scores and progress within the curriculum.

This double-up model does force students into making some choices as their time for elective courses can be limited. Enrollment in support classes is not optional for students who qualify, therefore we know that students will have fewer academic slots available in their day for elective classes. We defend this practice with the knowledge that the development of literacy and numeracy skills must take a higher priority than elective courses. Fewer choices now results in greater choice down the road.