



## **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):
- 27 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 4 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 8 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 39 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	15	29	44
7	16	17	33
8	7	15	22
9	30	30	60
10	27	26	53
11	23	23	46
12 or higher	20	15	35
<b>Total Students</b>	138	155	293

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

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 29 % Asian
  - 21 % Black or African American
  - 24 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 1 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 24 % White
  - 1 % 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: 7%

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	0
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2017 until the end of the 2017-2018 school year	19
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	19
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2017	258
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.07
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	7

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: 66%  
Total number students who qualify: 193

8. Students receiving special education services: 0 %  
1 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>0</u> Autism                  | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>1</u> Other Health Impaired                 |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>0</u> Specific Learning Disability          |
| <u>0</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	2
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	17
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	4
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	0
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	2

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 15:1

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	98%	99%	98%	99%	99%
High school graduation rate	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

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	32
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	97%
Enrolled in a community college	3%
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.

Infinity Institute aims to provide a learning environment that develops students' intellectual, technological, emotional, and social skills to live successfully as socially responsible global citizens.

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

As a magnet school, Infinity Institute facilitates an acceptance process for both the middle and high school grades. At the middle school level, students apply for admission as current 5th – 7th graders. While at the high school level, students must be enrolled as current 8th or 9th graders at the time of their application. The high school admissions process begins annually, in the fall. Applications are distributed to the district's public and charter elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, and non-public schools located in Jersey City. Interested students are required to complete and submit an application to their school counselors. All completed applications must include student residence information, grades for the past two years in five core subjects (reading, writing, math, social studies, and science), recommendations from three teachers and one administrator, attendance record from the current year, Preliminary SAT 8/9 (PSAT 8/9) scores, and extracurricular activities. For each admissions criterion, the students receive points. The points are tabulated electronically to determine each student's total overall score. The total maximum points that can be obtained are 100. Once the scores have been tabulated, all applicants in the databases are grouped into four subgroups based on their reported ethnicity: Hispanic, White, African-American, and Other (Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American). In each subgroup, the applicants' total scores are ranked from highest to lowest. Since the school seeks to enroll a hundred new students each year, the committee offers acceptance to the top 20 applicants of each ethnicity subgroup (80 students). Once 80 accepted students have been identified in each subgroup, the remaining applicants from the four subgroups are placed in one group and ranked from highest to lowest based on their application score. The final 20 accepted students are the top 20 applicants in this heterogeneous group. If an accepted student declines the invitation to enroll, the committee then invites the next student on the heterogeneous list to enroll. At the middle school level, the admissions process begins in early winter each school year and is very similar to the high school process.

## **PART III – SUMMARY**

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Infinity Institute is a secondary, citywide public school within the Jersey City Public Schools district. The school opened in September 2010 and is located in the Greenville section of Jersey City. Infinity serves grades sixth through twelfth and concentrates on academics in a personalized, challenging environment. As a magnet school that draws its student population from many neighborhoods within Jersey City, Infinity's student population is reflective of the diversity found within one of the nation's most ethnically diverse metropolitan areas.

According to a recent Wallethub study, Jersey City, a major port of entry for immigration, has become the second-most-populated and culturally diverse city in New Jersey. Based on the 2010 Census, the city's population was 247,597. Over 32 percent of the residents were reported as white, while a little over a quarter of its inhabitants were reported as African American. In addition, the remaining large subgroups were Asians (25.4%) and Hispanics or Latino (27.6%). Most significantly, the study reported that in regards to its linguistic diversity, Jersey City ranks number one in the nation. Over 45 percent of its citizens speak only English, while 52.97 percent speak other languages. The largest non-English language spoken is Spanish. In regards to income, Jersey City households have a median annual income of \$63,227. Although this is greater than the median income for the United States, it must be noted that approximately 17.2 percent live below the federal poverty line. The most common racial groups living below the poverty line are Whites, Hispanics, and African-Americans, respectively.

When Infinity opened its doors eight and a half years ago, a small community of 68 students, 12 staff members, and one administrator were charged with critical and historic tasks involving forging a school vision, mission, motto, and mascot. In order to promote unity and buy-in among its stakeholders, the entire school community worked collaboratively to identify the school's core values - the behaviors, beliefs, and actions that were believed to be most important. Through ongoing collaboration, stakeholders were able to craft the mission and vision statements that embodied their beliefs about the best thinking of teaching and learning, as well as provided them with a common direction for growth. Interestingly, the selection of the school's mascot and motto was born out of a school-wide competition. The students and staff were invited to propose ideas and write persuasive essays. After that, the four most popular ideas were voted upon by the entire school community. Through the submission of a ninth grader's compelling essay, the school's symbol and mascot emerged as the Phoenix. The entire community became ignited by the comparison of Infinity Institute to the mythological qualities of the majestic bird – powerful, the ability to rise from the ashes, and possessing eternal life. From that day on, community members embraced red and yellow as school colors and the motto, "Where learning never ends."

During the school's opening year, the community became involved in multiple social- action activities that are now a part of Infinity's traditions. In 2010, the school nurse requested the school's participation in the Alzheimer's Walk to raise funds for the organization. Her passion for this organization inspired students, parents, and staff members to action, leading the school to receive the School Spirit award from the Alzheimer's Association. Infinity became the first Hudson County public school to be presented this honor. Since 2010, the school has participated in Alzheimer's New Jersey fundraising activities and has won the Spirit Award nine years in a row. In fact, the school community's excitement has led to its participation in several community service projects: St. Paul's Church Food Drives, Salvation Army Adopt-a-Family, and American Heart Association fundraisers. Thus, the school's participation in civic activities has served to support the school's goals of pursuing high academic achievement along with social and ethical responsibility.

In order to advance the students' social, emotional, physical, and academic development, the school has established academic and community partnerships to support its comprehensive liberal arts program. In 2015, through a 21st Century Grant, Infinity became affiliated with the YMCA of Newark and Vicinity. Through this symbiotic relationship, students have been afforded free access to extracurricular activities involving sports, theater, graphic arts and college-tour field trips. In addition, the YMCA program employs Infinity's teachers to provide after-school tutoring and assistance in English language arts and mathematics. Lastly, the YMCA teams up with the school to sponsor social events, such as game nights and school

dances.

On the academic front, Infinity has sought to challenge students academically and increase their college readiness by forming partnerships with organizations and universities. On the high school level, the school became affiliated with Syracuse University and Seton Hall University through participation in their dual enrollment programs. The programs provided high school students with the opportunity to earn transferable college credits during the school day. Moreover, in the 2013-14 school year, the school introduced Advanced Placement (AP) courses approved by College Board. Over the past six years, the school's AP program has grown from two to seven course offerings in mathematics, science, language arts, social studies, and art. Lastly, in the middle grades, Infinity became a part of Cambridge University's global learning community as a member school in October 2015. As the first Cambridge school in New Jersey, the school adopted integrated curricula in language arts, science, and mathematics to serve as a pre-AP program.

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

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

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

The sixth and seventh grade classes follow blended curricula based on Cambridge International Framework and New Jersey Student Learning Standards (NJSLS). The Cambridge curriculum focuses on reading, writing, grammar and punctuation, speaking and listening, and vocabulary. The Cambridge curriculum uses a learner-centered and inquiry-based approach to learning. It develops learners' skills in creative thinking, inquiry and problem solving, reading complex texts, collaboration, and presenting arguments. In grades 8-12, the Honors English Language Arts (ELA) curricula addresses the NJSLS by having students read literature and informational texts and write for various purposes.

The instructional approaches that are used in the ELA curriculum are the workshop and inquiry-based approach. The workshop approach leads students through a scaffolding process in reading and writing. In the ELA curricula, teachers model strategies, define and utilize close reading, and explain the writing process. Students use Google tools to collaborate, create projects, and complete assignments. This integrated, rigorously focused inquiry-based approach to the study of language and literature was chosen so that students actively engage with the text to develop their knowledge of the content and process strategies and critical thinking skills. The online intervention program that is used to develop students' ELA skills is IXL Learning. Online resources used in the ELA classes are Common Lit, Albert, and Shmoop.

In professional learning communities with ELA teachers, assessment data is analyzed in bi-weekly meetings with the administration. The New Jersey Student Learning Assessment (NJSLA), PSAT, SAT, district quarterlies, and Diagnostic Online Reading Assessment (DORA) data are reviewed to identify strengths and weaknesses of students. The NJSLA School Evidence Statement Analysis Report is reviewed to determine grade level proficiency on tested standards. The PSAT and SAT data is reviewed to identify the subscores of students who are not on track for college readiness. District quarterlies are reviewed to determine students' mastery in reading and writing standards. DORA is used as a diagnostic tool to assess students' reading ability in eight sub skills. The team then formulates action plans that include instructional strategies to address areas of need. After strategies have been implemented, teachers and administrators review students' work products to determine if the instructional strategy was effective in addressing students' needs.

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

The sixth, seventh and eighth grade classes follow blended curricula based on Cambridge International Framework and New Jersey Student Learning Standards (NJSLS). The Cambridge curricula focus on developing competency and fluency with mathematical concepts, methods, and skills, and an emphasis on solving problems, presenting, and interpreting results. This develops a student's ability to solve problems, reason logically, and communicate in the language of mathematics. Grade 8 students also have the opportunity to take Algebra 1. In grades 9-12, students are enrolled in honors and AP courses. All mathematics curricula addressed the NJSLS of problem solving, reasoning and proof, communication, representation, and connections.

The instructional approaches used in the mathematics curriculum are the process approach and the blended learning approach. The process approach has students identifying steps in a problem and the reasoning and explanations of its solutions. This builds on their higher order thinking skills. The blended learning model has students using online educational resources and traditional classroom methods. Online interventions that are used to assist students in their Math classes are IXL Learning and Khan Academy. These approaches were chosen so that students learn multiple methods for solving a problem, how to communicate and reason using mathematical concepts, and to support strategic critical thinking skills.

In math professional learning communities, assessment data from various sources is analyzed in bi-weekly

meetings with the administration. The data is reviewed to identify strengths and weaknesses of students. The NJSLA School Evidence Statement Analysis Report is reviewed to determine grade level proficiency on tested standards. Based on the NJSLA School Evidence Statement Analysis Report, the Math team creates monthly practice tasks to improve students' areas of weakness. The PSAT and SAT data is reviewed to identify the subscores of students who are not on track for college readiness. IXL Learning reports are utilized to inform teachers of students' individualized progress towards mastery of math concepts and skills.

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

The sixth, seventh and eighth grade classes follow blended curricula based on Cambridge International Framework and Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). The Cambridge curriculum focuses on scientific inquiry, biology, chemistry, and physics. Students engage in activities and develop skills that extend their knowledge in the life, physical, and earth sciences. In grades 9-12 students take honors Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Environmental, Anatomy, AP Biology and AP Environmental. All science curricula addresses the NGSS which includes defining problems, analyzing data, creating models, conducting investigations, designing solutions, and engaging in evidence-based arguments.

The instructional approaches used in the science curriculum are the inquiry based learning, problem-based learning, and blended learning. The inquiry-based learning approach encourages students in the learning process and allows them to build knowledge through exploration, experience, and discussion. This approach includes small group discussion and guided learning. The problem based learning approach is student-centered and challenges students to learn through complex real-world problems. The blended approach has students using online educational resources and traditional classroom methods. These approaches were chosen so that students develop critical thinking skills, problem solving abilities, and communication skills. This engages students in the learning, where they evaluate evidence, plan investigations, analyze data, and explore a topic in more detail. The online intervention program, IXL Learning, is used to develop students' Science skills in grades 6 through 8.

In professional learning communities, assessment data generated from PSAT, research simulation tasks, lab reports, and quarterly assessments are analyzed in bi-weekly meetings with the administration. The data and student work is reviewed to identify strengths and weaknesses of students. The team then formulates action plans that include instructional strategies and resources to address areas of need. After strategies have been implemented, teachers and administrators review students' work products to determine if the instructional strategy was effective in addressing students' needs.

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

The middle school curriculum focuses on analyzing government structures and economic policies for communities and global relationships. The high school honors curriculum focuses on historical viewpoints to analyze roles in society and the significance of fundamental documents. At the high school level, advanced placement courses offered are AP US History and AP Government. Students are also required to take financial literacy in high school. All social studies curricula addresses the New Jersey State Learning Standards (NJSLS) by having students thinking critically and systematically about issues near and far, and reviewing primary sources to learn about important events.

The instructional approaches that are used in the Social Studies curricula are blended approach and the inquiry-based approach. The blended approach allows students to analyze documents, review videos, and digitally communicate with each other in and out of school while evaluating primary sources. The inquiry based approach to learning includes a range of question-driven approaches that develop students' critical thinking and problem solving skills. These approaches allow students to research and conduct an analysis of primary resources in order to participate in Socratic seminars and debate activities to develop communication and reasoning skills. Online resources that are used in social studies classes are Khan Academy, Common Lit, Albert, and Shmoop. Teachers also use Google Classroom for sharing documents, completing activities, and administering assessments.

In professional learning communities with Social Studies teachers, assessment data is analyzed in bi-weekly

meetings with the administration. The data is reviewed to identify strengths and weaknesses of students. The team then develops hypotheses about possible causes that affect students' learning and propose instructional strategies to help all students achieve. After strategies have been implemented, teachers and administrators meet and review students' work products to determine if the instructional strategy was effective in addressing students' needs. For example, document based question responses are analyzed and evaluated to see if students can effectively integrate and synthesize evidence from multiple sources.

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

Through partnerships with universities, the school offers dual enrollment high school courses to afford students with the opportunity to earn transferable college credits. In addition, eighth grade students have access to enroll in Honors Algebra I, Honors ELA 9, and French. Also, Advanced Placement courses are offered in grades 10-12 to prepare students for college-level academics. Moreover, all teachers in every subject area across all grades require students to read complex texts and write evidence-based analytical responses. In high school math and language arts classes, students use Khan Academy to prepare them for the PSAT and SAT assessments. Guidance counselors utilize Naviance to assist students in discovering their career interests in order to create post-secondary goals.

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

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

The visual and performing arts are discipline-based and aligned to student learning standards. These standards are aesthetics, art history, studio production/performance, and critique. The art making creative process is equal in value to the outcome for the students in the areas of problem solving, editing and analyzing the success of the end product. Additionally, students build self esteem, diligence, and vision through the process of conceptualization, creating, and completing the end product. Middle school students participate in visual and performing arts five days a week. High school students are able to select either visual or performing arts, which meet five days a week.

The health classes focus on enhancing students' knowledge and understanding of personal, social, and emotional well-being, developing short and long term goals, and learning communication and decision-making skills. Physical education emphasizes and promotes a healthy, active lifestyle by focusing on performance in seasonal and lifetime sports and physical fitness testing. Physical education classes develop leadership skills, cooperation, team building, and the improvement of self-confidence and self esteem. Middle school students participate in physical education five days a week. High school students participate in physical education for two marking periods, and health for two marking periods for five days a week.

The World Language classes offer a concise, well-developed communicative and cultural approach. The World Language Courses offer the students the opportunity to explore and acquire Spanish and French language and its culture based on the World-Readiness Standards of Learning Languages and the New Jersey Student Learning Standards. The World Language classes focus on the language and the appreciation and understanding of culture, customs, values, and lifestyles of the people. In addition, students learn Spanish and French through an interdisciplinary method that teaches the target language within the context of other subjects. Additionally, it fosters the development of three communicative modes: interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational. Middle school students in grades 6 and 7 receive Spanish and 8th grade students receive French five days a week. High school students are able to select either Spanish or French, which meets five days a week. Library media classes focus on information, literacy, and technology skills. Students learn the process of conducting research, citing credible sources, and evaluating information from print and non-print materials. Students are exposed to various databases, such as Ebsco and Britannica. Furthermore, to support digital literacy in the classroom, students use Google Suite, Google Classroom, Ebooks, and Worldbook an online resource for nonfiction. The librarian works in conjunction with teachers in all subjects to support and extend curricula. Students in middle school have library media five days a week. STEM Coding classes have students participating in programming and physical computing. Students

engage in problem-solving, communication, and creativity, while creating websites, apps, and games. Students in 8th grade attend coding classes five times a week.

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

A comprehensive analysis of the 2017 performance data revealed a performance gap between male and female students in the area of mathematics. From a review of the 2017 mathematics New Jersey Student Learning Assessment (NJSLA), it was noted that male students were outperforming their female counterparts in grades 6-11. The greatest gender performance gaps existed in grades 6 and 11. An analysis of the 2018 NJSLA assessments revealed that the gender performance gap in mathematics has narrowed and females' math performance has improved. In the 2016-17 testing year, males outperformed females in all tested math grades. However, for the 2017-18 school year, females outperformed their male peers in grades 6, 8, and 10. In review of the 2017 PSAT, it was noted that females' mathematics performance has improved and the gender performance gap has lessened. In the previous testing year (2016), male students in grades 8-11 achieved higher percentages for meeting math benchmarks when compared to females.

To address these gaps, the school implemented various initiatives and programs for teachers and students. In the math professional learning community, teachers designed formative assessments, analyzed student work and student performance data reports, and collaborated on instructional strategies to address student needs. Also, the teachers utilized instructional and assessment resources aligned to the College Board assessments e.g. Khan Academy. To support students' mathematics proficiency, the school implemented after-school math support labs in middle school mathematics, Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II. The math labs meet twice a week to review math concepts aligned to the New Jersey Student Learning Standards. Also, the school has purchased online intervention programs, Sketchpad and IXL Math, to provide students with individualized support in mastering math skills and concepts. The mathematics teachers follow a blended learning model by utilizing the online intervention programs inside and outside the classroom.

Students who are advanced and performing at high levels take advanced courses. Eighth grade students take ELA 9, Algebra 1, and a STEM Coding class. Thus, advanced students have the opportunity to take AP Calculus and AP Language and Composition in their junior year. Additionally, advanced 9th graders enroll in ELA 10 honors as a freshman.

## PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

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### **1. School Climate/Culture:**

In order to cultivate a high quality teaching and learning environment, the school engages in activities that promote students' academic, social, and emotional growth, and meaningful, supportive relationships throughout its community.

Each year, the school provides students with the opportunity to participate in an after-school academic support program. The tutoring classes focus on English language arts and mathematics skills for grades 6-9. In addition, the school implements an Advanced Placement (AP) Scholar Program. AP students participate in after-school classes wherein teachers provide instruction on course content and exam strategies. Lastly, the National Honor Society has created a peer tutoring program to provide one-to-one assistance to classmates in need of academic support. All of the programs have led to higher academic achievement and improved relationships among the school community.

Since Infinity's vision embraces academic, social and emotional development, the school and the YMCA sponsor many social events and extracurricular activities. The events include dances, game and movie nights, and sports competitions between students and staff. Moreover, the school encourages students to participate in after-school clubs to afford them more time to explore and develop their talents, creativity and relationships with their peers. The clubs offered include: Drama, Student Council, Visual Arts, Band, and Volleyball.

Most significant, the school empowers its students by welcoming and supporting their ideas for events, extracurricular activities, and community service projects. Students have proposed and designed school assemblies regarding developing positive self-esteem and celebrating the achievements of women leaders. In addition, students have spearheaded after-school clubs based on their personal and cultural interests, e.g. UNICEF Club and a Christian Support Group. Lastly, impassioned students have organized a year-long fundraising effort to increase awareness of human slave trafficking and to donate funds to the Free the Slaves organization. Thus, the students' role in decision-making has made a positive impact on the school and its global communities.

Additionally, Infinity promotes a culture wherein teachers feel valued, engaged, and respected. First, teachers are invited to participate in the decision-making process through their participation on school leadership teams, such as the School Improvement Panel or School Safety Team. As team members, teachers are provided a platform to express their feelings and ideas. Secondly, the administration provides time for teachers to work collaboratively before and during the school day. For instance, new and struggling teachers are provided with classroom coverage to visit colleagues' classrooms to discuss and observe best practices. Routinely, teachers are provided with instructional resources and professional development to support and expand their practice. Moreover, the administration demonstrates its support of teachers by addressing parent and discipline matters in a fair and consistent manner. Finally, teachers are often recognized for their daily efforts and contributions by parents, students, and administrators via handwritten cards, emails, and public announcements during the school day.

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

Since its inception, Infinity Institute has engaged its families and partners in its mission to create a safe, supportive, and challenging learning environment. Each year, parents are invited to participate on school teams and/or committees. These school teams and/or committees include School Safety Team, School Leadership Team, and Teacher of the Year Committee. As participants, the parents, administrators, teachers, and students work together as a collaborative unit to address the students' academic, social, and wellness goals. Through their participation, parents are informed of the school's needs and are provided the opportunity to share their concerns, ideas and strategies to address these needs. For example, after a few security incidents, the administration discussed the need for the video cameras to be repaired during a School Safety Team meeting. Consequently, the parents repeatedly contacted the district's Director of

Security to communicate their concerns and request that the cameras be repaired. Due to their advocacy, the video cameras were repaired ahead of the previously proposed timeline.

Moreover, the school and its Parent Teacher Association (PTA) support community building initiatives that promote parent engagement with Infinity's instructional programs, health and wellness activities, and college preparation. Based on a parent survey, which indicated that parents were interested in learning about online instructional programs/platforms, the school facilitated a series of teacher-led workshops on IXL Learning, Google Applications, and Khan Academy. During these workshops, the teachers introduced each resource and explained how it supports student improvement. Also, the school and PTA submitted a health and wellness competitive grant coordinated by the Statewide Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN). The awarded grant provided funds to purchase blenders to create healthy drinks after fitness activities. Lastly, the school has hosted college preparation events to discuss how to prepare college applications, research college majors and careers, and finance a college education.

Throughout the year, the school utilizes multiple methods to inform parents of their child's progress. First, the school uses an online student information system to create quarterly progress reports and report cards. In addition, parents have access to an online parent portal which allows them to view their child's grades. Also, teachers share students' progress through email and phone communications. If students are not making satisfactory progress, the teacher, counselor, and administration meet with the parent and student to discuss their progress and the proposed interventions outlined in an academic improvement plan. Finally, the school presents quarterly assemblies to recognize students who have achieved honor roll, perfect attendance, and Student of the Month.

Lastly, Infinity has formed partnerships with universities and non-profit organizations to enhance our students' college and career readiness. The school became a Cambridge University member school to provide its middle school students with a challenging, global-standard education. Furthermore, the school has participated in dual-enrollment programs with Seton Hall University, Syracuse University, and Hudson County Community College to enable students to earn college credits prior to graduation. Infinity Institute has partnered with non-profit organizations, such as, Girls Who Code, All Stars Project and the Jersey City Summer Internship Program, to provide students with career and mentoring experiences in the workplace.

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

Within the professional learning community (PLC) structure, Infinity Institute's teachers collaboratively develop and refine their knowledge of content, pedagogy, and student learning. The school and district utilize multiple professional development strategies to build teacher capacity and to improve student learning outcomes. These strategies involve implementing professional development that is situated in practice, focuses on student learning, incorporates active learning, supports collaboration, provides coaching and peer support, offers opportunities for feedback and reflection, and provides adequate time for teachers to learn, practice, and reflect on changes in their practice.

At the start of the 2018-19 school year, the instructional staff and administrators met to analyze student performance data on College Board assessments and discuss school goals included in Infinity's Professional Development Plan. Based on the student performance data analysis, it was determined that there was a need to improve students' analytical skills. Also, it was noted that teachers' informal and formal evaluation scores in the area of questioning and discussion were low due to their overuse of convergent questions that mainly required recall. Thus, through dialogue, the school community decided to focus its attention on improving students' analytical skills by supporting teachers' implementation of effective questioning and discussion strategies to engage students in deeper thinking of the content. After the Problem of Practice (POP) had been identified, the teachers and administrators engaged in sessions wherein they reviewed and discussed effective questioning strategies. During these sessions, teachers and administrators engaged in active learning activities including: examining research articles, viewing examples of the strategy in action, planning lessons incorporating the new strategy, and completing concrete tasks with their content peers, e.g. drafting discussion questions, sharing lesson activities with peers and participating in small group discussions wherein administrators and teachers share feedback to one another regarding lesson activities. Through this collegial process, both teachers and administrators

assumed the role of learners as they collaboratively develop and refine their professional knowledge.

One of the school's most impactful professional learning activities has involved administrative and teacher teams visiting classrooms to view teachers trying out new questioning and discussion strategies. During each visit, the team records the actions of the teacher and students. After the informal visit, the teams meet with the teacher and provide him/her with feedback on elements of their practice. Also, the observed teacher shares his/her reflections about the lesson and ideas on improving the observed practice. The team and teacher collaborate on strategies and resources that can be utilized for future lessons. Interestingly, the teachers, who viewed their peer's lessons, expressed that they gained a deeper understanding of the new strategy through their participation as informal observers. Lastly, through this process, administrators are able to engage in ongoing, informal, non-intimidating discourse with teachers about practice outside of the formal evaluation process.

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

The administration embraces a philosophy of leadership that seeks to establish a positive culture that builds the leadership capacity of all its members. To that end, administrators actively build relationships with all stakeholders in order to discover and engage their strengths, talents and interests. This strength-based focus originates from the instructional leader, the principal. Moreover, the principal's primary role has been to explicitly and passionately communicate to the stakeholders the school's collective strengths and achievements as they relate to its progress toward achieving Infinity's institutional goals. By focusing on individual strengths, before addressing areas in need of further development, the principal ensures that staff members feel valued and are more receptive to improving and refining their practice.

At the opening of each year, school administrators share student performance data on state and national assessments with parents and staff. Through guided discussions, stakeholders converse about overall performance trends, the performance of special populations, and achievement gaps between student groups. Then, the data conversations continue in staff monthly professional learning community (PLC) meetings wherein the vice principal assists the staff in mining the data. During these meetings, teachers converse about what the data reveals and ways student performance can be enhanced via instructional strategies and resources. Lastly, teachers are charged with implementing strategies and resources in their classroom, administering assessments, analyzing student performance, and sharing the outcomes with their colleagues to determine if the strategies or resources are effective.

The school embraces a leadership structure that promotes the distribution of leadership among its stakeholders. As illustrated by Tom Peters, "Leaders don't create followers, they create more leaders." Thus, the administration empowers its community to act as innovators in their school-level positions. For instance, during a summer break, a student spearheaded a school-wide initiative based on the school's theme of "Building Relationships." She contacted an inspirational speaker and requested the presenter to share a message of positive self-love, confidence, and kindness to the school community at an assembly. In addition, the students decorated the school building with motivating messages written by the entire student body.

Staff empowerment is evident in teachers taking the lead in designing and implementing programs to support the needs of the school community. Namely, the school counselor initiated and organized many day and evening events to increase students' and parents' awareness of post-secondary institutions, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) process, College Board assessments (PSAT/SAT), and Naviance, the online college and career planning tool. Also, in an effort to increase students' activism, the school nurse and teachers have formed partnerships with local organizations and led fundraising efforts. As a result of the aforementioned efforts and many others, the school's culture is positive, supportive, and conducive to student learning, professional satisfaction, and morale.

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

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Although Infinity Institute has exhibited high overall performance on state and national assessments, the school has faced instructional and organizational challenges within its learning community. As a magnet college preparatory school, the majority of its students enter the school performing at the proficiency level as measured by mandated state assessments. However, in analyzing the performance trends of grade level cohorts for multiple years, the school community realized that an overwhelming majority of students continued to perform within the range of the state's benchmarks for proficiency and did not progress to the next higher performance band. In addition, school administrators' informal and formal classroom observations revealed that the instructional staff were not designing instructional activities that illustrated increasing cognitive demand. Many of the teachers' lesson plans included learning outcomes and activities that focused on factual and procedural knowledge, representing low expectations. Lastly, during staff discussions, school leaders noted that the teachers did not share the same understanding of the term rigor. For many teachers, the term rigor was equated with quantity, e.g. the number of problems assigned or the number of pages required for an essay.

To address these challenges, the principal introduced Webb's Depth of Knowledge Framework (DOK) to teachers as a tool to provide the learning community with common language and a shared understanding of rigor and cognitive depth. First, in professional learning sessions, administrators and teachers studied the four levels of DOK tasks and assessed weekly lesson plans in relation to the DOK framework. The teachers sorted their tasks into the four DOK levels. As a result, teachers and administrators were able to discuss each level and clarify their understanding. Most significantly, the sorting activity assisted the administrators and teachers in identifying patterns in their lesson planning, e.g. uneven distribution of tasks across the four levels or DOK tasks planned in sequential order. In addition, department teams reviewed content area specific DOK frameworks to gain a deeper understanding of levels of thinking tasks aligned to Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, and Visual and Performing Arts. Based on new understandings, department teams collaborated to plan and design lesson activities and assessments that involved students analyzing, synthesizing and justifying ideas and concepts. Then, during PLC meetings, teachers presented student work products and engaged in academic conversations about their students' progress in relation to the language of the DOK framework. With the support of the aforementioned professional learning activities, teachers have designed lessons wherein all students are challenged and supported to complete high intellectual activities.