

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

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Mrs. Meghan B. Stenta

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

Official School Name African Road Elementary School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 600 South Benita Boulevard

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

Vestal NY 13850-2698  
City State Zip Code+4 (9 digits total)

County Broome County

Telephone (607) 757-2311

Fax (607) 757-2705

Web site/URL

[https://www.vestal.stier.org/africanroad\\_home.aspx](https://www.vestal.stier.org/africanroad_home.aspx)

E-mail [mbstenta@vestal.k12.ny.us](mailto:mbstenta@vestal.k12.ny.us)

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent\*Mr. Jeffrey Ahearn

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other) E-mail [JJAhearn@vestal.k12.ny.us](mailto:JJAhearn@vestal.k12.ny.us)

District Name Vestal Central School District Tel. (607) 757-2241

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. Mario Nunes

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

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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

## Part I – Eligibility Certification

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

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

## PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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

### DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 5 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 1 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 7 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	25	20	45
1	22	21	43
2	18	21	39
3	21	26	47
4	19	25	44
5	21	18	39
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	126	131	257

\*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
  - 25 % Asian
  - 6 % Black or African American
  - 4 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 61 % White
  - 4 % Two or more races
  - 100 % Total**

(Only these seven standard categories should be used to report the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.)

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2017 – 2018 school year: 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.

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2017 until the end of the 2017-2018 school year	6
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2017 until the end of the 2017-2018 school year	1
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	7
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2017	263
(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: 9%  
24 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):  
Arabic, Bosnian, Chinese, English, Hindi, Japanese, Kurdish, Spanish, Urdu, Vietnamese

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 33%  
Total number students who qualify: 84

8. Students receiving special education services: 12 %  
31 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>2</u> Autism                  | <u>4</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>7</u> Other Health Impaired                 |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>8</u> Specific Learning Disability          |
| <u>1</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>4</u> Speech or Language Impairment         |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment      | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>4</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>1</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:

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	12
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	10
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	23
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	7

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 0:1

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yes  No

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

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

Our mission is to provide a nurturing and supportive environment where all students respect themselves, understand the diversity of others, and develop a love of learning.

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

## **PART III – SUMMARY**

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African Road Elementary (ARE) is a strong candidate for the Blue Ribbon designation due to its commitment to lifelong learning, community building, and student leadership. ARE's school motto is "Learning Today, Leading Tomorrow." This motto reflects our core value that education must be purposeful and directed towards improving the world through improving one's self. African Road Elementary is successful because all members of the community embrace learning as a process of continual growth. The keystones of this process are core practices embraced by all stakeholders: strong traditions, student leadership, community building, and the promotion of a coherent academic program.

ARE's culturally diverse community gives it unique character within the district and region. It is one of five elementary schools serving the community in Vestal, New York. Our district is located in upstate New York, adjacent to both the city of Binghamton and Binghamton University. ARE is the most ethnically diverse of the five elementary schools. The school supports approximately 260 students in kindergarten to grade five, including two 8:1:1 special education classrooms for students with global delays. Nine percent of our students are English Language Learners (ELL). ARE supports families who have come to our school from all over the world to further their education, to teach at Binghamton University, to work in the local engineering or medical fields, or in other service sector jobs. As a result, our students are from all around the world speak fifteen different languages. ARE families value education and expect high standards of excellence for their children.

Strong traditions allow stakeholders the opportunity to be fully integrated within our school's culture, promote a sense of belonging, and foster communal responsibility through student leadership. The school hosts many annual events. "Taste of ARE" is an evening celebration in which families share food, artifacts, and traditions from their country of origin or choice. Likewise, "Ice Cream Social" is a community fundraiser for the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) that generates funds to support classroom grants and field trips. Our annual "Walk to School Day" is another opportunity for the community to meet and connect. "Donuts with Dad" and "Muffins with Mom" are traditions the PTA organizes to celebrate students families and their caregivers. An important academic event is the annual science fair. Here, students work with their parents and teachers to conduct investigations and present them to the school community. The "ARE Turkey Trot" family walk/run event that promotes relationship building among our parents, students, and staff. Finally, the "12 Days of Kindness" is a yearly celebration of kindness, a simple but essential characteristic of the school spirit we foster.

ARE's commitment to community building involves purposeful curriculum, instruction, and activities that foster a love for learning and a sense of greater purpose. Our motto, "Learning Today, Leading Tomorrow" is connected to real-world practices involving the active engagement of ARE's Student Council (SC). SC organizes an annual food drive for local food pantries and the middle school. SC also organizes an annual pet drive each year. This student-centered event allows children to engage in a service learning project around something near and dear to them-their pets! Veteran's Day and Flag Day are celebrated each year at ARE by having the SC plan events. Assemblies have included guest speakers, Skyping with the Pentagon, slideshows of veterans from the school community, and students performing patriotic songs.

Our students' contributions to the school community are fostered through a wide array of community events and projects. The second grade musical is a yearly dramatic performance that showcases our student's talents. Third grade simulates a "Trip to China." Our fourth grade "talk show" is a tradition in which each student selects a historical figure, conducts research, and dresses up as this chosen person to participate in an interview. Our fifth grade promotion ceremony is a time to showcase the amazing accomplishments of our fifth graders. Every June, ARE has a schoolwide celebration of reading and writing accomplishments where all students are bussed to a local park for the day to participate in a variety of activities. The music department also has various concerts throughout the school year where students perform for their community.

A significant milestone in the success of ARE is the coordination of instruction and curriculum to create a coherent academic program. During the past five years, the principal and faculty have worked together to

bring curriculum into vertical alignment. Longitudinal data shows this impact. The number of ARE students performing at proficiency on the New York State ELA and mathematics assessments has increased at a steady rate over the last six years. An area of significant gain in performance can be seen in the results from third grade. In 2013, 37% of students achieved mastery in ELA; in 2018, 72% achieved mastery. In 2013, 58% of students achieved mastery in mathematics; in 2018, 82% achieved mastery. This year, ARE's increase in proficiency outpaced both the state and district. Proficiency on the 2018 ELA assessments increased by 16 percentage points (71% proficiency) for ARE compared to the state's 5% increase and the district's 6% increase. Proficiency on the 2018 mathematics assessment increased by 8 percentage points (81% proficiency) for ARE compared to the state and district's 5% increase. Our school's nomination for the Blue Ribbon Award reflects this success.



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

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

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

African Road Elementary uses the district-adopted K-5 reading and writing curriculum for all K-5 elementary students – Columbia Teachers College "Units of Study for the Teaching of Writing and Reading." Literacy instruction follows a workshop approach using student writing portfolios, book clubs, and independent reading. The workshop model is a strength-based to authentically differentiate according to the rich cultural, linguistic, and cognitive diversity of our student body. Described below are four core values of ARE's literacy program:

Firstly, we believe children don't merely learn "how to" read and write. Through rich experiences they "become" readers and writers in authentic workshops in which children work at their independent levels. Even our very youngest children are empowered as readers and writers. They see literacy as a purposeful form of community building.

Secondly, children benefit from a carefully sequenced curriculum. African Road faculty work closely together to ensure that curriculum and instruction is carefully coordinated as a seamless progression through the grades. This coordination provides students with a coherent experience over many years, which is especially important for ELLs and students with special needs.

Thirdly, children need to read and write regularly. ARE students have internalized strong reading and writing habits. We are committed to fostering a love of learning in students. They come to see literacy as a natural extension of their identities, intellects, and social lives.

Finally, assessment is curriculum based. Student growth is supported through multi-tiered assessments beginning with individual reading and writing conferences between teachers and students. Checklists and rubrics are used by teachers to provide feedback to students and are used by students to self-assess. Teachers use The Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System to determine student's independent and instructional reading levels. Teachers then tailor instruction and intervention to these levels based on individual student need.

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

African Road Elementary School uses Eureka Math, the district-adopted K-5 mathematics curriculum. Eureka Math is designed around the Common Core Mathematics Standards to provide coherent mathematics education centered on the careful progression of skills and concepts from concrete objects to pictorial representations leading to a students' ability to reason abstractly and symbolically. The curriculum has been enriched through ARE's development of math learning centers to support differentiation at each grade. The principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) are embedded in every module to provide scaffolding to support ELLs and students with special needs, and to provide enrichment. The math program balances applied learning with fluency practice.

Computer programming language is used as a tool to reinforce this progression in math. The primary grades work with programmable robots to concretely explore concepts in geometry and numeracy using simple command sequences. In grades four and five, students learn "Logo," a programming language, to write programs that apply more complex geometric principles and to provide exposure to an abstract coding environment. Several other technology programs are used to further a student's math understanding, fluency, and independence including IXL, Splashmath, Xtramath, and Zearn.

Assessment of student work is an integral part of the math program. Teachers use problem-based assessment tools to benchmark student progress formatively within units, and summatively at the conclusion of units. Here, teachers' analysis of student work serves to refine their instructional strategies by identifying areas of

strength and growth among grade-level groups as well as with individual students. These performance-based assessments are used by grade level teams to refine their knowledge of student mathematical thinking as well and to identify areas of student growth and strength. Finally, the STAR Math online assessment is used as a universal screening tool and for summative assessment at the beginning, middle, and end of each year.

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

At the core of African Road's practices is a strong emphasis on promoting curiosity and wonder—of inspiring a scientific mindset in students. African Road Elementary follows the NYS Science Learning Standards (NYSSLS) based on the Framework for K-12 Science Education developed by the National Research Council and based on the Next GEN Science Standards. These standards create a coherent model of science that provides students with a rigorous balance between science concepts and authentic application. Through inquiry and experimentation students pose questions to investigate the world. ARE teachers actively work at the district level to write and disseminate curriculum aligned to the NYSSLS, developing units of study that celebrate the district's "motto" for science education is: "Don't kill the wonder." The district believes that when teachers themselves are involved in deep subject-matter learning and in the creation of new curricula, they are well positioned to inspire learning in their students.

There are science field trips that take place throughout the school year to enhance learning. The Kopernik Observatory & Science Center is situated within our district. First grade students attend Kopernik Observatory as the culmination of a "Light and Sound" unit created by the first grade teachers. Another local museum, the Roberson Museum and Science Center, offers a nature exhibit aligned to the third grade natural science unit. Fourth grade students tour a Binghamton University laboratory. This field experience provides students with an opportunity to meet scientists, learn about their work, and interact with "high-tech" laboratory equipment.

The school's annual science fair is a culmination of classroom practices focusing on problem-posing and problem-solving methodologies. Students design and present science "projects" to their classmates, parents, teachers, and community members. This type of project-based learning integrates learning and performance-based assessment. Teachers assess students on scientific knowledge in the context of actual experiments in which student establish a hypothesis, formulate an inquiry, apply the hypothesis, and draw a conclusion.

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

At African Road Elementary we believe the primary purpose of social studies education is to promote civic engagement and democracy. Elementary social studies should provide students with rich and varied opportunities to learn about themselves and others through reflective inquiry. Students encounter people and ideas—both indirectly through media sources and directly through personal interactions. Our school believes the ability to consider multiple perspectives lies at the core of democratic thinking and living, therefore it should be our highest priority. Because reflecting on their encounters with others ultimately helps students better understand both their world and themselves, ARE's cultural and linguistic diversity is a major asset. Teachers work closely with the school's families to connect the K-5 social studies curriculum to students' home cultures.

Children at ARE come from all over the world. This cultural and linguistic diversity is the foundation for a model of social studies education led by teachers who work closely with the school's families to connect the K-5 social standards to the direct experience of culture expressed in our school community through personal interactions with friends and families. They encounter people and ideas from distant times and places through media sources. These real and "virtual" encounters foster an appreciation for multiple perspectives and viewpoint. This appreciation ultimately helps students better understand both their world and themselves. The ability is an essential democratic principle. In this respect, African Road teachers use student leadership and government to promote democracy as an action. Importantly, student leadership initiatives incorporate themes of tolerance and respect. The character education "book of the month" promotes topics related to civic engagement, diversity, and compassion. Student leaders use these themes to develop activities and events to help their classmates develop civic-mindedness.

**1e. For secondary schools:**

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

**2. Other Curriculum Areas:**

African Road Elementary emphasizes the development of the whole child and purposefully works to provide a fully integrated learning environment. To this end, core instruction is enriched through students' experiences in the other curriculum areas such as music, art, physical education, and library media.

Music education integrates performance art with attention to school wide themes that promote a holistic appreciation for character education and classroom topics. Students develop a foundational understanding of musical forms: At the primary level (grades K-2), students gain basic skills about melody, harmony, rhythm, form, tone color, style, dynamics, tempo, articulation, etiquette, and evaluation. Intermediate students (grades 3-5) mainly display their musical understandings by joining performance-based ensembles. Through music programming students develop the confidence and experience to perform in public in many different venues: annual school open houses, orchestra and band ensembles, musical plays and school assemblies, as well as in the community at local and public assemblies. This confidence builds an essential foundation for a successful life.

Physical education challenges students to be aware of their health and fitness. Multiple fitness units are designed to engage students in teamwork, fairness, and a balanced lifestyle of healthy eating and exercise. African Road hosts an annual student run called the "Turkey Trot." This fun event brings families and students together to celebrate exercise. It underscores our commitment to provide students with the knowledge and skills to incorporate physical fitness into their daily lives.

African Road Elementary's art department creates many opportunities for students to express themselves visually and artistically. Student work is displayed throughout the school so that they can see and appreciate their efforts while traveling from class to class. The after-school art club provides students with extra opportunities to express their creative side while honing the necessary skills for successful development in art. At ARE, students receive an hour of art instruction during their six day cycle. We follow the New York State Learning Standards for the Arts: Students create, present, respond to, and connect to art. They are exposed to different visual art processes, styles, techniques, and artists. Students develop proficiency in a wide range of art media which crosses over to other areas of school and life.

Technology integration extends through all areas and grade levels of our school's instructional program. We recognize that students use of technology extends beyond the school day. For this reason, our library program includes a digital citizenship strand that progresses from kindergarten to fifth grade, incrementally teaching students how to safely and appropriately access online media. This culminates in a fifth grade workshop in digital safety with a specific focus on social media. Annually we provide workshops for parents on understanding digital media and how to teach their children to be responsible users of it.

Digital citizenship is one example of how library and media arts support students holistically. The library provides a space for project-based learning within a makerspace environment. Our librarian collaborates with classroom teachers to give students a full experience in the areas of research and sourcing methodologies, as well as in procuring relevant and accessible texts for a range of topics and readers.

**3. Special Populations:**

African Road Elementary has a long history of inclusive practices. We recognize that diversity benefits all students and our school embraces diversity with compassion and pride. We rely on the workshop model for primary instruction in reading and writing. This environment allows for authentic differentiation,

enrichment, and specific pacing for students performing at all levels. Importantly, the workshop model is the foundation for inclusive literacy education.

Special education faculty collaborate with their general education colleagues to provide a continuum of services tailored to students specific cognitive, social, and physical needs. To best serve students with disabilities, special education teachers work closely with the general education teacher and related services staff to provide specially designed instruction (SDI) for individual students. We rely on multiple measures of performance to identify a student's growth areas, create SDI, and progress monitor. In 2017, the special education faculty adopted a model of phonetic-based intervention called Accelerating Literacy (AL). Our teachers work with faculty from Binghamton University's Department of Education and our regional BOCES professional developers to implement the AL model. This model includes clearly articulated student learning progressions, specific assessment tools, and a range of instructional strategies targeted to students' individual needs in the area of reading decoding. AL has begun to have a positive impact on students' reading and written performance. Since last year, the number of special education students scoring at levels 2, 3, and 4 increased from 38% to 82%. (Note: Students scoring at levels 2, 3, and 4 are a strong indicator of passing rates on high school Regents exams.) For example, second grade students who experience difficulty with decoding grade level text receive explicit phonics instruction as part of a literacy intervention to boost reading and writing skills in a resource room setting. The skills taught in resource room are practiced in the general education setting during readers and writers workshop reflecting a balance between inclusive support in the general education setting and specific and targeted small group instruction.

African Road has a vibrant community of English Language Learners (ELL). Because of the heavy linguistic demands they face in mainstream classes, they receive both integrated (co-taught) and "stand alone" English as a New Language (ENL) instruction. ENL services are aligned to New York's Next Generation English Language Arts standards. ELLs learn content-based vocabulary and syntax. They practice narrative and academic writing and are exposed to a range of literary and informational texts. Finally, they have many opportunities to develop receptive and expressive oral language skills. Newcomers also receive supplemental instruction in literacy and culture.

Math specialists assist classroom and special education teachers in using the K-5 developmental progression of math skills and concepts to identify students' target areas for support. For example, using this model, we assess a third grade student and may discover that s/he is lacking in foundational skills taught in first grade. We will then draw from those resources to "fill in" developmental gaps. Here as well specialists work with classroom teachers to ensure that learning transfers between targeted small group and classroom instruction. Our math curriculum has a strong fluency component that uses a range of multisensory practices to help students attain computational fluency. The math curriculum integrates visual and concrete models to support multiple modalities and specially designed instruction.

## PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

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### 1. School Climate/Culture:

“Learning Today, Leading Tomorrow” requires the intentional empowerment of students and staff to create a school culture of engagement and pride. The school highlights the International Baccalaureate (IB) Learner Profile as the framework for its character education model. The IB Learner Profile calls for students to become inquirers, knowledgeable, thinkers, communicators, principled, open-minded, caring, risk-takers, balanced, and reflective. Each month, students and staff adopt a profile trait and explore the behaviors and actions associated with that trait. For example, in the month of September the school began the year by discussing what it means to be “principled.” Students and staff worked together to define “principled” in the following way: “We act with integrity and honesty, with a strong sense of fairness, and with respect for the dignity and rights of people everywhere. We take responsibility for our actions.” Through classroom meetings, read-alouds, and student-designed activities, students and teachers explored what it would mean to be “principled” in their behaviors, words, and actions. The school chooses three character education books each year. During the 2018-19 school year, the first book was the “The Word Collector” by Peter H. Reynolds. Each teacher referred to the book through morning meetings, in-class activities and home-school connections appropriate for their grade level. ARE has created its own model of expectations called the “Three Bees” to complement the IB Learner Profile: “Be your best self;” “Be kind and respectful;” “Be in control.” These simple, concrete expectations ensure that all caregivers give students a consistent message. At the core of this message is the importance of being kind.

A culture of engagement requires that student voices be heard. African Road has developed an inclusive model of student leadership called “Student Council.” Every year each classroom in the intermediate grades selects two student representatives to serve on the council. These representatives then organize committees among their classmates to include any student who wants to participate in specific projects. In this way, we ensure that all students can contribute to school leadership. The principal, teachers, paraprofessionals, and parents work closely with student council to bring their visions and ideas into practice. Over the last three years ARE’s Student Council has organized many events including the Veteran’s Day celebrations, ARE “Turkey Trot” walk/run, food drives, ARE Kindness Challenge, ARE Pet Drive, Police Appreciation Day, Running of the Bears 5K, and ARE Reading Challenge.

A culture of engagement requires that adults work together to build caring relationships among all members of the school community, “big and small.” Our “Building Planning Team,” which consists of the principal, teachers, paraprofessionals, support staff, and parents, launches and supports all school initiatives. This team brings together various stakeholders to work on celebrations that define our school identity and promote strong, caring relationships. These include the “Taste of ARE” cultural fair, “Family Dance Night,” “Ice Cream Social,” Science Fair,” “Open House,” and “Curriculum Night.”

Finally, a culture of engagement requires that the academic environment be rich and rewarding. Students must see themselves as knowledgeable inquirers, thinkers, and communicators. This can only happen when students are taught by teachers who are, themselves, empowered as instructional leaders. African Road teachers serve on a wide range of district committees related to the development and implementation of all curriculum initiatives. Their contributions and leadership significantly influenced the development of the district’s academic model—a model that has enabled our students to demonstrate strong growth and achievement on state, district, and classroom assessments. These committees include the: Social Studies Curriculum Task Force, Science Curriculum Task Force, Vestal Early Literacy Program, Accelerating Literacy Early Intervention Model, District Planning Group, Response to Intervention Steering Committee, District Planning Group, and various technology and curriculum pilot teams (ad hoc groups that explore potential curriculum and technology integration initiatives).

### 2. Engaging Families and Community:

African Road Elementary is a dynamic learning community with strong connections to our families, active student leadership, and a strong parent-teacher association. The Building Planning Team (BPT) is the

school's decision-making group consisting of parents, teachers, paraprofessionals and support staff. The BPT works to engage family communities through the Book of the Season. The Book of the Season is a book shared with the entire African Road Community grades K-5. Each book promotes character education in connection with the International Baccalaureate Learner Profiles. An important component of the Book of the Season includes a family connection. Each family is asked to read the book together and complete an activity that the students then share with the whole school.

African Road also has a very active Parent Teacher Association (PTA). The Parent Teacher Association also provides support for student success and community involvement. Some of the events the PTA supports include: Taste of ARE (cultural celebration), Science Fair, Lockheed Martin's "I Want To Be an Engineer" Day (stem event), Doughnuts with Dad, Muffins with Mom, Ice Cream Social. The African Road PTA provides field trip funding for each classroom. The African Road PTA is very supportive of faculty and staff at African Road. They supplement classroom supplies, offer grants for special projects, and plan a community event at our yearly Staff Appreciation Luncheon.

Parents and the community are informed of student academic achievements and challenges in a variety of ways. Parents receive a monthly newsletter, they have access to the District and African Road Webpages as well as the PTA Facebook parents page which is updated frequently with current information. Our families are invited into the school for an informational Curriculum Night in the fall that includes a meeting with the principal about building initiatives, safety and curriculum supports. Each spring we host an open house that showcases student successes. Parents are informed of individual student needs through parent teacher conferences. Teachers initiate meetings for students with diverse range of academic needs including gifted and talented as well as special needs. The school psychologist meets with families before annual reviews to support a comprehensive individualized plan for students.

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

The Vestal district professional development model is also a model of curriculum development. All professional and curriculum development adheres to the following criteria and standards:

**K-12 Vertical Alignment:** Professional and curriculum development is anchored in an understanding of "progressions" within each discipline. For example, the adoption of the Eureka mathematics curriculum involved professional development of K-12 teachers and administrators in the learning progressions from kindergarten through 10th grade (Geometry). By way of this training, a teacher could identify a student's area of weakness or strength, trace the concept or skill to a prior or advanced grade level content, and develop targeted instruction accordingly.

**Teaching for Understanding:** Teaching for Understanding (TfU) is a framework for curriculum development designed by Project Zero at Harvard University's Graduate School of Education. The core of the TfU framework is teaching for understanding as a performative act. This means that children demonstrate learning dynamically by "doing something with it." African Road teachers serve on the district Science and Social Studies Curriculum Task Force. They are currently working with their colleagues on applying the principles of TfU to the creation of vertically aligned K-5 social studies and science curriculum to provide student with a coherent academic experience.

**Educating the Whole Child:** The district emphasizes academic growth within the constellation of the social, emotion, cognitive and affective domains. To this end, the district incorporates a model of data analysis referred to as "data informed practice." Teacher and administrators are trained use multiple sources of data to evaluate programmatic impact or assess a child's development and learning. NYS assessments results are correlated with district tools (STAR, DIBELS, running records) to achieve complex understanding a group or individual's performance and growth. The ARE Building Planning Team has applied this model to survey students on their feelings of belonging to evaluate the impact of our character education program, Responsive Classroom.

**Inquiry-based Strategic Planning:** The district uses a model of strategic planning and goal setting called, "Action Inquiry." In this model, each building identifies a focus area and then develops an inquiry plan

which poses a question, gathers research, generates/collects data, designs an action plan, and then evaluates impact. African Road faculty, parents, and paraprofessionals serve on the Building Planning Team (BPT) responsible for developing ARE's Action Inquiry. Because ARE's diversity, our BPT created an inquiry to evaluate the impact of Responsive Classroom on student engagement. Importantly, action inquiry is the professional and collegial growth of the team and school community. In this way, strategic planning supports professional development through purposeful collaboration toward using the same strategies of inquiry and problem-posing central to our students own academic experience.

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

African Road Elementary believes and operates under distributed leadership. The principal of the school shares the leadership role by entrusting teachers, parents and students with the decision-making process. Our school motto, "Learning Today, Leading Tomorrow" expresses our commitment to promoting all stakeholders as leaders. This vision of leadership aligns to our district's mission that "each student is unique and can learn; to provide instruction, programs, strategies and challenges in a caring, positive learning environment," and "to enable each student to become a critical thinker, a lifelong learner and a responsible, contributing citizen in a changing global society." Our school motto brings this mission statement to life through the daily work of all our stakeholders, but most especially, our students.

The principal of ARE is in her fifth year at the school. During these five years, the principal has empowered staff and students to take leadership roles within the building. The school's Building Planning Team (BPT) is made up of the principal, classroom teachers, the counselor, paraprofessionals and parents. This team drives the character education plans of the school and also tracks data to improve student achievement. Student achievement is evaluated through multiple measures of academic success, and through student surveys that inform the school's BPT about the social emotional health of the students. The BPT monitors data throughout the year to make decisions about improving student achievement. This includes curriculum-based measures, screenings (DIBELS, running records, on-demand writing), and norm-referenced assessments (STAR Math and Reading). All decisions about curriculum, instruction, and social emotional health are generated through this team. Members of the BPT also attend district level strategic planning meetings to support K-12 coherence of social and academic programs.

Instructional leadership is provided by our school's Response to Intervention (RTI) Team. Members include the principal, two special education teachers, reading specialist, math specialist, classroom teachers, school psychologist, and school counselor. The RTI team meets bi-monthly and is responsible for coordinating the reporting and analysis of student data for the school. This includes the annual review of screening data (STAR, DIBELS, Fountas and Pinell levels) and state assessments to identify students in need of academic support. In this respect, the RTI team represents a collaborative approach to the use of data to inform instructional practices, models of intervention, and social-emotional supports. They serve as an important liaison between faculty and families, working closely with both groups and the principal to ensure that all students academic and social needs are being fully supported.

The RTI team and Building Planning Team Giving are two examples of distributed leadership. Giving choice and voice to teachers is essential to ARE's success and growth. Teachers influence all curricular decisions through participation on district curriculum committees, curriculum pilots, and task forces. Our teachers were instrumental in the adoption of Responsive Classroom, a schoolwide program of social-emotional learning strongly correlated to academic and social success. All teachers have adopted the International Baccalaureate "Learner Profile" as the foundation for character development and classroom community. Teachers are committed to teaching the profile of the month and connecting it to the Book of the Season.

Finally, student leadership is the core of our academic and social model and represents distributed leadership at its roots. The Student Council is an integral part of our school's decision-making process. This group of twenty students work closely with the principal and Building Planning Team to have their voices heard and their choices brought to life through character development themes, school celebrations, and annual events. Importantly, Student Council members serve as role models for their peers in the primary

grades. As these leaders mature, we see them taking on leadership roles in the middle school and high school and are proud of their influence.



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

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African Road Elementary's character development program was formed over five years through the collective efforts of teachers, parents, paraprofessionals, students and the school principal. The power of the program is that we created it, we own it, and we believe in it. It represents our commitment to distributed leadership at all levels, and models the vision we hold for our students, “Learning Today, Leading Tomorrow.” It recognizes that academic engagement has its roots in students’ social engagement and sense of belonging.

This sense of belonging starts with the critical role all students take in promoting the three components of African Road’s character development program: the “Three Bees,” Student Council, and “SWARM.” The “Three Bees” explains in child-centered language what appropriate conduct looks like. Images of bees adorn our school and present messages that appeal to students of all ages. As bees “swarm” so too do our students! Each classroom holds monthly “SWARM” meetings. “SWARM” is an acronym for “Students Working together And Responding Monthly.” This model of student empowerment is derived from the Responsive Classroom (RC) approach to teaching and learning. All ARE teachers have received certified training in Responsive Classroom. RC is an evidenced based approach to education that focuses on the strong relationship between academics and social emotional learning. RC empowers teachers with strategies to create a safe, joyful and engaging learning communities where all students feel a sense of belonging and significance. “SWARM” is one example of how we have put this approach to work for our students.

SWARM meetings give students experience in effective group communication. Students learn how to listen and respond to multiple viewpoints. They build confidence in their ability in addressing their peers to express their viewpoints and feeling. SWARM topics integrate the IB Learner Profile as guide for developing discussions and planning activities. In these “SWARM” sessions, Student Council leaders advocate for their peers, making sure adults listen and understand their perspectives. Over the last five years they have planned many events for their peers. The “Kindness Challenge” is an event that continues to evolve.

The work of the Student Council is supported by the Building Planning Team in their selection of Books of the Season that explore qualities of the IB Learner. These Books of the Season give students an opportunity to work with their teachers and friends on exploring character development through stories about children like them, striving to be good and kind. Student Council members meet every month to plan for school wide events, charities and important initiatives such as The Kindness Challenge.

“Learning Today, Leading Tomorrow” is the core of African Road Elementary School’s success, empowering our students and staff to be civic-minded, hard-working, and compassionate. Our students know that their adult caregivers -- teachers, paraprofessionals, and families -- stand behind their leadership. We recognize that we must model for our students the qualities we seek to inspire in them. This belief is the core of our success as a thriving academic and social community.