

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

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Mr. Stephen Sargent

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

Official School Name Freedom Trail Elementary School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 6743 Bale Kenyon Road

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

Lewis Center OH 43035-9312  
City State Zip Code+4 (9 digits total)

County Delaware County

Telephone (740) 657-5700

Fax (740) 657-5749

Web site/URL https://www.olentangy.k12.oh.us

E-mail stephen\_sargent@olentangy.k12.oh.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. Mark Raiff

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other) E-mail mark\_raiff@olsd.us

District Name Olentangy Local School District Tel. (740) 657-4050

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. Kevin O'Brian

(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):
- 15 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 5 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 4 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 24 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	40	33	73
1	49	42	91
2	58	61	119
3	43	61	104
4	63	64	127
5	69	49	118
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>	322	310	632

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

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 1 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 13 % Asian
  - 4 % Black or African American
  - 1 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 76 % White
  - 5 % Two or more races
  - 100 % Total**

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

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2017 – 2018 school year: 4%

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

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

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2017 until the end of the 2017-2018 school year	17
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2017 until the end of the 2017-2018 school year	9
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	26
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2017	618
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.04
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	4

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 3%  
22 Total number ELL

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

African Dialect, Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Farsi, Japanese, Mandarin, Russian, Tamil, Telugu, Turkish, Vietnamese

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 5%  
Total number students who qualify: 30

8. Students receiving special education services: 14 %  
86 Total number of students served

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional conditions. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <u>10</u> Autism                 | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>34</u> Other Health Impaired                |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>23</u> Specific Learning Disability         |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>16</u> Speech or Language Impairment        |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment      | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>2</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: 10
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.	28
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	6
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	10
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 21:1

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

<b>Required Information</b>	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014
Daily student attendance	95%	97%	97%	97%	97%
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.

To facilitate maximum learning for every student.

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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Freedom Trail Elementary is a K-5 elementary school serving a population of 639 students. Freedom Trail is one of 15 elementary schools in the Olentangy Local School District located in Central Ohio. Our district is comprised of 21,602 enrolled students (not including Pre-K) and is one of the fastest-growing districts in the state. In 1990, Olentangy High School opened on Lewis Center Road for students in grades 9-12. Since 1990, the district has experienced a tremendous increase in student enrollment and has grown to a total of 24 schools which includes 15 elementary schools, five middle schools and a four high schools. Freedom Trail serves a diverse population, including a wide range of cultures and languages with 4.7% of students eligible for free and reduced lunch. Our building supports two Specialized Learning Centers (SLCs) and Freedom Trail serves 82 students with a wide range of disabilities. The gifted student population comprises 37% of the student body representing all academic areas, including the arts. As a young school, we have recently celebrated our 10 year anniversary. Freedom Trail has a unique history, named after a trail that was part of the Underground Railroad.

Freedom Trail participates in traditions that are student centered with the intent of building relationships between students, staff, and parents. Building-wide traditions, including a school sing-along, Enrichment Day, and Field Day, create the opportunity to develop shared experiences for teachers, staff, students, and parents. Traditions have been cultivated within grade level teams. The first grade teachers oversee Camp Skeeter, offering a camp-like experience. Third grade students enjoy an annual pioneer day, allowing them to experience a step back in time. Fifth grade students are celebrated with a last day of school “Clap Out” sending them off with a round of applause, and each fifth grade class is recognized with a plaque in the school lobby.

The mission of Olentangy Local Schools is to “facilitate maximum learning for every student” and Freedom Trail works hard to enact upon that mission daily. Among the strategies employed, differentiated math and language arts instruction occurs at all grade levels to fulfill the district mission. Components of daily instruction include learning stations, small group guided lessons, and technology. Students participate in flexible grouping based on formative assessments, teacher input, and data analysis. Students receive personalized instruction from intervention and gifted intervention specialists throughout the day. The Building Leadership Team, in collaboration with building and district administrators, strives to deliver research based professional development that addresses student, building, and district Improvement Plans. Our literacy support teacher meets regularly with teachers to dialogue about student data using the information gleaned to design meaningful literacy instruction. The Five Pillars of Literacy (from the National Reading Panel 2000) is used as the foundation for the research and background knowledge needed to make informed instructional decisions. For the past three years, many teachers have participated in an action research group, studying three students from various subgroups and grade levels, to determine the effectiveness of the Benchmark Assessment System (BAS). The BAS assesses through conversation and higher level thinking paired with active decoding. Likewise, our gifted intervention specialist meets with teachers on a regular basis to share strategies, based on the works of Making Thinking Visible by Ron Ritchhart and research of Ian Byrd. The staff believes in the philosophy of “low floors and high ceilings”, whereby all students can begin learning and then work at their own level of engagement.

Students are encouraged to develop their full potential through purposeful physical, social and emotional experiences. Mindfulness and self-regulation are encouraged through relaxing activities including yoga and meditation. Throughout the building, “Brain Breaks” are posted on the walls, providing strategies for students to take a moment to physically move, breathe, or center themselves. Running Club is available for students to promote wellness and physical fitness. The guidance counselor is available for students’ emotional needs, meeting with classes bi-monthly to talk about self-image and positive peer relationships. Small groups are also utilized to provide additional support in topics such as divorce, illnesses and grief.

In a global society, staff recognizes the importance of preparing students for a culturally diverse world. Varied cultures are explored in classrooms and in the related arts. Music curriculum focuses on traditional and modern songs sourced from around the globe. Art instruction incorporates a diverse range of artists from many cultures and backgrounds. Students in grades 2-5 may elect to participate in the Diversity Book

Club which meets monthly to explore children's literature, spotlighting cultures to increase understanding and empathy. Our media specialist is a knowledgeable resource for delivering culturally diverse texts for students and staff. During our Veterans' Day celebration, we recognize and honor our military in a school wide assembly.

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

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

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

Olentangy Local School District supports a balanced literacy approach and utilizes a Literacy Framework for staff reference. In addition, Freedom Trail has focused on the Five Pillars of Literacy Instruction, based on research from the National Reading Panel. Teachers utilize this knowledge to design an effective and research-based language arts block to ensure a strong foundation of literacy skills. With a wide variety of challenging print-rich materials available at all reading levels, teachers employ research-based methods, such as Lucy Calkins' Reading and Writing Project, to support student learning. This allows a shift from teacher to student-driven instruction, and provides opportunities for practice and application of skill-based lessons. Collaborative techniques and inquiry are embedded into science and social studies content standards.

Literacy skills are assessed three times a year using a universal screener (AIMSweb) and a developmental reading assessment (Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment) to gain further insight into students' progress. Differentiated instruction is then designed and delivered by staff. Instruction is presented in whole group, small group, or individually to meet the learner at their level. Student progress is monitored weekly or bi-weekly to determine progress; instructional adjustments are strategically made using the information gleaned.

Based on information gleaned from kindergarten screening, insight is gained on the varied skill levels that students possess. As research states, upon entering kindergarten, students need solid academic skills in reading and math. In addition, students are assessed using AIMSweb, identifying at risk students who did not meet an established criterion. A reading improvement and monitoring plan (RIMP) is created and implemented allowing for extra literacy support to students in grades K-3 and the use of the resource Core 5 Lexia to target skill gaps. Providing interventions and collaborating across grade levels allows for the instructional adjustments necessary to maximize learning for all students.

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

Conceptual understanding of mathematics is critical to students' learning and is essential to the application of these concepts. Freedom Trail Elementary teachers use the common core math curriculum, other resources and tools to support understanding. AIMSweb is used to assess computation and the application of mathematical concepts to identify at risk students. Teachers use data, formative assessments and flexible student grouping to provide each student an individualized path to access curriculum at his or her own pace. Differentiation opportunities occur at all levels. Intervention specialists and classroom teachers facilitate a co-taught math class which consists of students with IEPs and struggling math students. Similarly, the gifted intervention specialist serves the gifted learners in collaboration with classroom teachers. Within all classrooms, teachers differentiate through the use of flexible grouping and with the assistance of technology. Teachers are continually building and monitoring conceptual understanding using guided math groups and resources, such as ST Math. Our ultimate goal is to aid students in their ability to transfer mathematical skills to real world situations.

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

Science and social studies content areas utilize similar strategies. Students collaborate with their classmates on open ended activities, affording students opportunities to participate in experiences with a low ceiling and high floor. Valuing multiple perspectives while working towards a common goal increases knowledge of the world and self. Nonfiction text and multimedia resources are utilized to introduce concepts and key vocabulary. Students are encouraged to explore and extend their learning in areas of interest based on content standards.

During science lessons, students are immersed in hands-on investigations and experiments to deepen their understanding. These activities are designed to provide the opportunity to use the design process and scientific inquiry to solve problems. The Discovery Education Science Techbook provides model lessons using the 5E Instructional Model. Inquiry based learning experience allows for the differentiation of science content; lessons can be assigned as either a reteaching or an enrichment opportunity. The goal is to aid students in their ability to understand the world around them using questions and observations to communicate scientific thinking by encouraging them to think scientifically and to become participants rather than observers.

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

Social studies instruction focuses on aiding students in the development of their ability to make informed decisions as citizens of a culturally diverse and interdependent world. Civic competences are addressed as students learn their role in the community, nation, and world. Freedom Trail participates in a variety of activities to support social awareness. Activities range from honoring and recognizing Veterans and military personnel in a schoolwide assembly and collecting and donating items to deployed soldiers. Another focus includes recycling paper and plastic; celebrating autism and Down Syndrome awareness through student led speeches and spirit days. After reading *A Long Walk to Water*, students led a school wide initiative to raise money to build wells in South Sudan. In addition, using NEWSELA and current events, students are exposed to multiple viewpoints. Through discussion, students explore essential questions and formulate new knowledge. The understanding of geography is utilized in understanding the impact of human interactions with the world. The rights and responsibilities of citizenship are studied and correlated with the Freedom Trail Pledge and awards. All of these activities have a positive impact on our community and world.

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

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

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

Our District mission is to “facilitate maximum learning for every student” and at Freedom Trail Elementary students have access to many curricular and extracurricular activities to enhance their learning.

All students, K-5, receive 50 minutes of related arts instruction (art, music, physical education, library, and guidance) each day. Freedom Trail operates on a five day arts rotation schedule; students do not miss instruction in these areas if they miss a school day due to holidays or inclement weather.

Each related arts content area has a grade level designed to provide extra enrichment. In first grade, students receive an extra art class every week. Art instruction is provided by a certified instructor at all grade levels. Media covered during this coursework includes, but is not limited to, painting, drawing, ceramics, sculpture, collage, and printing. Content is based upon the State of Ohio Standards for Art Education and our art instructors frequently collaborate with instructors throughout the building to integrate content learning with art. Every spring, an interactive Art Show showcases pieces created by every student in the building. Student- led art stations throughout the building place intermediate students in a leadership role, helping students and families create art together.

Freedom Trail's music department has a focus on the Orff-Schulwerk approach to music making. Music education philosophy centers around student choice, creativity, improvisation, and movement. Students present grade level performances at grades 1, 3, and 5, showcasing musical choices in a performance for the school community and parents. Fourth and Fifth grade students have the option to participate in a before school strings program. In addition, fifth grade students can elect to learn a band instrument; instruction occurs weekly during the school day. Over one hundred 4th and 5th grade students elect to participate in

choir which meets once a week for 50 minutes before school. Music ensembles perform a spring concert for the school community and parents.

Students receive Physical Education instruction once per week in grades K, 1, 3, and 4; instruction occurs twice per week in grades two and five. Skills, such as ball handling and running, are practiced in collaborative activities and games, promoting personal growth and teamwork. Activities are designed by our physical education instructor. The ODE Physical Education benchmark assessments are administered in 2nd and 5th grade and reported to the State of Ohio.

Running Club is also available to students in the 3rd, 4th and 5th grade; many of our students take advantage of this opportunity. Students meet twice a week to run, focusing on fitness and friendship. A Fun Run and 5K is hosted; students and families are welcome to participate. Yoga class is also offered on Mondays after school as a means to strengthen and destress.

Field Day in the spring provides yet another enrichment opportunity for our students in the area of physical education. Students rotate through many stations designed to encourage a healthy and active lifestyle including, taekwondo, soccer and golf. Community leaders in fitness and education are invited to participate; students from the high school soccer and football teams also assist.

Freedom Trail participates in Hoops for Hearts, a fundraiser for the American Heart Association. A partnership with the Columbus Blue Jackets has been established to provide hockey education to students. Both of these events promote a healthy lifestyle through movement.

Students have access to the media center throughout the school day. Students visit the media center as a part of the daily arts schedule, receiving lessons on navigating the library, research techniques, digital media practices, and A/V production. Lessons are aligned with Ohio media standards. Collaboration between classroom teachers and arts instructors enriches student learning, encouraging the pursuit of student interests.

Our guidance counselor is an integral member of the related arts team; guidance instruction is provided to students during the 5- day arts rotation schedule. Creating a strong self-image and developing positive ways to interact with peers is a key component of the guidance program. Lessons focus on recognizing and managing emotions, and strategies are identified that allow students to have productive and healthy relationships in and out of school. Freedom Trail strives to support students as they emerge into productive and responsible members of society.

Lastly, Freedom Trail Elementary offers a Community Garden. Students from each class are selected by teachers to help with the maintenance of the garden space. Responsibilities include weeding, watering, planting, mulching, and tending to the vegetables, fruits, herbs, and flowers. Students benefit from participating in the cultivation of the crops and assume ownership of the produce. A unique understanding of the process of cultivation is developed. Students gain a valuable perspective, appreciating the work of farmers all over the world.

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

Research based teaching methods are the foundation of instruction at Freedom Trail Elementary. Instructional strategies and interventions are consistently reviewed to ensure that the needs of all students are being met. Grade level teams meet weekly to discuss student progress and brainstorm strategies for differentiating instruction in specific curricular areas. With a large number of students identified as gifted, our gifted intervention specialist participates in team meetings, providing professional development to staff to meet the needs of all students. Freedom Trail also has two specialized learning centers that service students on IEPs. The goal of this program to have students participate in learning with their same age peers for the majority of the school day.

Grade level team meetings include classroom teachers, intervention specialists, gifted specialist, school counselor, literacy support and building principal. These meetings focus on student progress and begin by

examining data. Freedom Trail administers AIMSweb, InView, Terra Nova, Ohio State Tests, Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System along with formative and summative classroom assessments. InView, Terra Nova, and Ohio State Tests are compiled into a projection for each student by our district statistician. Projections assist teachers in making instructional decisions for individual and groups of students. Classroom assessments and Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark data are utilized to guide instruction. Time is dedicated in the daily schedule as an I/E block (intervention and enrichment), allowing teachers and students additional opportunities for differentiation.

Freedom Trail Elementary utilizes the Response to Intervention (RTI) framework. Grade level teams monitor the progress of all students through AIMSweb Universal Screener, classwork/class performance, classroom assessments, and progress monitoring. The Student Data Team meets to discuss concerns that an individual student's needs are not being met after differentiation of instruction. The team is comprised of a classroom teacher, literacy support teacher, school counselor, intervention specialist and/or gifted intervention specialist, school psychologist, school principal and the student's parents/guardians. A student monitoring plan is established, and data is collected for a 6-8 week span. After analyzing data, a decision is made to formally assess the student, or continue with current classroom accommodations. Olentangy's district mission is to facilitate maximum learning for every student and through this framework, Freedom Trail lives up to that mission.

## PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

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### 1. School Climate/Culture:

Freedom Trail Elementary strives to create a positive culture where students and teachers honor high academic expectations and promote leadership, kindness, and a safe learning environment. Students are encouraged to cultivate a growth mindset as they persevere through challenges to become a more reflective learner. As a school community, we recite the Freedom Trail pledge, focusing on developing character traits and values, including being Truthful, Responsible, Accountable, Industrious, and a Leader. These traits are reinforced during classroom discussions and guidance lessons; students are honored and recognized at a monthly celebration. In addition, students are provided an opportunity to belong to something that matters to them, such as diversity book club, art club, running club, gardening club, or a student-led math club. Social and emotional growth is also attended to with interactions between students of different grade levels as they develop buddy relationships. During school parties, students often participate in service projects benefiting Children’s Hospital, Down Syndrome Association, and Autism Awareness groups. Following a 5th grade book study of *A Long Walk to Water* written by Linda Sue Park, all students participate in “A Drop for Hope”, a student-directed initiative, raising money and an awareness of the water crisis in South Sudan. This ongoing global project has funded multiple wells, the provision of hygiene items, and education opportunities for villages in need.

Freedom Trail encourages strong relationships both professionally and personally. Professionally, at staff meetings, teachers work in both grade level and vertical teams. Vertical teams allow for cross grade level collaboration and celebrations as student progress is shared. Grade level team meetings afford the opportunity to collaborate on student data and lesson design; the insight of support staff is elicited and valued. Teachers participate in professional book clubs to encourage reflection and promote growth in pedagogy. Staff members support and encourage each other personally. Throughout the school year, teachers participate in yoga, books clubs, exercise classes, potluck lunches, breakfast coffee chats and post-school field trips. Significant life events are celebrated at staff and team meetings and a support system is established to assist a staff member in need. Freedom Trail Elementary School strives to create a safe learning environment that enables teachers and students to mutualistically support each other and thrive.

### 2. Engaging Families and Community:

Freedom Trail welcomes community members and parents. Freedom Trail has a strong relationship with our Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) and many area businesses. The Freedom Trail Elementary Parent Teacher Organization’s mission is to enhance the educational opportunities for our students and to promote positive community spirit among students, families, and staff. PTO unites families before the first day of school with a Back to School Food Truck Festival. The parking lot is transformed into a festival for community engagement and fun. Local businesses offer free services for our families, musical acts, food trucks, and inflatables for students to enjoy. The PTO also hosts a Bingo Night and Ice Cream Social. These events allow families and staff to engage in a social setting, strengthening relationships and establishing connections.

Grade levels strive to create experiences in which parents can engage with students at school. Open house and curriculum night are held in August to inform parents about the academic content of the coming year. This also provides an opportunity for parents to engage with their child’s teacher. Kindergarten and First Grade parents are encouraged to be “Mystery Readers.” Second grade parents are welcomed to share an experiment during Science Week. Science week is a week long exploration of scientific topics including investigations and experiments. Third grade students participate in a study of pioneer life culminating in Pioneer Day. Parents lead activities engaging students in the life of a pioneer. The fourth grade class participates in a biographical study of famous Ohioans, presenting their findings at an “Ohio Fair.” During this time, students take on the personae of their historical figure. Musical performances are a highlight of the year for many families; grade level performances are well attended. Over the summer, the community garden’s plethora of produce is enjoyed by many families. Two families per week sign-up and often collaborate to make sure vegetables are watered and weeded throughout the growing season.

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

This year, Freedom Trail's professional development has been aligned to the district focus of building relationships and the understanding that positive relationships set the stage for meaningful work. District professional development meetings occur at various times throughout the school year. These meetings are designed to support district and building Continuous Improvement Plans (CIP) and staff professional growth plans. Teacher-led professional development and opportunities for staff to connect and learn from each other are provided. Meetings are organized and presented by members of the Building Leadership Team (BLT) in collaboration with building and district administrators. Our Building Leadership Team is comprised of six members from various areas and grade levels who collaborate bi-weekly to bring the most meaningful professional development topics to our staff. BLT members are also responsible for leading committees related to curriculum, building culture, staff wellness, and professional development. The purpose of these committees is to provide a forum for teachers to work across grade levels to address building, staff, and student needs. This distributive approach to professional development has a positive impact on teachers and administrators which helps to support student academic achievement.

In addition to members of the BLT, other staff members engage in leadership roles to provide teacher development. All teachers, including literacy support and English Language Learning instructors (ELL), have volunteered to take part in professional development provided by our gifted intervention specialist. The focus of this training is to add depth and complexity into units and lessons being utilized in classrooms; these activities challenge all students. With the guidance of the gifted intervention specialist, teachers are developing enriched instructional strategies to enhance curriculum and instruction.

Job-embedded professional development to improve literacy instruction is provided by our literacy support specialist. Monthly staff meetings focus on the Five Pillars of Literacy. These critical components were identified by the National Reading Panel as essential for literacy instruction. This highly interactive training provides real strategies which can easily and immediately be implemented in classrooms. A variety of articles and online discussions are available to continue exploration and implementation of the Five Pillars of Literacy.

Administrators are active participants throughout the professional development journey. Weekly team and staff meetings afford the opportunity for continued collaboration with administration and vertical teams. Walk-throughs and formal evaluations are utilized to ensure quality classroom practices and reflection.

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

Leadership at Freedom Trail Elementary is shared through a team approach. The Building Leadership Team (BLT) is a shared decision making team comprised of teachers and the principal. The main purpose of the team is to foster teacher leadership in order to ensure the focus of the building is on student achievement. Each spring, teachers can apply to become a member of the BLT for the following school year. Positions are not supervisory in nature, nor do they represent a particular grade level. The representatives are master teachers and trusted staff members, charged to represent what is best for students and the needs of all stakeholders. BLT meets bi-weekly or more when necessary. Meetings include decisions about programming, professional development, resource allocation and committee updates.

The main responsibilities of the BLT include facilitating professional development and building committees. BLT members attend district meetings throughout the school year to learn the focus of professional development. Adult learning strategies are modeled along with high quality research based content. The BLT reflects on this learning and creates professional development that is specific to the needs of teachers and students. There are a variety of building level committees, including curriculum, school community, wellness, technology, and diversity. Committees are facilitated by BLT members; teachers volunteer to participate in the committee of their choice. Committee responsibilities include author visits, implementing classroom yoga, planning Freedom Trail Award assemblies, professional book clubs, and diversity book clubs for students.

personnel in attendance. Meetings are dedicated to planning for differentiation, allocating resources and professional development. Grade level teams plan the weekly agenda through a Google Doc. In addition, gifted and literacy specialist provide job embedded professional development. A shared vision for student achievement is the goal.

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

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Freedom Trail is a successful school due to the practice of developing meaningful relationships among students, staff, and the community. John Hattie, the author of *Visible Learning*, writes, “It is teachers who have created positive teacher-student relationships that are more likely to have above average effects on student achievement.” Building on this quote, Freedom Trail has implemented a variety of strategies and classroom practices to strengthen interpersonal relationships.

An essential component of building relationships has been the development of the Trail Award. Character traits recognized and celebrated are being Truthful, Respectful, Accountable, Industrious and a Leader (T.R.A.I.L.) Each month, one student per class is identified for exemplifying one of the core traits and is honored with a T.R.A.I.L. award, which includes a certificate and a tag for their backpack. The school community gathers monthly to celebrate student leaders at an assembly. A pancake breakfast served to the award winners and their families by teachers is the culminating celebration. The breakfast serves as a great opportunity to acknowledge parents for their role in the support of Freedom Trail and the development of their child as a leader.

Cross grade level student relationships are developed through paired classroom buddies. Classroom bonds between older and younger students are established providing the opportunity for students to establish friendships and emerge as academic and social leaders. The positive relationships students build with buddies are evident in the excitement expressed at the anticipation of buddy day and in their greetings as they pass each other in the hallways.

Multiple opportunities are available for students and teachers to continue to build relationships. Students have the opportunity to participate the diversity book club, choir, gardening, running club, or art club, allowing students to continue to develop friendships. Teachers participate in vertical teams during meetings providing the opportunity for staff members to collaborate across grade levels. A planned, purposeful collaboration supports meaningful relationships and facilitates maximum learning for every student.