

**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. Lindsay Rosswog

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

Official School Name Mars Area High School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 520 Route 228

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

Mars PA 16046-3124  
City State Zip Code+4 (9 digits total)

County Butler County

Telephone (724) 625-1581

Fax

Web site/URL https://www.marsk12.org/

E-mail lrosswog@marsk12.org

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent\*Dr. Wesley Shipley

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other) E-mail drshipley@marsk12.org

District Name Mars Area School District Tel. (724) 625-1518

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board

President/Chairperson Mrs. Dayle Ferguson

(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):
- 3 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 1 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 5 TOTAL

### SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located:
- Urban or large central city
  - Suburban
  - Rural or small city/town
3. Number of students as of October 1, 2018 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

| Grade                 | # of Males | # of Females | Grade Total |
|-----------------------|------------|--------------|-------------|
| PreK                  | 0          | 0            | 0           |
| K                     | 0          | 0            | 0           |
| 1                     | 0          | 0            | 0           |
| 2                     | 0          | 0            | 0           |
| 3                     | 0          | 0            | 0           |
| 4                     | 0          | 0            | 0           |
| 5                     | 0          | 0            | 0           |
| 6                     | 0          | 0            | 0           |
| 7                     | 0          | 0            | 0           |
| 8                     | 0          | 0            | 0           |
| 9                     | 129        | 125          | 254         |
| 10                    | 123        | 154          | 277         |
| 11                    | 130        | 123          | 253         |
| 12 or higher          | 133        | 113          | 246         |
| <b>Total Students</b> | 515        | 515          | 1030        |

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

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 2 % Asian
  - 1 % Black or African American
  - 1 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 96 % White
  - 0 % 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: 2%

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   | 10            |
| (2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2017 until the end of the 2017-2018 school year | 14            |
| (3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]  | 24            |
| (4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2017   | 1030          |
| (5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)   | 0.02          |
| (6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100  | 2             |

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

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 5%  
Total number students who qualify: 53

8. Students receiving special education services: 9 %  
96 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>16</u> Autism                 | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>29</u> Other Health Impaired                |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>41</u> Specific Learning Disability         |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>1</u> Speech or Language Impairment         |
| <u>1</u> Hearing Impairment      | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>1</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>2</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 3
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.   | 62                     |
| 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.   | 9                      |
| Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc. | 5                      |

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 17:1

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%       | 96%       | 96%       | 95%       | 96%       |
| High school graduation rate | 99%       | 99%       | 98%       | 98%       | 99%       |

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                         | 278 |
| Enrolled in a 4-year college or university    | 73% |
| Enrolled in a community college               | 13% |
| Enrolled in career/technical training program | 1%  |
| Found employment                              | 4%  |
| Joined the military or other public service   | 3%  |
| Other   | 6%  |

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

Yes  No

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

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

The Mission of Mars Area School District is to create and sustain a supportive educational environment that allows all students the opportunity to achieve their maximum learning potential.

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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The Mission of Mars Area School District is to create and sustain a supportive educational environment that allows all students the opportunity to achieve their maximum learning potential. The Mars Area School district is committed to cultivating and sustaining quality programs that meet the needs of individual learners, fostering visionary leadership, and developing lifelong learners who will have a positive impact on society.

Mars Area High School serves approximately 1,030 students from Adams Township, Middlesex Township and Valencia Borough and Mars Borough. The district is located in southern Butler County, approximately 25 miles north of the city of Pittsburgh. Mars Area School District has been identified in the Pittsburgh Business Times as the number one district in Butler County for several years, as well as in the top 10 schools in the Western Pennsylvania region. The district demographics support a learning community striving for excellence, with a 98.8% graduation rate, 82.2% post-secondary education indicator, 6.1% enlisted military, and 9.3% entering PA workforce. The newly renovated Mars Area High School opened its doors in 2010, after an expansion project that created a two-story rear academic wing, new main office suite, a nurse/guidance suite and the creation of a new television/broadcast studio, computer room, large group instruction area, and innovation wing for robotics and pre-engineering classrooms. The district prides itself in preparing for college and career readiness. For the past five years, the high school has provided a 1:1 learning environment for students in a blended approach of district-issued devices and a bring-your-own-device model.

The high school offers a variety of course options that have grown over the past several years. Mars Area High School has 55.6% of rigorous course offerings, such as, 14 AP courses, 9 College in the High School courses, 14 advanced course options. In addition, there are a variety of electives in driver's theory, video production, news media, robotics, engineering and architectural design. The fine arts department offers various levels of band and chorus, as well as the option to participate in yearly stage plays and musicals as well as marching band and small performing ensembles. The high school has 6.3% student population attending Butler County Vo-Tech courses to focus on more specifically aligned career pathways. In 2018, Mars Area School District and Pine-Richland School District entered into a cross-district partnership to offer Air Force JROTC to Mars students. Through this partnership, 19 Mars Area Cadets attend JROTC courses at Pine-Richland High School, they learn how to fly with simulators, participate in summer cadet leadership camps, attend drill competitions, and participate in numerous community service opportunities and in academic challenges with no military obligation imposed.

The district's special education program has expanded and strengthened its services to students throughout the 2018-2019 school year. The high school opened the "Space Shop", which is completely student run to sell snack items and coffee within the high school. Also, a Life Skills apartment was created to provide students with hands-on learning experiences in a full-size, operable kitchen, laundry room, bedroom, and bathroom to engage in daily living skills with support. Our gifted support program has provided students with opportunity to extend their learning beyond the classroom to engage in academic competitions and job-shadowing experiences.

Beginning in 2017-2018, Mars Area School District partnered with the National Math Science Initiative (NMSI) to expand AP course offerings and to provide incentives to students and teachers involved in AP instruction and assessment. The goal is to continually increase the level of instruction and Advanced Placement course offerings in the subject areas of Math, Science, and English. Professional development opportunities around the region are open to AP teachers and teachers for grades 3-12 in Math, Science, and English to increase the level of rigor of instruction to prepare students for higher levels of learning and encourage more participation in AP courses. Since our initial participation, our AP scores have increased significantly in the AP Computer Science classes. In 2018, 198 students were enrolled in AP courses. Out of 357 AP exams taken, 73% of students earned a qualifying score. The number of qualifying scores earned by students in math, science, and English increased by 82%. The national average is traditionally a 7% increase year-to-year. Mars Area High School implemented 3 new AP courses from 2016-2018: AP Computer Science A, AP Computer Science Principles and AP Physics 1.

Weekly, students can engage in an activity period within the school day to expand learning opportunities beyond core instruction. The district's athletic programs are highly rated and have a history of WPIAL success. In 2018, the district started a chain reaction of kindness as they embraced Rachel's Challenge. At the high school, Rachel's Friends of Rachel (FOR) Club was created to awaken individual transformation and transition to a safer and more connected school environment. Throughout the year, the student-led FOR Club has facilitated school-wide activities, events, and positive message displays to spread kindness and compassion to all students.



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

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

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

All curriculum content is aligned with the PA Core Standards and is led by focus questions to guide the learning. Professional development has created a baseline of support to allow teachers the opportunities to dig deeper into their content and generate questions that drive instruction beyond the surface level. The emphasis on focus questions and prompting questions take learning to a deeper level and allow students to process, think, and apply their knowledge in engaging ways. We believe in involving students in their learning and strive to create a culture that supports thinking, inquiry, and collaboration. Our teachers are encouraged to shift the instruction to the students through various instructional strategies which open the door for students to communicate with each other to connect more to their thinking and learning.

The core academic courses offer students with vast learning opportunities. Students are required to have 4.0 credits in English to graduate. They can select from English, Advanced English, AP English Literature, and/or Language offerings as their core selections. Electives offered are Yearbook 1 and 2, News Media Analysis 1 and 2, Communications and Journalism, Contemporary Literature (which is an online offering), Creative Writing, Film Studies and CHS Speech. New to 2018 was the implementation of the required semester course, Foundations of Communications. This course presents the fundamental skills of communication, media use, writing, and presenting.

The high school has provided a 1:1 technology learning environment for all students with the use of Microsoft Surfaces as the district-issued device, but allows students to participate in a Bring-Your-Own-Device (BYOD) model. The district's learning management system is Schoology, which opens a pathway for teachers and students to communicate and engage in instruction, conversations, and assessments through the online platform.

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

Math courses are sequenced so students are required to have 3.0 credits for graduation. They can select from Geometry (advanced and TE included), Algebra I, II, and III, AP Computer Science Principles/A, Pre-Calculus (including advanced), Calculus (including advanced), College in the High School (CHS) Statistics, Pre-Calculus with Trig, and Statistics and Probability. The Standards for Mathematical Practice are incorporated into the curriculum which allows students to engage with mathematical concepts, and whenever applicable, teachers are asked to apply the curriculum to real world issues. For example, the Algebra II course build parabolic mirrors that will combine mathematics, group work, and real life application. Through new curriculum written in 2017-2018, there is a focus on problem solving, justifying solutions, and questioning to promote a deeper understanding of the content.

All students 9-12 learn in a 1:1 technology-based environment with Schoology as their learning management system. Assessment data is analyzed by departments throughout the year within the curriculum team, building administration, and the district administrative team. Data tools, such as: On-Hands data analysis tools, Keystones, AP exams, mid-terms and finals, formative/summative classroom assessments are administered throughout the year. Teachers analyze data as it pertains to their specific content area throughout the year to make any necessary instructional and curricular adaptations. Projections are made for student performance per subject and the progression of content. Teachers work together and analyze available data in three tiers: 1. to establish overall curriculum scope and sequence adjustments to determine proper instructional pacing and content delivery, 2. to make specific adaptations to their instruction based on the available data, and 3. adjusting individual learning needs through modifications and interventions most appropriate to promote student success.

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

Our science pathway requires 3.0 credits to graduate, which must include a Biology, Chemistry, and Physics course. Students have options such as: Biology, Chemistry, Physics, all of which include a conceptual framework for students. Advanced options are available in Anatomy and Physiology and Chemistry. AP options are available in Physics 1 and 2, Chemistry, and Biology. Built into the science curriculum is a focus on authentic learning through multiple lab and performance-based opportunities. The science courses provide experiences for students to ask questions and explore solutions, develop and use models, obtain, evaluate, and communicate information and form hypothesis, plan, and perform investigations, analyze data, and build arguments. These skills are all part of the 21-century skills that we hope to impart onto students during their time here at Mars Area High School. We also work to differentiate our curriculum to meet all students needs with project- based learning built into our conceptual science courses that also allow students to work on presentation and collaboration skills.

The high school has created courses to support students in their quest to meet the current graduation requirements. Remediation courses are offered in Biology, Algebra 1, and Literature for students working toward passing the Keystones or participating in the project-based assessment. Data is reviewed as Keystone scores are available from Winter, Spring, and Summer testing windows to determine the proper placement, which becomes a fluid process depending on the results throughout the year. The teachers in these content areas also have data team meetings to determine future planning based on previous grade-level scores from the Keystones and current student data based on the Classroom Diagnostic Tools (CDT) assessment.

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

In Social Studies, 4.0 credits are required to graduate with course options in Social Studies 9 and 10, World History, Psychology, Sociology, Economics, and War and Peace. College in the High School offerings are in Principals of Economics, General Psychology, and American National Government. AP course offerings are available in European History and US History. Within the Social Studies curriculum, we work to provide opportunities for students to develop many cross-curricular skills. Students are expected to perform tasks focused on research, writing, and building arguments that will support many of the goals in the English classrooms. Many courses use Socratic Seminars to allow students the ability to build their own capacity in interpreting and synthesizing primary sources and then verbalize their insights and point of view. The teachers work to act as facilitators in allowing students to do the heavy lifting of the thinking and learning in the classroom.

Curriculum has been recently revised in the area of Business, Communication, Information, and Technology (BCIT), Math, and Social Studies within the last three years. The curriculum framework has emphasized big ideas, essential questions, and focus questions. Teachers have had time to work within their departments to collaborate and adjust instruction based on available data, instructional strategies, and success within their classrooms. Enhanced professional development has been provided to teachers of AP courses in Math, Science, and English through the district's National Math and Science Initiative (NMSI) partnership. Yearly, instructional departments participate in a goal-setting activity where they discuss the strengths, weaknesses, and needs of their individual departments and then have an opportunity to meet with the building principal and curriculum director to discuss next steps.

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

Our district curriculum supports college and career readiness in several areas. The high school guidance counselors (along with the K-12 team) recently created their Act 339 plan which explicitly outlines the expectations for 9-12 students in their quest to prepare for post-secondary options. As part of the Career Education Work Standards, students can participate in a multitude of activities, experiences, and coursework aligned to the four strands of the CEW standards. For example, students can meet with college and career representatives to discuss options during the school day, and in the evening. Mars Area High School hosts a large college and career fair where 90 colleges, military and careers and 124 families participate. In addition to district scheduled events, teachers have been encouraged to provide applicable learning opportunities in class where they can network with local businesses to build connections and opportunities for our students.

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

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

Mars Area High School operates with content departments of: English, World Language, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Health and Physical Education, Business, Computers and Info Technology, Networking and Programming Technology, Music, Art, Family and Consumer Sciences, and Technology Education. Students also have out of district learning opportunities at the Butler County Vo-Tech School, Pine-Richland School District for JROTC, and Mars Cyber Academy.

The physical education courses require students to enroll in freshman and sophomore PE classes at least once in their first 2 years, and junior and senior PE classes once in their 3rd and 4th years. As part of the required Freshman Health curriculum, all students will complete a 2-year certification program in American Red Cross for Adult CPR/AED, Pediatric CPR and First Aid, which also couples as our Career Indicator of Success with 100% achievement. Students also take Health in their Junior year with a focus of making healthy choices into adulthood in the areas of nutrition, drugs and alcohol, and sex education.

The high school offers a vast variety of elective course offerings in BCIT, Family Consumer Sciences, Technology Education, World Language, Art, and Music.

Our music programs offers band, orchestra and chorus to 225 students. Students who select band as a course during the day have the option of participating in Marching Band for an additional .25 credit. Students also have the option of taking Jazz Improvisation, Music Theory 1 and 2, Musical Keyboarding, Musical Composition, Exploring Music for the 21st Century, and String Orchestra. Outside of the course selections, students can audition to be a part of the yearly musical production, show choir, and men's/women's ensembles that perform in regional events.

Through the Family and Consumer Science (FACS) curriculum, the high school offers a community preschool, "Planet Preschool", as part of the Child Development 1 and 2 courses. There are 16 children that attend Planet Preschool, and approximately 18 students who have selected the Child Development 1 and 2 as an elective option. Planet Preschool has a direct correlation to the Career Education Work Standards as it provides the high school students with a hands-on work experience of planning lessons, teaching, and providing activities for children as in a functional preschool program. Additionally, Food Fundamentals and Creative Cuisine are additional elective offerings in the FACS department.

The Fine Arts department has expanded its course offerings to include art fundamentals to students hoping to learn the basic principles of art and elements of design. In addition, they have the option of Intermediate Art, Advanced Art, Exploratory Art, 20th Century Art History, and Intro to Digital Photography. There are 167 students who have selected art electives in the 2018-2019 school year.

Business, Computers, and Information Technology has an abundance of course offerings, including a required foundation of business course mandatory for all 9th grade students. This 9-week course exposes students to the expansive choices, such as: Business Management, Personal Finance, Digital Business Tools, Business Communications, Digital Business Publications, Digits and Data: Excel and Access, Accounting 1 and 2, Business Law, Intro to Marketing, and Sports and Entertainment Marketing. The BCIT department has expanded its CHS course offerings through BC3 (Butler Community College) to include Marketing, Business Law, Intro to Micro Computing and Business Math. As part of the Personal Finance class, the district partners with EVERFI and Mars National Bank to provide hands-on applicable approaches to learning.

The high school is proud of its transformation of the traditional wood shop to an Innovation Center which houses high-tech learning experiences beginning with a mandatory 9-week Foundations of Technology course for all 9th grade students. Students have options of Graphic Design 1 and 2, CADD (Computer Aided Drafting and Design), CADD applications, Architectural Design, Engineering by Design (EbD), Systems

Engineering, Manufacturing Technology 1, 2, 3 and 4, and Robotics 1 and 2. Over the past two years, students have entered a local Shaler STEAM competition and placed first in the overall challenge. In addition to the hands-on innovation, students are able to select Principles of Video Production, Broadcast Media 1 and 2. Students in these courses learn how to create, produce, and host the morning announcements for the entire school in a daily live broadcast.

Mars Area High School begins its World Language program in grade 9 with offerings in Spanish, German, French courses levels 1 – 4, advanced, and AP. Additionally, Mandarin Chinese, offered as an online course, is available and currently has one student enrolled. Spanish is offered in 5 different levels, and is our most advanced track of languages offered to students.

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

Mars Area High School has 96 students receiving special education services through their IEPs, and 44 participating in gifted education through their Gifted Individualized Education Plan (GIEPS). Students with IEPs have access to educational services that meets their level of needs, such as learning support, supplemental supports, life skills and inclusion. There are 5 special education teachers at the high school providing instruction through a variety of delivery methods. Through our course offerings, students can participate in level courses for mathematics, as well as conceptual science courses in addition to their direct math and english instruction with their special education teacher. Students all have access to Schoology Learning Management system, where teachers can create modified access to lessons and assessments, group student appropriately and provide support to students where needed. Special education teachers regularly meet with content teachers to discuss student needs and provide support throughout the day and year. New in 2018, the special education department created a life-skills apartment for students to experience real-life application to maintaining a home, utilizing a kitchen, keeping the home tidy, and general home care. Also, the Space Shop was created to teach student life skills of operating a small business of selling coffee and other small goods to the students and teachers in the school.

Students with GIEPs work directly with a teacher to enhance their instructional focus in multiple content areas. They have the opportunity to be involved in project-based learning and academic challenges. The teacher facilitates their learning goals and encourages students to extend their knowledge beyond traditional classroom expectations. The students involved in the gifted education program are in the process of creating a school-based escape room for students to actively participate in challenges to successfully solve the puzzle to unlock the room.

Our staff members also participate in a weekly Student Assistance Program meeting to help identify students that need additional support as well. Their needs may be in a variety of areas, but this team work to identify any potential student needs and find solutions. The counselors are part of monitoring both this and students with a 504 Plan to ensure that accommodations are in place to best serve each student's individual needs.

Generally, all content areas work closely with students at their varied learning levels and learning styles. Teachers expose students to a variety of methods to engage them in their learning. As part of our professional development opportunities, teachers have learned and implemented strategies that encourage students to actively participate through discussions, partnering, presentations, projects, and Socratic seminars. In a Business Communications lesson, students were learning the basics of creating directions for creating a new Lego model. The students made the model, and then created concise directions. As part of the trial period, the students shared their Lego models with other groups to see if they were clear enough to rebuild the model. The next step was to share with elementary level students to test the directions and model. Students in a social studies class participated in a student-led Socratic seminar where two groups of students participated in a discussion based upon student-generated questions and responses. The approach allowed all students to participate and actively connect to the content.

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

One of the focus areas for the district for the 2018-2019 school year is improving school climate. The district kicked off the year with the Rachel's Challenge – Start a Chain Reaction. This initiative is inspired by Rachel Joy Scott, the first person killed in Columbine school shooting. Her legacy is to start a chain reaction by showing kindness and compassion to all. The high school started the "FOR" Club where students meet regularly to discuss ways to improve the culture, spread kindness, and help others. The students in the FOR Club have spearheaded several school-wide events where students could come together, meet new people, and spread kindness to start a chain reaction. Through this club, the staff and students created a theme song and t-shirts. They also held a full-day event before the holidays where a station allowed for students to create cards for residents of local retirement homes. Around the school, teachers have created signs and motivational posters in the bathrooms to spread positive messages to students and adults in the building.

At Mars High School this year, we have built specific goals focused around a Climate Action Plan. We first started with the idea of building more and stronger connections between staff and students. We also wanted to continue to focus on having our teachers be facilitators of learning and engaging; this is being addressed with professional development and focused walk-throughs and observations. Another goal was to educate staff on the idea of a growth mindset; we continue to talk about this at faculty meetings and through communication from administration. Mars Area High School also worked on building capacity in our staff to confront uncomfortable behavior and have uncomfortable, but necessary conversations. We looked at this through the lens of unconscious biases. We also worked to highlight staff with staff spotlights and shout-outs as well as a staff recognition and appreciation award that is passed among the staff.

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

Our school tries to use multiple means of communication to our parents, community, and any other stakeholders. We find value in communicating our mission and vision as well as successes of Mars High School students as often as possible. We host events to celebrate our students such as the Renaissance Breakfast which highlights students with positive attendance and behavior, and our academic banquet that allows us to highlight juniors and seniors who maintain honors throughout high school or who have won scholarships. A strong support system for Mars Area High School has been the Planet Foundation. Their mission is to enrich, enhance, and support the goals of the school district. Mars Planet Foundation helps to provide unique educational opportunities that are not part of the current curriculum. With Teaching Grants from the Planet Foundation, students are able to maximize learning initiatives.

Through many of the clubs and activities here at Mars High School we are able to build and maintain relationships with many community organizations. The Rich-Mar Rotary, Mars New Year Committee, Central Blood Bank, Mars Home for the Youth, and Westinghouse are a few organizations that have provided many valuable partnerships for our students in the past few years. We also invite both community organizations as well as parents in for events that showcase student work such as our Art Showcase, Winter and Spring Concerts, and the all school play and musical. Also, our students participate in events hosted in the town of Mars yearly, such as Applefest, the Mars New Year, a fall Homecoming parade, and a Fourth of July parade.

Mars Area High School also works to communicate with parents quarterly through Parent-Principal Communication meetings where the parents have an opportunity to sit down with high school administration and discuss upcoming and pertinent information. This same group helps organize a celebration for our teachers for Teacher Appreciation Week- which ends with a culminating luncheon for staff and parents. The athletic department, high school administration, and teachers work to highlight student accomplishments both in the classroom and on the field through social media such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram in an effort to create a positive digital footprint.

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

The high school has 9 of the 12 secondary curriculum leaders. All curriculum leaders meet monthly with the Director of Curriculum to discuss pertinent curriculum topics, such as ESSA, professional development offerings, district initiatives and expanding the culture of learning in our schools. Yearly, departments are asked to submit any changes or revisions their team would like to see for their courses. These suggestions have led to the curriculum changes in several departments, including refreshing course descriptions and adding new offerings for students. Providing teachers with a voice is important to the leadership team.

With the recent shift in instructional focus on the metacognitive strategies, teachers are implementing engaging practices in all content areas. Across the board, teachers are creating inquiry-based learning environments and employing strategies such as think-pair-share, higher order questioning to promote deeper learning, and summarization techniques to provide students with multiple pathways to communicate and collaborate. Teachers are exposed to the various techniques through face-to-face, district-provided online professional learning opportunities, and by attending regional conferences.

The High School Principal has also began using faculty meeting to introduce and share ideas related to instruction and school improvement. There has been a focus on school culture and climate for both students and staff, an introduction to the idea of building a growth mindset within our staff and eventually our students, and a building of knowledge and expectations about questioning, specifically focus questions, within the last year.

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

The high school leadership team consists of two administrators and three counselors. This team works together to build goals based on data analysis of student achievement, as well as student, parent, and staff feedback. The team strives to build on current instructional practices and move instruction forward to enhance our growth data while maintaining our strong history of high achievement. The goals are shared with staff in the opening meeting and periodically throughout the year as a reminder and check-in. During the first few days of school, the administration team coordinates and runs an orientation for freshmen students and also meets with each grade level of students separately. These class meetings allow time for the administration to discuss expectations, academic initiatives, and available resources with all students. The administrators also strive to visit classrooms both in the first few days of school and throughout the school year to show support and monitor instructional practices.

The high school administrators utilize formal evaluations and differentiated supervision that is modeled on Danielson's Framework for Teaching. Both administrators supervise one-half of the teachers in either a directed or self-directed model. The professional staff is rotated between these modes every third year. We also utilize a walk-through evaluation tool to provide teachers with feedback in a timely manner. This allows the administrator to focus on specific areas of instructional practices and gives the teacher recommendations and data. Through the formal observation process, the administrator completed a pre-observation conference with the professional staff member prior to the full class observation. Following the observation, the administrator shares data from the observation and evaluative feedback. The teacher and administrator then complete a post-conference meeting and a self-evaluation. For staff members working in the differentiated supervision model, they have the option of Peer Collaboration, Self-Directed Action Research, or a Portfolio. Documentation of their selected supervision model is shared with the administrators.

The high school administrators also works on building a positive school climate for all stakeholders. The principal meets with students for round-table discussions on a regular basis and is often joined by the superintendent for these meetings. This allows the students to have a voice as well as allows the administration to support student led initiatives. The principal and assistant principal also meets monthly with a faculty advisory group that provides an outlet for teachers to voice concerns and help administration solve potential issues. Team- and morale-building activities for staff are also regular components of faculty meetings and in-service agendas.

The high school administrators meet weekly with the counselors, with an agenda focused on building management and student concerns or issues. This team also works together to create a master schedule and receives input from departments to initiate curriculum changes for the high school.

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

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The focus for the past few years has been on building the “Focus of Learning” in each content area. Through research and professional development based upon integrating metacognition, student thinking, and learning, teachers have worked within their departments to intensify and deepen instruction. Specifically, teachers have worked with administrators and outside supports to drive learning through deeper questions promoting a greater understanding of content. Students are highly encouraged to communicate with peers to share their thought process and ask more questions to dive deeper in their understanding. In addition to their questioning skills, students are engaged in multiple strategies that demonstrate their level of understanding of content through the use of technology-based applications, Socratic seminars, project-based learning, and cooperative learning experiences.

Professional development has been presented, modeled, and applied in a variety of settings. Teachers learned the philosophy and purpose of metacognition and the learning strategies used and were involved with guided planning of the professional development content. Initially, the professional development started with a small cohort of secondary English teachers; they worked intimately with a coach who provided individualized coaching support within their classroom. The next step broadened the professional development to include all core content areas. The foundation of the trainings became a model for the monthly staff meetings facilitated by the building principal to apply strategies with mixed content areas to collaborate and discuss instructional strategies. In addition, administrative walk-throughs and evaluations have centered around the focus of learning, infusing the instructional questions that promote deeper learning, and encouraging student talk and collaboration at a more challenging level. The focus of learning strategies have made instruction and assessments more rigorous. It has coupled with our participation with the National Math Science Initiative (NMSI), where we are working to increase the level of rigor in non-AP and AP course instruction which prepares students for post-secondary.