

**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 Dr. Joseph Patrick Masgai

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

Official School Name Afton Elementary School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 1673 Quarry Road

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

Yardley PA 19067-3911  
City State Zip Code+4 (9 digits total)

County Bucks County

Telephone (215) 321-8540

Fax (215) 321-3620

Web site/URL  
[http://www.pennsburyisd.org/aftonelementary\\_home.aspx](http://www.pennsburyisd.org/aftonelementary_home.aspx)

E-mail [jmasgai@pennsburyisd.org](mailto:jmasgai@pennsburyisd.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. William Gretzula

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other) E-mail [wgretzula@pennsburyisd.org](mailto:wgretzula@pennsburyisd.org)

District Name Pennsbury School District Tel. (215) 428-4100

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. TR Kannan

(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):
- 10 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 3 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 2 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 15 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
<b>PreK</b>	0	0	0
<b>K</b>	39	47	86
<b>1</b>	40	51	91
<b>2</b>	57	63	120
<b>3</b>	40	44	84
<b>4</b>	53	48	101
<b>5</b>	58	43	101
<b>6</b>	0	0	0
<b>7</b>	0	0	0
<b>8</b>	0	0	0
<b>9</b>	0	0	0
<b>10</b>	0	0	0
<b>11</b>	0	0	0
<b>12 or higher</b>	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	287	296	583

\*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
  - 13 % Asian
  - 5 % Black or African American
  - 3 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 75 % 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: 7%

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

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

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2017 until the end of the 2017-2018 school year	23
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2017 until the end of the 2017-2018 school year	17
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	40
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2017	595
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.07
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	7

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

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):  
Spanish, Gujarti, French, Arabic, Hindu, Urdu, Russian, Telugu, Uzbek, Farsi, Punjabi, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Mandarin, Dujarti, Italian

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 15 %  
Total number students who qualify: 85

8. Students receiving special education services: 12 %  
69 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>13</u> Autism                 | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>2</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>36</u> Other Health Impaired                |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>35</u> Specific Learning Disability         |
| <u>1</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>54</u> Speech or Language Impairment        |
| <u>1</u> Hearing Impairment      | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>9</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	1
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	26
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	19
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	7
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 22:1

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%	96%	96%	96%	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.

At Afton, we maintain high expectations for students and staff. We recognize the variability of learning and the need to build bridges to optimize strengths.

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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Afton Elementary School opened its doors on October 24, 1997. The founding principal, staff, and students elected the Eagle as the school mascot and the tradition that Afton Eagles Soar became an immediate tradition that continues twenty-one years after its inception. Within the context of the Pennsbury School District, Afton is one of ten elementary schools out of a total of fifteen buildings when taking into consideration the secondary division.

Afton's student population is the largest on the elementary division with a total population of 583 students in grades K - 5. The staff is comprised of approximately seventy-five dedicated teachers, specialist teachers, paraprofessionals, and support personnel all of whom are focused on student academic, emotional, and social growth. Although a diversified staff in terms of service years, the majority of teachers possess advanced degrees. Common planning time at each grade level provides teachers with the opportunity to design consistent lesson plans that are aligned with state standards and fosters a sense of "team" among colleagues. All teachers "own" their curriculum and model exemplar pedagogy on a daily basis. The quality of Afton teachers has been recognized numerous times at the district level. Several teachers past and present have been awarded the title "Demonstration Teacher" for distinguished teaching in the classroom. In turn, the demonstration teachers' classroom doors are open to all teachers, especially those in the Induction Program, in order to observe best practices in action.

The principal believes that Afton represents "all things good that are working in public education" and credits the school's success in the dedicated staff that links arms in order to practice continuous school improvement. Afton is comprised of 583 students from varied socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. Students are organized into six grade levels in grades K - 5 with each comprised of four sections with the exception of five sections at second grade. In addition, Afton is home to three specialized life skills classes and one multi-disability intermediate class. Students who attend the SLS classes are elementary students from across the district who require specialized instruction. Likewise, students who attend the IU class are Pennsbury students from across the district as well as students from neighboring districts. The spectrum of educational need is expansive as Afton's student population reflects equal percentages of students who require learning support and gifted support.

Afton is the beneficiary of a highly involved and supportive PTO who works to support the staff and enhance the learning experiences of the students. This is most evident in the PTO's ability to support the principal's goal to create 21st century classrooms by fundraising over \$90,000 to equip all classrooms with a smartboard, projector, and docu-cam. Moreover, the PTO acted upon the principal's vision for an outdoor garden classroom and converted the underutilized courtyard into a beautiful vegetable garden, outdoor stage, and seating area for all students to enjoy. Each grade level adopted a garden bed and is responsible for the upkeep. In addition, PTO volunteers promote the academic and social well-being of all students by sponsoring events such as the STEM Fair, Celebration of the Arts, school-wide assemblies, and author visits. Beyond these activities, parent volunteers visit classrooms regularly as guest readers, to assist with KidWriting, to chaperone Reading Olympic teams, and to partake of classroom celebrations and grade level classroom extensions.

The majority of students arrive to school from middle to upper-middle class homes. Parents are typically college-educated and possess professional careers. Parents value education and take pride in the high achieving status of Afton Elementary to the extent that many move into the attendance area because of the school's reputation as a place where children grow and flourish. Several traditions that are the hallmark of the school and have been carried forward proudly since 1997 are: the annual Turkey Bowl, Legacy Wall that reflects fifth grade graduates' favorite Afton memory, the Afton Family Back-to-School picnic, the Artist-in-Residence mosaic project, and the Principal's Building Community through Literature initiative.

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

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

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

The Pennsbury School District believes all students are entitled to a comprehensive and balanced literacy program that provides standards delivery via grouping structures and teacher support with various text levels and genres. Balanced literacy is a curriculum framework that ensures that Reading/English Language Arts (RELA) standards are delivered through authentic experiences and mini-lesson within the RELA block and across content areas. Whole group, guided reading groups, and independent practice models ensure all student needs are met. Grouping is determined via a comprehensive Multi-tiered System of Support MTSS process that utilizes the best practices of assessment using universal screeners such as Dibels and diagnostic assessments such as DRA2. Ongoing use of formative and summative assessments garner best instructional decisions for student programming needs. Grade specific standards-aligned curriculum maps guide teachers to ensure consistency of programming across grade levels. Direct explicit instruction coupled with technology based support guarantees students' individual learning needs are met and challenged. The school-wide writing program is rooted in the research and best practices of Lucy Calkins and all teachers are well-versed and skilled in delivering the Writers' Workshop model to students during the Reading Language Arts (RELA) block as well as across the content areas throughout the day. In fact, many teachers have attended weekend workshops at Columbia University's Teachers' College to attend staff development classes on writing and one Afton teacher, in particular, has been instrumental in offering this resource to teachers across the elementary division. Supplemental materials such as mentor texts and texts from the principal's Building Community through Literature initiative have enriched students' RELA experience at Afton.

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

Afton adheres to a balanced numeracy model to deliver the PA State standards via the curriculum. The model design supports the wide spectrum of student need and embeds both intervention and enrichment supports. The framework provides the stage for teachers to provide whole group direct teaching with explicit modeling and small group differentiated learning to support or challenge students. Problem-solving, calculators, and technology are embedded daily. Afton upholds the philosophy that students learn best by engaging in hands-on activities that build their interests and connect to their experiences. As a result, students learn skills and develop a mathematical conceptual understanding while solving relevant problems. Students learn by explaining solutions and strategies in multiple ways which, in turn, fosters flexibility of thinking. Everyday Math (EM4) was adopted twofold: (1) the spiral curriculum approach and (2) the embedded "productive struggle." The need to develop perseverance complemented the school's character education initiative and is an essential element of problem solving that promotes "thinking outside the box" and enables teachers to build critical thinking skills and develop grit. Assessment data drives instruction and support services in math. Dibels data, MAP data, formative and cumulative assessments guide teachers to meet students' individual needs and provides the math specialist with focus when designing staff development in the area of math literacy. Through the Mutli-tiered System of Support (MTSS), the learning support teachers, classroom teachers, math specialist, and principal work in tandem to support students through enrichment and/or remediation.

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

The science curriculum is a researched-based program that extends beyond the basic Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) standards and provides students with learning opportunities to build knowledge and conceptual understanding of modern and revolutionary science. Electronic text and inquiry-based laboratory assignments provide students with the framework to propose a hypothesis and experiment to identify solutions. The engineering design process of STEM education builds students' scientific literacy and problem-solving skills. Moreover, the overarching goal is to promote design thinking correlated with critical thinking skills to arrive ultimately at creative solutions while exploring career possibilities. We currently use the Future Ready annual growth measure index to program effectively for students. Teachers

are committed to evolving with changing science instruction needs and learning emerging technologies that are embedded into delivery to provide students with a 21st century mindset and toolkit. Teachers habitually deliver inquiry-based lessons and differentiate the curriculum for all learners to accommodate and provide challenge to all learners. Numerous science-based activities take place throughout the year and are enthusiastically received by students. The annual STEM Fair, K'Nex Engineering Competition, and Odyssey of the Mind reflect high participation rates and a historical trend for student achievement as evidenced in the many top level awards and distinctions students earn at the building, county, state, and world level. The common denominator in students' level of achievement is rooted in their ability to apply skills, concepts, and knowledge learned in science. These include observation skills, critical thinking, the ability to hypothesize and predict, design and construct models, and persevere through failures.

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

Building upon the Pennsylvania Academic Standards of Civics and Government, Economics, Geography, and History, teachers utilize visual discovery activities, skill builders, experiential exercises, writing for understanding, response groups, and problem-solving group work to bring learning alive and to make history meaningful and relative for students. Individual student interactive notebooks and strategies of integrating reading/language arts, differentiating instruction and building critical thinking skills is observable in each social studies lesson delivery. Assessment takes various forms and is diversified in order for students to demonstrate their comprehension of civic concepts. Traditional assessments as well as project-based assessments provide the stage for students to demonstrate and apply the key concepts presented in social studies. Whether through diary entries, Ellis Island simulations, or researching primary sources of historical events, students are assessed through a variety of creative measures. Geography is also integrated into the units as is the development of empathy and understanding for the experiences of different racial, religious, and ethnic groups. Students demonstrate their geography knowledge annually by participating in the school's National Geographic Geography Bee. Civic responsibility is evidenced in the manner in which the school participates in veteran letter writing and adopting a veteran. In the not too distant past, Afton students visited the Pennsylvania Legislature to petition for the box turtle to be adopted as the state reptile.

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

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

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

All students in grades K - 5 attend a forty-minute special area class on a daily basis in the areas of: library, art, physical education, or music. The overarching goal of the combined special areas is to enrich students' learning experience and to provide a well-balanced approach to living.

The library program seeks to empower students to become life-long learners and to foster a love for reading. The certified librarian, in collaboration with classroom teachers, delivers instruction that upholds rigorous standards that enable students to become critical thinkers, discriminating researchers, effective locators of information, and proficient users of traditional sources and emerging technologies. As an advocate for free exchange of ideas and information, the librarian ensures that a balanced collection supports curricular needs, reflects the diverse interests and backgrounds of students, and represents various points of views. The librarian participates in on-going professional development opportunities and provides PD to staff on a regular basis. Moreover, the librarian is an advocate for literacy skills to be integrated fully across content areas. Students engage in a set curriculum based upon PA Core Standards and curriculum topics ranging from listening skills, literature appreciation, research skills, and general library skills. Literacy and reading are celebrated throughout the school year in events such as Read Across America Week, April is Poetry Month and each year, Art and Library combine in a culminating event entitled Celebration of the Arts

wherein students artwork and writing is showcased.

The overarching goal of the Art program is to develop students' own creativity and their appreciation and understanding for the arts. The Art program is designed sequentially from kindergarten through fifth grade. Throughout their matriculation, students learn art production, art history, art criticism and aesthetics aligned to the PA State Standards for the Arts and Humanities. Students learn to use higher order thinking and problem-solving skills and the process of making art using a variety of 2D and 3D medias. Afton student artwork is showcased throughout the building and in central office. Through the generous support of the Afton PTO, students' art education is enhanced through the annual experience of the Art Goes to School Program or the Artmobile. Numerous PTO-sponsored assemblies also underscore the importance of art such as author visits, dance troupes, and performers of various genres.

The immediate goal of physical education is to develop the physical, social, cognitive, and emotional well-being of our students with the long range goal to promote the skills necessary for students to choose a lifetime of wellness and healthy living. Through a developmentally appropriate and sequential physical education program, students learn to perform efficiently the motor skills needed in everyday living. Physical education promotes leadership, critical thinking, decision-making, co-operation, respect, and good sportsmanship by focusing on contemporary activities designed to motivate and encourage maximum participation. Richer experiences are created for students by integrating content with technology, multicultural citizenship, and problem-solving competencies. A strong emphasis is placed on fostering a positive and nurturing environment where all students can achieve success as an individual and a team member. PE hosts the annual and culminating activity of Field Day where students' sportsmanship and proclivity for a healthy lifestyle are highlighted. Likewise, in conjunction with the PTO, Afton Boys' Activity Night and Afton Girls' Activity Night are much anticipated events that allow students to invite a special guest to attend an evening of physical activities designed around the theme that a physical lifestyle is a fun lifestyle.

Beyond the forty-minute music special, Afton students are afforded the opportunity to participate in the rich music tradition of the Pennsbury School District. Students in grades four and five are invited to participate in the the strings and instrumental program and student attendance in both programs is very high. Students in both programs showcase their musical abilities in the annual events of the Winter and Spring Concerts. In addition to developing musical talents, Afton develops students' theatrical talents through the annual school musical and participation in the school chorus. Recent performances of the school musical have included: Dear Edwina, Suessical the Musical, Jr., Madagascar, Jr., and Peter Pan, Jr.

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

Afton adheres to the multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) to allow teachers to document and monitor the performance of the school and individual students in order to make adjustments to the curriculum, the delivery of the curriculum, and to identify students who may need remediation or enrichment. Three times a year a universal screener is administered to identify or predict students who may be at-risk and may require additional support. The universal screener also becomes a yardstick with which determinations can be made regarding curriculum and instruction effectiveness on individual students and groups such as learning support, ELL, and disadvantaged students. The school Data Team meets three times a year at a Tier I status to review the results of the universal screener assessment. Reflecting upon our practice, the team answers the following questions: Is the researched-based curriculum meeting the needs for 80% - 90% of students? Are supplemental curricula required for some students? and What students are at-risk and require a Tier II intervention? Approximately every eight weeks, the Data Team meets to discuss Tier II students with grade level teachers. Dialogue focuses on student grouping and intervention strategies to close achievement gaps. The team decides on appropriate interventions, the teacher or specialist who will administer the intervention, and the duration and frequency of the intervention. These interventions are targeted and specific to the group needs and population of students. Goals are set and progress is monitored every two to three weeks. The Data team will then reconvene in eight weeks and review students' progress. When students demonstrate growth and achieve their goal they are assimilated back to the classroom with continued monitoring. Conversely, for students who do not demonstrate adequate progress, the team considers altering the frequency of the intervention, changing the intervention, or elevating the students' need to a Tier III

intervention with weekly progress monitoring and the potential referral for special education services.

Students in the Specialized Life Skills classrooms receive special education services at the supplemental level. IEP goals and objectives are monitored daily, weekly, or bi-weekly depending upon students' individual goals. Progress toward the goal or objective is reviewed quarterly and feedback is provided to parents via the IEP Progress Report. Students in the Life Skills Program receive small group instruction using research-based replacement curriculum in the areas of Reading, Writing, and Mathematics such as Reading Mastery, Connecting Math Concepts or Number Worlds, Language for Learning, Reasoning and Writing, and ABLLs (Language, ABA). In order to participate in these programs, students are administered a placement test to determine individual instructional levels. Students participate in a modified Social Studies and Science program within the regular education classroom with the support of a paraprofessional. Exposure to the general education curriculum and classroom allows students in the Life Skills Program to improve present levels and socialize with peers. In the area of assessment, students in grades 3 - 5 are administered the Pennsylvania Alternate System of Assessment (PASA) in place of the PSSA. The PASA is administered in a 1:1 setting with the classroom teacher as the proctor. The PASA addresses concepts and skills on the student's individual instructional level. Students in the Life Skills Program often require related services such as speech, occupational therapy, and physical therapy. Ultimately, students' IEPs and the specially designed instruction (SDI) embedded in the IEP drive the instruction in the classroom.

## PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

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### 1. School Climate/Culture:

Afton is recognized at both the state and national level as a School of Character. This recognition is rooted in an established culture of positive school climate that supports students' academic, social, and emotional growth. At the foundation of this culture is a social-emotional curriculum, Second Step, that is taught at all grade levels. The program teaches students the skills to gain confidence, set goals, make good decisions, collaborate with others in work and play, and navigate the world more effectively. The program consists of several units of study that vary at each grade level to meet the changing developmental needs of students. Units of study include topics such as skills for learning, empathy, emotional management, and problem solving. The lessons are delivered by the teachers and the school guidance counselor. Parents are informed and involved in the program through the PTO Newsletter, grade level information letters, and the HomeLinks component of the program which requires parent participation with the child(ren) on a weekly basis. In addition, the fifth grade Standing Together: Educators, Police, and Students (STEPS) program is designed to complement the Second Step program. A Mindfulness component called Mind Yeti underscores students to be self-reflective and self-regulatory of their emotions. Students are encouraged to work on mindfulness in school and at home to help regulate their emotions and responses in educational and social settings.

The school is also adopting the the Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support model (SWPBIS) for full implementation in the 2019 - 2020 school year. The current school year is designed to be the planning stage for the adoption as teachers are receiving staff development on the explicit teaching of expected behaviors in all school settings. The SWPBIS team of core teachers have met at strategic times throughout this school year to tailor the SWPBIS philosophy to meet the present need at Afton and have, in turn, provided staff development to the entire staff. The team's focus is to develop in students an intrinsic understanding and habitual modeling of respect in all settings and with all personnel.

The principal supports and practices collaborative leadership with the staff. The veteran status of experienced teachers is valued and "tapped into" as a resource for all school and district initiatives. Novice teachers' technology skills are utilized to support the veteran teachers. The end result is a cohesive team where strengths are valued and shared and contributed for the greater good. The principal's management skills augment the building budget and supports teachers to provide release time for teachers to engage in professional development sessions at grade level, in committees, or to attend out-of-district workshops. On a more personal level, the principal is mindful of teachers' non-professional lives and espouses the tenant "family first." As such, the principal provides flex time to teachers, when needed, and culls positive relationships with the staff. Numerous social activities such as staff breakfasts, holiday gift and cookie exchange, and the fifth grade clap-out farewell tradition exemplifies the close and personal bonds among all staff members.

### 2. Engaging Families and Community:

Afton strives to provide a continuous connection between school and families. In fact, Afton is committed to create one large family comprised of staff, students, and families. To meet the needs of our 21st century families, Afton has adopted a paperless communication line and uses electronic communications as the primary source to keep families informed. A weekly web blast is sent to families directly each Monday that list important announcements and upcoming events. A calendar delineates activities with links for families to participate and support various activities and Sign-up Genius requests are habitually completed with full participation. The Afton community of staff and parents value the academic and emotional success of every student and we are cognizant of these needs when planning yearly events. As such, we provide activities that promote, provide practice, and celebrate students' success in growing academically and emotionally. The STEM Fair, School Musical, Celebration of the Arts, Field Day, Presidential Awards Assembly are examples of events where school and home join to celebrate the students. Teachers incorporate Google Classroom as a communication tool to share current units of study and projects with families. Families receive REMIND messages through their emails on their computers or cell phones with

important information related to individual classes.

Afton's commitment to prepare students to be good citizens is promoted through partnerships within the larger community of Yardley and Newtown and the surrounding district. Students visit the Exelon Energy Center annually to participate in green engineering activities in order to raise students' level of awareness and concern to preserve energy and to promote conservation. Moreover, students support others not as fortunate as they are via multiple food drives throughout the year, an annual coat drive, sponsorship of an American Red Cross blood drive, American Heart Association Hoops for Hearts, and Pennies for Patients. The Afton community actively involves itself in promoting school goals as related to a growth mindset. Each day begins with the school community in unison reciting our Growth Mindset Pledge after the Pledge of Allegiance. We encourage respect and perseverance as essential traits in order to be successful and happy individuals. Staff and parents strive to support students to grow emotionally and academically for their present and future lives. Enrichment is offered through the Gifted Support Program and the Math Enrichment Program. The Gifted Support teacher models and shares STEM lessons in all primary classrooms weekly. Students are afforded multiple enrichment activities in PTO-sponsored after-school enrichment classes that are offered on a semester basis. Program offerings include foreign languages, robotics, the sciences and the arts. Monthly family activities held throughout the school year promote physical activity and family engagement. Families are also encouraged and invited to support students in the classroom with KidWriting, Reading Olympics, and as guest speakers to promote career possibilities for students.

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

The principal believes professional development is the cornerstone to student growth. Within the district and at Afton, professional development positively impacts the pedagogy capacity of teachers and the instructional leadership of the principal. Referencing current educational research, the district and the school recognize the importance of investing time and resources into professional development as both are essential to impart long-term and permanent effects on student growth. Moreover, all professional development is aligned to district initiatives, underscores the importance of data-based decision making, and supports school initiatives.

The school's philosophy on professional development is committed to focus on researched-based instructional practices, active participation of all participants, and adaptation to unique classrooms. As much as fiscally possible, the district strives to provide outside experts to deliver staff development. At the building level, professional development is designed to be well-organized, is carefully structured, provides meaning and reflects need. The common thread of all professional development, whether at the district or building level, is rooted on pedagogy, content, and mission. It is also focused on sustainability, follow-up, and supportive accountability to ensure it is embedded throughout the school program.

The Balanced Literacy and Balanced Numeracy Model are reviewed annually as the cornerstone to effective instruction and to promote consistent instruction at all grade levels. Both the reading specialist and math specialist take an active role to provide ongoing professional development to teachers throughout the school year at the building, grade, and individual levels. Recognized as a teacher-leader on the elementary level, Afton's math specialist has provided professional development to the elementary division of teachers at numerous workshops throughout the school year in the areas of Google Classroom, how to respond to open-ended math questions with accuracy and consistency, and is an active leader in the curriculum renewal process. The reading specialist has played a significant role among the elementary division of reading specialists especially in the areas of phonological training and building teachers' capacity to understand, administer, and score accurately the Dibels assessment. Recognizing the instructional leadership of the principal, the assistant superintendent for elementary education has twice within the current school year called upon the principal to pilot and provide elementary division professional development in the areas of student-led report card portfolio conferences and Text Dependent Analysis response writing training at all ten elementary buildings. Within the building, the principal has organized a team of teachers from across content areas and grade levels to form a SWPBIS team for the purpose of year-long planning in order to implement the school-wide positive behavior plan for next school

year. This capacity building is being provided in conjunction with a representative from the Bucks County Intermediate Unit.

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

The educational philosophy espoused by the principal is rooted in educational research. His curriculum lens is focused on the research of Mike Schmoker, his leadership style is modeled after Michael Fullan, and his vision for a school community reflects the precepts of Mr. Rogers. The principal is a self-professed lifelong learner as evidenced in his pursuit and successful attainment of a Lehigh University doctoral degree that is continuously applied in the daily operation of the building and in his interactions with all stakeholders. Building positive professional relationships and providing continuous staff development define the principal's role as the instructional leader, or the lead teacher, in the building. As an adjunct professor in the Educational Leadership Department at Lehigh University, the principal remains current on the best practices of instruction and assessment and applies his teaching of Supervision and Staff Development and Data-based Decision Making to his staff. Service Leadership via modeling expected professionalism affects the strengths of each staff member creates a cohesive team of professionals dedicated to student growth. Collaborative leadership where decisions are made with input and consensus promotes individual worth. Thoughtful consideration of all stakeholders' needs when making a decision is an administrative hallmark. The principal speaks of "I," but habitually speaks of "we" when discussing the merits of Afton because he values and acknowledges the collective effort of the entire staff. Truly emulating the tenants of service leadership, the principal always places the spotlight on the students, teachers, staff, and parents but never on himself.

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

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The one practice that has provided the greatest egress to student growth and achievement has been the adoption and practice of a data driven culture among all staff for the purpose of continuous school improvement. Utilizing instructional and management leadership skills, the principal designed systemic staff development embedded with supportive accountability to provide teachers with the knowledge and competence to administer assessments with fidelity, score with consistency, and interpret results objectively. In turn, teachers developed the skills to manage the data to influence lesson design, modify delivery based upon current student demographics and instructional needs, and self-reflect on their own pedagogy. The differentiated model of supervision provided the means for the principal to personalize observations and modify the process into individualized staff development. Utilizing the district resources of the English/Language Arts, mathematics, and Assessment Co-Ordinators as resources promoted a culture of data from grades K - 5 and created a continuum of learning across grade levels. The end result was a cohesive team of educators who took responsibility for students' learning not from September to June but from kindergarten through fifth grade and each teacher readily assumed his/her role as critical to the overall development of each student. The principal also created a leadership team comprised of the reading specialist and math specialist who utilize both diagnostic and prescriptive skills to promote student growth. The team regularly meets with grade levels to discuss trends in student performance, identify best practices that are promoting student growth, and to provide remedies where student performance wanes. Moreover, in 2016, Afton was identified by the Philadelphia Inquirer as a Top Ten performing School in PSSA English Achievement across five counties in Southeastern Pennsylvania and was the only school to be recognized from the thirteen school districts in Bucks County. The trajectory of student achievement has demonstrated significant growth. This is evidenced when student results from MAP, Dibels, DRA2, and PSSA are collected, disaggregated, and corroborated.