

U.S. Department of Education
2020 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

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

Official School Name Norton Elementary School
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 414 North Brooksvale Road
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Cheshire State CT Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 06410-3340

County New Haven County

Telephone (203) 272-7283 Fax _____

Web site/URL http://www.cheshire.k12.ct.us/norton E-mail kgrillo@cheshire.k12.ct.us

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

Date _____

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent* Dr. Jeffrey Solan E-mail jsolan@cheshire.k12.ct.us
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Cheshire School District Tel. (203) 250-2420

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. Anthony Perugini
(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

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 2020 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 2014 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: 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, or 2019.
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

Data should be provided for the most recent school year (2019-2020) unless otherwise stated.

DISTRICT (Question 1 is not applicable to non-public schools)

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 5 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 1 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 7 TOTAL

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located. If unsure, refer to NCES database for correct category: <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/> (Find your school and check “Locale”)

- Urban (city or town)
 Suburban
 Rural

3. Number of students as of October 1, 2019 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent at the school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	17	30	47
1	46	30	76
2	26	25	51
3	37	26	63
4	34	27	61
5	26	23	49
6	31	38	69
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	217	199	416

*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
 - 9.9 % Asian
 - 3.6 % Black or African American
 - 3.9 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 77.1 % White
 - 5.5 % Two or more races
 - 100 % Total**

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

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2018 - 2019 school year: 3%

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

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

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2018 until the end of the 2018-2019 school year	6
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2018 until the end of the 2018-2019 school year	8
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	14
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2018	425
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.03
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	3

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

Russian, Albanian, Korean, Spanish, Urdu, Saurashtra

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 2 %

8 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 12 %

Total number students who qualify: 49

8. Students receiving special education services: 8 %

35 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>7</u> Autism | <u>2</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>5</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>1</u> Developmental Delay | <u>16</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>2</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>1</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>1</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 4

10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to the nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	Number of Staff
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	23
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	9
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	13
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	2

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 18:1

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

Required Information	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014-2015
Daily student attendance	97%	97%	97%	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 2019.

Post-Secondary Status	
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.

The Norton School Community is committed to providing a caring and safe learning environment where all students can strive to reach their fullest potential, academically and as community contributors.

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

Norton School is a caring, professional learning community composed of approximately 60 teachers and support staff. Each day over 400 students in kindergarten through grade six enter our doors. We are a neighborhood school in Cheshire; a suburban town located in central Connecticut. As the population of our town has changed over the years so has our school. Our school population has some cultural and socioeconomic diversity and includes a variety of family dynamics. We take pride in working together with families and community members to provide a learning environment that prepares our students to be successful for the challenging demands of a changing society. Our families are partners in our learning community through numerous volunteer opportunities, parent/teacher communications, as well as an active Parent Teacher Association. Together, our Norton community is dedicated to fostering an environment where students thrive and enjoy learning.

Norton staff members remain dedicated to providing an excellent educational program that meets the academic, social, and emotional needs of our students. Combined, our rigorous curriculum and Cheshire Performance Standards prepare and encourage our students to be Collaborative/Cooperative Learners, Community Contributors, Complex Thinkers, Effective Communicators, Self-Directed Learners, and Creative Thinkers. Our staff is committed to building relationships with students and families. We believe that these positive connections allow students to reach their full potential.

Our teachers use Responsive Classroom, the foundation of our teaching and learning process, to develop a classroom community that fosters relationships between and among students and teachers. To strengthen our already established strong school community, our work this year focused on using the Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) standards to cultivate an equitable learning environment and to actively involve our students in their social, emotional, and academic growth. Our school counselor and school psychologist led our faculty through a series of professional development sessions to explore these standards and create opportunities to explicitly teach these important skills to our students. This work will further develop students' social-emotional awareness, thus making them more successful.

Our strong classroom communities make it possible for our teachers to delve into rigorous curriculum and instruction, focused on Common Core State Standards. A variety of quality assessments provide meaningful feedback to students in order to foster growth. In this supportive and challenging learning environment students are encouraged and guided to become knowledgeable, self-directed, complex thinkers. Committed to providing a personalized learning path for all students, our work is grounded in data-driven instructional planning. We meet the needs of all learners by implementing the workshop model, committing to individual conferencing, and posing questions using Webb's Depth of Knowledge. This individualized approach helps to foster critical thinking while providing opportunities for students to extend their learning. Teachers continuously analyze students' formative understanding and use data in real-time to determine the need for intervention or advancement opportunities. Teachers structure their environments so this process is fluid and the needs are met as they change and develop.

Since our principal began her tenure at Norton School in 2016 we have focused our strategic plan on two goals; complex thinking and social-emotional development. Our professional development opportunities are consistently aligned with these two goals in mind. This year's work included a faculty book study of *The Art of Inquiry* by Nancy Lee Cecil and Jeanne Pfeifer. Our staff is committed to employing the strategies highlighted in this book to foster complex thinking opportunities and to create space for students to push their thinking. Together we have explored best practices through faculty discussions as well as through class learning walks whereby teachers observe each other. This practice has allowed us to develop a common language and understanding of best practices as well as generated great enthusiasm among staff who were excited to learn from their colleagues. We look forward to broadening our strategic goal to include student-generated questions as a strategy to foster complex thinking opportunities.

We believe our positive school culture has empowered our students to be active participants in their learning process. Students, as our partners, have a heavy hand in growing our culture and ensuring it is inclusive of all students. Over the past several years our students have led monthly town meetings, showcasing student

work at all grade levels. This student leadership experience led to a change of mascot, multiple community service projects, and kindness and gratitude campaigns for our community. Our students have a sense of ownership and pride in our school and want to continue to improve our practices. There are many things to be proud of at Norton, students taking leadership roles is one of the standout features that make our school so special.

Norton has a strong school community that cares about growing well-rounded individuals; kind, caring, capable citizens who are interested in giving their best so they can be their best. Students, parents, teachers, and staff, united, cultivate a space where this is possible, a space we are proud to call our school, a school worthy of the honor of having a National Blue Ribbon.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

1a. Overall approach, which may include overarching philosophy or approaches common across subject areas

The core of work in Cheshire Public Schools sits at the intersection of Complex Thinking and Social-Emotional Learning. To that end, each curricular area begins with identifying rigorous standards toward which students work to demonstrate mastery. Some ideas woven throughout the standards include: utilizing evidence and models to support thinking, inquiry, effective communication, creativity, and collaboration, to understand and analyze structure, and build toward independence. Those ideas are strongly connected to the Cheshire performance standards: Complex Thinker, Creative Thinker, Self-Directed Learner, Effective Communicator, Collaborative/Cooperative Learner, and Community Contributor.

Instructionally, an adept blend of approaches helps bring the work relative to the standards alive to the students. Utilizing a gradual release of responsibility (I do, we do, you do), inquiry-based learning, project-based learning, collaborative work, individual conferences, and targeted small group instruction, teachers and staff engage students at high levels. An emphasis on guiding students to be self-directed learners is a constant in the work of the teachers and staff.

Assessments are used to gain a strong understanding of how students are performing relative to the standards as well as observe growth over time. As part of the written curriculum both formative and summative assessments are included and aligned to standards. Even where summative assessments are used, the goal is to have each student demonstrate mastery of each key standard. Therefore, students are provided multiple opportunities and means to demonstrate mastery of each standard. Additionally, a variety of benchmark assessments are used to gain an understanding of how students grow within and across school years. With a balanced assessment approach, teachers have the ability to adjust and respond to meet student needs.

1b. Reading/English language arts

The Connecticut Core Standards provide the foundation for the work within Reading/English language arts. Reading high-quality literature and informational text, building reading foundational skills, writing, speaking and listening, and developing language skills are all areas addressed through these standards. The curriculum is written to directly address these standards, and units of study are each centered around an anchor standard. While each unit highlights the work related to a particular standard, the integration of all reading skills/standards is understood to be essential to student success. Students' ability to read and comprehend increasingly complex literature and informational text is key to the work within the curriculum. There is a firm belief that the best way to grow as a reader is to read. Therefore, students reading "just right books" (books at their independent reading level) daily for a minimum of 20 to 30 minutes is a given in the curriculum. For the youngest learners, being ever mindful of the foundational reading skills each student has acquired helps teachers provide appropriate, personalized instruction that allows each reader to grow at an appropriate rate.

In writing, similar to reading, there is a firm belief that the best way for writers to grow is to write. Through the curriculum, students are exposed to a variety of writing genres appropriate to their grade level and given unit. The curriculum provides key areas of instruction relative to the given genre/unit, and then students follow the writing process and produce their own writing pieces. This recursive process throughout the year gives students plenty of opportunities to write and grow as writers.

Language standards are embedded in both the reading and writing curriculum and are addressed in a natural way given what text students are reading and their own writing. Again, this allows for a personalized approach for each student to grow and show mastery of these standards.

While there are a variety of instructional approaches used, there are three main ways in which we engage

learners in our English/language arts curriculum. First, mini-lessons that rely on a gradual release of responsibility to the learners happen on a daily basis. The approach is for a teacher to model a particular concept (I do), have the students practice the concept together (we do), and then students try the concept individually (you do). This allows students to move relatively quickly to the stage of being the ones doing the work. Additionally, as a means for students to engage in and think deeply about high-level, high-quality texts, teachers use shared inquiry as a key instructional strategy. Often through read alouds, the teachers utilize effective questioning strategies to allow students to explore ideas, meaning, and information in challenging text. Finally, learning is often personalized through the use of individual reading and writing conferences. These conferences allow teachers to meet students where they are instructionally, have students set meaningful goals, and monitor progress over time.

The use of individual conferences is one means to formatively assess students and is one of a host of assessment practices designed to understand student mastery of standards and how students are progressing over time. Identifying reading levels through running records, using a variety of individually administered inventories to assess foundational skill, administering online reading inventory to determine a lexile level, and utilizing rubric-based assessment of writing and written responses to text are key ways mastery of standards and progress is monitored.

1c. Mathematics

The Connecticut Core Standards provide the foundation for the work within Mathematics. While the mathematical content and skills in each grade level are essential for student success, a good portion of the emphasis in math is related to the eight mathematical practices described in the standards. Those practices help provide a means to ensure the development of strong number sense and robust mathematical thinking throughout all of the grade levels.

The scope and sequence of the curriculum, therefore, is built to have students work through the concrete, representational, and abstract stages for each interconnected concept and skill area. Building a strong conceptual understanding through hands-on manipulatives and a variety of mental math and visual math strategies prior to introducing standard algorithms helps solidify student understanding of concepts. The mental math and visual strategies introduced in the early grades are used throughout the grade levels with increasing complexity and sophistication. The curriculum emphasizes students applying strategies that work for them, communicating and defending their thinking to others, understanding the thinking of others, and increasing computational fluency and efficiency.

The foundation of the instructional approach in math begins with guiding students through the concrete, representational, and abstract stages for each given concept or cluster of concepts. While utilizing the gradual release of responsibility model applies to a good portion of the math instruction, it is balanced with providing opportunities for students to engage in productive struggle. Elevating student discourse through effective questioning techniques and math problems that are challenging yet reachable for students is a key aspect of the instructional approach. Additionally, layering in regular opportunities for students to engage in mental math and fluency practice helps foster and build a strong number sense.

Daily formative assessment through exit tickets and similar strategies provide teachers insight into the level of student understanding and allows teachers to make whole class, small group, and individual instructional decisions. Each unit of study also has mid-unit and end of unit assessments that provide students the opportunity to demonstrate mastery of skills and concepts. While these assessments are utilized more in a summative manner, teachers can use them to adjust instruction to meet individual and class needs. Benchmark assessments are also administered to students three times per year and provide a key indicator of student growth.

1d. Science

The Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) are the anchor for the Science Curriculum. The curriculum and related professional development to these relatively new standards are still evolving. Embedding science practices (the behaviors of scientists), cross cutting concepts (those ideas that link all domains of

science), and disciplinary core ideas (the science content) is the work that has and will continue to happen relative to the written curriculum. Including strong, real-world science phenomena has been essential to the development of successful units of study.

The heart of the instructional shifts for teachers has been ensuring that students are the ones “doing the science”. In part, this includes having students observe, model their thinking visually, collaborate, engage in discourse, trial and experiment, and revise their thinking based on a science phenomenon. The chosen science phenomenon is introduced at the beginning of a unit prior to students reading or otherwise learning about the science content associated with the phenomenon. The infusion of science content then happens in doses over the course of the unit. This sequencing is often the reverse of previous science instruction where students would be given the science content first, and then conduct an experiment or activity that matches the content. Having students “do the science” has strong alignment to the overarching emphasis on developing self-directed learners and certainly engages them in complex thinking.

Similar to the shifts in curriculum and instruction, there have been noticeable shifts in science assessment. The science assessments include the three dimensions of science practices, cross cutting concepts, and disciplinary core ideas. This is the case for the more traditional assessments given as part of the curriculum, as well as the significant number of performance tasks that are included.

1e. Social studies/history/civic learning and engagement

The C3 Social Studies framework (College, Career, and Civic Life) provides the anchor for the Social Studies curriculum. Similar to Science, the framework is relatively new, and the curriculum in Social Studies is evolving. Inquiry is a key component of the shifts and priorities in the curriculum. Additionally, developing claims and using evidence, clearly communicating, determining and using helpful sources of information, and taking informed action are tenets of the Social Studies curriculum.

From a developmental perspective, the curriculum is designed for our youngest learners to focus on themselves and their community and build to add a broader and increasingly global understanding as students progress through the grade levels.

The organization of the units primarily follows a thematic approach to the curriculum. As students advance higher in grade levels, an increasing number of case studies are included in the curriculum.

A significant portion of assessments within Social Studies are performance or project-based in some fashion. These types of assessments allow students to demonstrate an authentic understanding of the concepts and/or answer to the unit’s compelling question(s). Additionally, these types of assessments provide students increased choice in how they demonstrate their mastery.

1f. For secondary schools:

1g. For schools that offer preschool for three- and/or four-year old students:

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

In addition to the core curriculum, Norton provides a unified arts curriculum that supports the overall acquisition of skills for students to become complex thinkers and social-emotional learners. All students in kindergarten through sixth grade participate in art, general music, physical education, and health classes. Students in kindergarten through grade five participate in library media classes and our sixth graders receive instruction in Spanish. Instruction in each area is provided for forty-five minutes once every four days.

The visual arts curriculum is grounded in the National Visual Arts Standards (Create, Respond, Connect, Present). Our goal is to enable our students to have choice in their artmaking, which will provide greater opportunities for personalized learning, differentiation, and complex thinking. We aim to teach skills and concepts, not subject matter, and provide for real-world connections and student choice. Our art teacher uses conferencing, assessment rubrics, and artist statements to help students express what they have learned.

The foundation for our performing arts curriculum is grounded in the National Core Arts Standards which are anchored in the concepts: Create, Perform, Respond and Connect. Teachers use the Feierabend method, Conversational Solfege (University of Hartford) which advocates teaching ‘sound before sight’, much like written language. Students in kindergarten through grade three learn to understand music as a whole-body connection through internalizing steady beat, interpretive movement, listening exercises, and call and response before transitioning to written music. Voice is the primary instrument in elementary general music. Students in grades four through six expand upon these concepts as movement, emotion, historical and cultural connections are explored more deeply and through song, dance, composing, improvising, and performing on instruments.

Starting in 5th grade, our instrumental programs follow the path set by general music and expand upon the basic principles of notation. The musical 'conversations' from Conversational Solfege are easily translated to instrumental music as students use the familiar tonal and rhythmic patterns on their instrument. Later students learn how to play as an ensemble, listening to others in the group while simultaneously playing and making adjustments to their own performance. Instrumental students attend lessons once per four-day rotation and ensembles once per week. Nearly 90% of Norton intermediate students participate in the choral or instrumental program.

The physical education curriculum is based on the Society of Health and Physical Educator (SHAPE) Standards. Developing physical literacy through movement, health-enhancing level of physical activity and fitness for life, positive personal and social behaviors, and enjoyment are all tenets of the Physical Education program. The teaching of good sportsmanship, teamwork, problem-solving, and cooperation help support our district initiative of social-emotional learning. The physical education teachers also support the delivery of the health curriculum through integrated classroom instruction including human growth and development lessons.

Spanish is introduced to our students in 6th grade. This is the second year of implementation. The language program, FLES, is based upon the five C's of language learning: “Communication, Cultures, Comparisons, Connections and Communities” and is aligned with both state and national world language standards as well as the American Council of the Teaching of Foreign Languages guidelines. The FLES program is proficiency-based and is taught sequentially and connected to interdisciplinary content, specifically social studies.

Library Media curriculum is grounded in the American Association of School Librarians standards and supports the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts. In addition to these, the recent emphasis on digital citizenship, the design thinking process, and experiences through maker space have made the library media center an even more exciting centerpiece of the school.

All students participate in the comprehensive school counseling program in which they receive developmentally appropriate classroom lessons on academic, career, and social-emotional development. These lessons are provided by the school counselor. Through this curriculum, students develop student success plans in grade six which are the foundation for future planning in middle school. Counselors also provide group and individual counseling services for students who need additional support with coping skills, grief, divorce/separated/restructured families, etc.

Our overall district focus on social-emotional learning involves our commitment to the implementation of Responsive Classroom practices. Our commitment to this approach helps us to create a safe, challenging, and joyful classroom and schoolwide climate for all students through engaging academics, positive community, effective management, and developmentally responsive teaching. To establish a cohesive understanding of schoolwide expectations students and staff worked together to identify the distinguishing characteristics of successful community members. We use the acronym SOAR to capture these characteristics and to build a common understanding of each pillar, which are Showing Integrity, Owning your own learning, Accepting responsibility, and Respecting yourself, others, and property. Implementing the SOAR initiative enables our Norton School community to work together as one cohesive unit with shared expectations and responsibilities.

3. Academic Supports:

3a. Students performing below grade level

Student progress related to grade level expectations is monitored very closely through a variety of assessments. When students perform below grade level expectations for a period of time and/or on key benchmarks, individualized support plans are developed and implemented. Teachers, the building instructional coach, the district Math coach, the district Language Arts consultant, Learning Support Tutors (LST), and/or Instructional Assistants (IA) are involved in developing the plans, identifying the appropriate tier of support, and/or implementing the plans. While the focus objectives for a given plan are based on the standards and curriculum, each student's plan is truly crafted individually to meet his or her needs.

The type of instructional support may range from individual in-class support from the teacher, LST, or IA on a weekly basis to individual pull out support five times per week with an LST or IA in addition to core instruction. Regardless of the level and type of support, almost all of the support provided is on an individual basis. Many support models utilize small group instruction ranging from 3 to 12 students at each tier. In this model, by providing individual support through individual plans, the support is not only tailored to the student, but the result is that students often make significant progress.

All of the hallmarks of effective support systems such as universal screens, six to eight-week cycles of intervention, research based interventions, clear and focused learning objectives, progress monitoring, high fidelity of implementation, the appropriate movement to various tiers of support, and communication with families are embedded in the process to support students who are performing below grade level.

3b. Students performing above grade level

There are a significant number of ways and opportunities students can extend, enrich, and/or accelerate their learning.

Within the English/language arts curriculum, because students are reading books and text at their own level, the core curriculum provides opportunities for students to engage in work above their grade level. In addition to simply working in more complex texts, teachers can also point students to work on the next grade level's progression of a given standard. Responsive supplementary online software, such as MobyMax, also helps personalize instruction to a student's individual levels regardless of the student's grade.

In math, each unit in the curriculum has enrichment opportunities written into the curriculum. These enrichment opportunities are typically on the application side of math and require students to integrate multiple skills and concepts, problem solve, and communicate effectively. Further, supplementary online tools such as Zearn and Khan Academy are used to personalize instruction to a student's individual level regardless of the student's grade. Based on performance, students in sixth grade may also enter a math acceleration protocol that puts them into a position to take one of two higher-level math courses once they enter the middle school as seventh grade students.

Students also avail themselves of many interest-based choice opportunities given throughout the year. One example is participating in Discovery Expo. Students design and create an independent project of their choice, and share it at an annual district-wide exposition. Norton School is heavily represented at this highly impressive event.

Academies through our Academically Gifted Program (AGP) are also offered to students whose performance and aptitude are at the highest levels. Students are identified for AGP through broad search criteria which includes not only standardized testing measures such as high scores on the Smarter Balanced Assessment and Otis Lennon School Ability Test but also teacher recommendation based on in-class performance. Students may choose the academies that match their interests and strengths. A district teacher facilitates each academy, meets with students weekly, and otherwise manages the academies through Google Classroom. These academies are offered in addition to core instruction.

3c. Special education

Special education supports the continuum of services based on student needs expressed through each student's individualized education program (IEP). Providing appropriate, specialized instruction with any related services in the least restrictive environment is an obvious high priority for Planning and Placement Teams.

Applying a strong philosophy of inclusion and universal design, special educators work closely with general education teachers, unwrapping the standards, providing accommodations, and modifications. Special educators and support specialists collaborate with general educators in the daily planning of instruction, through grade level meetings, and professional development. This collaboration supports special education students' access to grade level instruction while receiving the necessary supports, such as alternative materials, modified assessments, and leveled text. Special education teachers and support staff attend grade level curriculum training as well as training for specialized instructional strategies. While many special educators design their own materials, they also have access to various online supports, alternative materials, and technology to support instruction based on grade level standards.

Assistive technology, from modified paper, pencil grips, and sensory tools to high tech tools such as Chromebooks, Kindles, and Ipads, are provided beginning in the primary level to ensure students are able to access the curriculum while working on basic skills. Students are given direct instruction on how to utilize programs such as Google Read and Write, a text to speech program. Providing these supports early allows students to efficiently access instruction and demonstrate their learning through everyday work, assessments, and state mandated testing.

Special educators support students through a co-teaching model, pushing supports into the classroom, as well as through pull out services providing specialized instruction with small groups and individuals. Each special education teacher supervises several instructional assistants that support students in the general education classroom working with small groups, ensuring accommodations are in place, and applying modifications as outlined in the IEP. Instructional assistants also support students across school settings. We believe investing in a strong philosophy of inclusion, and providing the resources necessary will close the gap between our non-disabled and disabled students.

3d. ELLs, if a special program or intervention is offered

The supports for English Learners (EL) mirror the process used to support students who are performing below grade level. That is, the type of instructional support may range from individual in class support from the teacher, LST, or IA on a weekly basis to individual pull out support five times per week with an LST or IA in addition to core instruction. The support most aligns with a sheltered immersion model where there are dual goals of providing access to grade level content and developing English Language proficiency.

The goals for each student are based on their performance relative to the Connecticut English Language Proficiency (CELP) standards. Progress is monitored against a rubric based on the CELP standards as well as the LAS Links Language Assessment.

Contracted professional development is provided on an annual basis to teachers and staff to help assure the use of effective strategies to support the EL population. Additionally, significant effort is made to connect with families of EL students, to ensure the types of supports are well understood, answer questions, and help families connect to the school and broader community.

3e. Other populations (e.g., migrant), if a special program or intervention is offered

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

We are the Norton Nighthawks. We empower our students to soar to great heights. We provide a climate that fosters school spirit, a drive to learn and grow, and a willingness to take risks. We embrace a growth mindset that inspires us to push the boundaries of our students and staff beyond what feels safe so we can conquer new frontiers as learners.

Each day our students are welcomed by staff who are genuinely happy to see them. From our custodian to kitchen staff, to the school counselor and principals, our students are greeted with a “good morning” or a “high five” as they enter Norton School. They proceed to their classrooms where they start their day in a Morning Meeting. This sets the tone for respectful learning while building a community of learners who feel safe with each other. Their day is filled with opportunities to explore rigorous curriculum with the support of their teacher to guide and push them. Students participate in goal setting conferences and help articulate their personalized learning path to success.

To support students along their journey, we have a staff dedicated to ensuring they each thrive in their own unique way. Our classroom teachers and specialists employ Responsive Classroom approaches to foster a positive climate that includes building respectful relationships between students. In addition to the constant support and explicit instruction provided in the classroom, students participate in a comprehensive school counseling program in which they receive developmentally appropriate classroom lessons on academic, career, and social-emotional development. These lessons are provided by the school counselor. Group and individual counseling services for students are also provided to those who need additional support. Students are encouraged to self-advocate for support when it’s needed by completing a “Do you want to chat?” form that is located outside our counselor’s office door. These layers of support create a culture that values the whole child and recognizes their journey can be challenging at times. Norton provides a safe space that nurtures and supports our students. Recent climate survey results show 91% of Norton parents reported having a trusted adult at Norton School. The dedication and support of our entire Norton community provide the guidance needed for students to navigate the challenges of life.

Students at Norton have a prominent role as leaders in our community. Students feel supported, are taught the skills they need to be collaborative learners and community contributors and feel a sense of ownership for the well being of our school. Norton students are leaders of their own learning and our school culture. Our student leaders actively pursue community service projects and lead our monthly town meetings to celebrate student work. They also assist with morning announcements, kindness and gratitude campaigns, and even our daily dismissal procedures. Our students are the heart and soul of Norton, and are successful because they believe it!

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Parents and families are an integral part of Norton’s climate and culture in many ways. They value education and support our work by partnering with us throughout their child(ren)’s journey. Our active parent community offers a diverse perspective on ways to enrich and enhance our practices, which helps us continually grow as a school.

Our classroom teachers welcome parents for Open House each September. It is here they begin to forge a relationship to foster a successful school year. Parents are encouraged to communicate their needs and to advocate on their child’s behalf whenever necessary. Parent/Teacher conferences are scheduled for October and March, but are welcomed, and utilized, as needed throughout the year. Teachers share frequent updates with families through the use of newsletters. Newsletters communicate both the academic and social-emotional standards being focused on in the classroom. They provide prompting questions and ideas to stimulate conversations about their child’s learning. Our parents value this communication as it supports their work at home with their children.

Our PTA is instrumental in contributing to our school culture. They are an active group willing to plan events, raise funds, and provide cultural activities to enrich our school experiences. They co-host our first day of school “Happy New Year” celebration, plan family gatherings such as our ice cream social and Trunk or Treat, and maintain the beautification of our grounds. They also provide enrichment opportunities including science presentations such as High Touch High Tech and Birds of Prey and One School One Book author visits. They organize fundraisers to support all of these important activities. These special events add to our vibrant Norton atmosphere and wouldn’t be possible without PTA volunteers and financial support.

Families are active members of our Norton community and have a visible presence in our school on a regular basis. They attend celebrations of student work during our Town Meetings and class events, band, orchestra, and chorus concerts, our art show, and school play. They have lunch with their child(ren) in our cafeteria and can even be found reading to their child’s class. Parents participate in school and district-based committees, such as Safe School Climate and Indoor Air Quality; an invaluable contribution to the greater good of our school and district. Many parents attend the principal’s monthly Coffee and Conversation meetings, which is a platform dedicated to addressing parent questions and building home/school connections in a small group setting.

As a school, we are committed to partnering with our parents to ensure our students have the very best place to come to learn and grow. We invite parent input through a yearly school climate survey. The results have been extremely positive over the past several years, however, we scrutinize the data to find ways to better our practices. We want our parents to feel important, valued, and respected as our partners because we believe this is essential for our students’ success. Our Norton families are key building blocks in the foundation of our school.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

Norton educators are held to the highest standards and are respected, valued, and appreciated for attaining excellence. Committed to recognizing the dedication, passion, and work ethic of staff, administration fosters a climate of trust and respect that promotes true collaboration. Through team-building activities, deeply respectful working relationships are established for the purpose of building on our already strong practices and achieving great results for our students.

As hard work is evident, Norton also creates enjoyable opportunities that make staff excited to come to work every day. Team building activities are embedded in our school year. Teachers enjoy games such as human scrabble and scavenger hunts. The ten days before winter break have become a tradition to celebrate the end of the first term. These days are filled with treats, breaks, and fun activities to lift spirits. We play reindeer games, hold a White Elephant gift exchange, and take Elfie Selfies. The excitement is palpable and not only helps strengthen team relationships but demonstrates appreciation for their consistent dedication and hard work. Throughout the year we enjoy crockpot day, staff visits to the trampoline park, lip-syncing staff videos, and gathering to celebrate, or mourn, the important events in our lives. These experiences help our staff stay deeply connected with one another. Our connections are the secret ingredient in the recipe that creates Norton School.

Our staff feels supported as they encounter the heavy-lift during change initiatives and new professional learning. Our commitment to reflection and the evaluation of strategies ensures our leveraging of best practices. Our leadership team of administration, instructional coaches, and teachers work together to determine needs and establish plans for growth. We gather a variety of data, including curriculum-based measures, standardized tests, and climate surveys to determine areas of focus. Together we establish our strategic plan goals, which provide a framework for our professional development.

While this process is exceptional, growth is made possible due to the collaborative culture of the staff. Our team learns from one another on a daily basis. They are willing to share ideas, seek help, and try new things because of their colleagues' constant encouragement. Our instructional coach supports teachers by ensuring their understanding of curriculum and assessments, modeling lessons, reviewing and analyzing data, determining focus objectives and intervention plans, and exploring instructional strategies. Our teachers have a strong work ethic, are open to constructive support, are committed to their professional growth, and aspire to continue to learn and grow.

Additional professional learning takes place in a variety of settings, including grade level, department, and faculty meetings. However, we believe that the best professional development is “the teacher down the hall.” Through class visits, teachers are provided an opportunity to observe colleagues. This practice has allowed us to develop a common language and understanding of best practices and has generated great enthusiasm among staff who are excited to learn from their colleagues. Our teachers at Norton School have many individual strengths and are each an important piece of our success. We take every opportunity to share and highlight those individual strengths in order to build the capacity of our entire Norton School community.

4. School Leadership:

Norton School’s administrative team believes in a shared leadership philosophy. They believe that it takes a village to educate a child so they utilize structures and practices that include a variety of stakeholders to provide input. Every decision made is with students’ best interest at the center.

Administration fosters a school culture and climate that is warm and respectful while also upholding high standards. The leadership team works collaboratively with staff, parents, and students to foster academic and social-emotional growth. They build capacity by maintaining an open-door policy and welcoming staff into their office. Teachers feel comfortable going to administration for a quick hello and a piece of chocolate, a shoulder to cry on, an ear to vent, or another perspective to consider. The connection between the leadership team and staff is built on mutual respect and trust, which is critical to our work and ultimately impacts student achievement.

Teachers are trusted leaders within our community as well. They lead and manage their classrooms, making the instructional decisions needed to promote student growth. They work collaboratively with colleagues on committees to analyze student data, examine curriculum, review instructional practices, evaluate our school safety practices and procedures, and assess our school climate. They have a strong voice in the day to day operations of our school as well as the long term planning that is critical to ensuring we grow our practice and maximize our student learning.

Student leadership is fostered in classrooms starting at a very young age with the use of Responsive Classroom strategies. Together students work with teachers to create classroom expectations that help them achieve their hopes and dreams. Students take the lead to demonstrate Norton’s SOARing pillars by Showing integrity, Owning their own learning, Accepting responsibility, and Respecting themselves, others, and property. They demonstrate this in their classrooms, hallways, cafeteria, playground, and on the bus. As they grow and develop, the leadership roles increase and students begin leading our town meetings, organizing community service projects, and planning and executing kindness and gratitude campaigns. Some student leaders serve on student council, safety patrol, and as reading buddies for primary aged students.

Our shared leadership philosophy relies on the multiple perspectives that make up our school community because their points of view matter. We have several leadership teams that include parents, community members, teachers, and support staff. These include Principal’s Advisory, Safe School Climate, School Safety, SRBI, Indoor Air Quality, Crisis Team, as well as grade level and department teams. We work together as a school community to ensure our students are fully supported and are provided a warm, safe school to thrive and meet their full potential.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Norton staff is committed to student growth and achievement. Because the climate of our school is strong and positive, we are afforded the opportunity to do difficult work together. To ensure every student makes the growth they deserve, our work is consistently grounded in data. Our data teams are committed to continuous improvement in staff performance as well as student learning. As a collaborative group, we dedicate time to intensive reflection of our instructional practices while staying focused on student benchmark data. Through comprehensive examination, we evaluate the effectiveness of our practices and their impact on student achievement. The work of our data teams is instrumental in the outstanding growth and achievement of Norton students.

This process of reviewing data has been clearly established and practiced at Norton School. We have created a friendly environment in our curriculum resource room where teachers can come for instructional materials or advice from our instructional coach. Our data team meetings are also held in this room where data charts indicating our district benchmarks are clearly posted as a reference for teachers. Teachers understand how to organize, compare, and analyze data and have a clear understanding of the “why” behind this analysis. They are comfortable reviewing class data with team members in a non-judgemental or evaluative way. It is clear for our teachers at Norton that data is used to best meet the needs of individual students and to plan for the most effective approach to instruction.

At specific points in the school year, we review district benchmark assessments that include phonics, fluency, comprehension, writing, and math data. More regularly our attention is on formative assessment data used to establish plans to personalize each student’s path. In some cases, this means intervention may be needed and in others, it is enrichment and extension. Teachers leave our meetings empowered and equipped to implement instructional practices that ultimately leverages student growth.

This process that has been established at Norton School has led to the collective belief that teachers and effective teaching practices are the single most important factor in the success of their students. Teachers have watched their data climb and experienced students’ “aha” moments that came from changes in their instructional practices based on the data analyzed during our meetings. Teachers have collaborated with one another, brainstormed ideas, and looked at the child as a whole to make decisions that ensure individual student success. This strong sense of teacher self-efficacy at Norton School has developed into a community of educators who love their job and see the difference they make each and every day.