

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

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

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

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

School Mailing Address 301 6th Street SW
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Altoona State IA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 50009-1609

County Polk County

Telephone (515) 967-3771 Fax (515) 967-2079

Web site/URL https://www.southeastpolk.org/ E-mail steven.stotts@southeastpolk.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. Dirk Halupnik E-mail dirk.halupnik@southeastpolk.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Southeast Polk Community School District Tel. (515) 967-4294

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. Gary Fischer
(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):
- 8 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 2 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 1 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 11 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	27	25	52
K	33	34	67
1	31	28	59
2	33	23	56
3	45	21	66
4	29	44	73
5	25	27	52
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	223	202	425

*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
 - 1 % Asian
 - 11 % Black or African American
 - 7 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 1 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 73 % White
 - 7 % 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: 10%

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	32
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2018 until the end of the 2018-2019 school year	16
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	48
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2018	469
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.10
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	10

6. Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):
Arabic, Liberian English, Spanish, Korean, Dinka, Tigrinya, Somali, and Pohnpeian

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 4 %
15 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 37 %
 Total number students who qualify: 159

8. Students receiving special education services: 13 %

56 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>1</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>3</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>15</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>3</u> Developmental Delay | <u>22</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>23</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>18</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>2</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>2</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: 8

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.	19
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	15
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	22
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	1

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.

Required Information	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014-2015
Daily student attendance	96%	97%	97%	96%	99%
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.

Provide a safe community in which all students can reach their full academic, social, and emotional potential in and beyond the classroom.

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

Altoona Elementary School is one of eleven schools that make up the Southeast Polk School District. The school district has eight elementary buildings, a sixth grade center, a junior high building for seventh and eighth grade students and a high school building for grades nine through twelve. The district consists of four communities which include: Altoona, Mitchellville, Pleasant Hill, and Runnells, Iowa. These communities were consolidated to form the Southeast Polk School District in 1961. Each community has brought a different demographic feel to the school district. Mitchellville and Runnells are rural communities, located on the eastern edge of the district. The city of Altoona is a small suburban community, centrally located within the district boundaries, and Pleasant Hill is a larger suburban area located on the southwestern edge of the school district. From the time the district was consolidated in 1961 to our current school year, 2019-2020, student enrollment has increased from 2,708 students to 7,200 students in grades kindergarten through twelfth grade. The families that make up the Southeast Polk School District are proud, hard-working people who take great pride in their schools. They value the importance of an excellence education for their children and strongly support the extra-curricular activities that are provided as an outlet for our students. They bleed black and gold and are a strong part of our RAMS Family!

Altoona Elementary provides an exciting and unique learning environment for our students and the families we serve. We are committed to ensuring academic excellence, mutual respect, and an appreciation for diversity. We want our students to be established problem-solvers, critical thinkers, and confident learners who have every opportunity to succeed in the school setting and beyond.

Altoona Elementary is a Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) Recognition School in the State of Iowa. The key initiative to being recognized as a school with this honor is that we are committed to reinforcing positive attitudes and behaviors of all stakeholders within our building. We strive to focus on the positive “little” things that students demonstrate on a daily basis so that we can reduce disruptive behaviors that interfere with student learning. Our goal is to provide our students with seven positive comments for every one negative factor that could exist. By doing so, we have been able to reduce inappropriate and disruptive behaviors that impact the ability for our students to efficiently and effectively learn in the classroom setting. Being a PBIS School has most definitely had a positive impact on student achievement at Altoona Elementary. At Altoona Elementary, we are respectful. We are always responsible. We are motivated learners and we practice safety. We are kind to everyone and stand up for what is right. We accept and appreciate others as they are and we understand that we must use our voice.

When identifying creative techniques and programs that we have used to support student learning, Altoona Elementary has worked very hard to develop a collaborative culture among the teaching staff throughout the building. Teams of teachers meet on a weekly basis to discuss student achievement data, common formative assessments, and Multi-Tiered Support System (MTSS) levels of support to ensure that no students fall through the cracks. The Southeast Polk School District made a commitment to send our teachers, over the last five years, to the PLC At Work Institutes that have taken place across the Midwest. Teams of four to six teachers have attended the institutes each year, over the summer months, to develop a stronger group of educators who are committed to transforming our school so that our students’ needs always come first when making educational decisions. Our team has definitely gotten tighter in recommitting our efforts to support each and every student at Altoona Elementary. We have continued to build our culture and create a purpose for our work.

When looking at the social and emotional characteristics that impact student learning, Altoona Elementary continues to build strong and healthy relationships that are pertinent to academic success. Five years ago, the Southeast Polk School District adopted the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program to support student to student relationships in the school setting and community. These efforts have truly improved peer relations to make our school safer and they have definitely made our school a more positive place for our students to learn and grow. Teachers continue to implement the Olweus curriculum and present lessons that help students accept and appreciate others as they are. Routine classroom meetings keep our focus on building a positive and productive environment at Altoona Elementary. Their work is paying off!

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

After the State of Iowa adopted new standards, we began our process by clearly articulating what we wanted all students to know and be able to do. We started with the curriculum areas of math and reading, and brought grade level teams together to prioritize the standards. We came to consensus on how we would make decisions about priority and supporting standards, including endurance, leverage, readiness for the next level of learning, and supporting success on external indicators. As each grade level prioritized standards, we engaged in vertical conversations to look for gaps and repetition in our learning progressions. This included further unpacking of the standards to develop a shared understanding and clear articulation of what this would look like at each grade level. Once we had identified priority and supporting standards at different levels, each grade then bundled the standards into units of study. These units included guiding questions, enduring understandings, as well as a matching of instructional resources to best support the learning. The next step was to create assessments designed to measure the priority standards for each unit. These were written in a pretest and post test format, and we used a data management system to efficiently provide information for teams, as well as, study trends and patterns at the system level. We used this same protocol to develop curriculum for science, social studies, physical education and fine arts.

As we revisit and revise our curriculum each year, the unpacking of our standards supports teams in writing proficiency scales for each of our priority standards. These learning progressions have helped teachers in planning more precision for interventions and enrichment, have supported feedback, and have engaged students more fully in their own learning. All of these elements, which include, curriculum, assessment, collaboration, instruction, and feedback are a part of the process and each component informs the other and provides information for reflection and revision.

1b. Reading/English language arts

At Altoona Elementary, we provide a rigorous, yet developmentally appropriate, literacy curriculum that is aligned to the Iowa Core English Language Arts standards. In the early grades, we provide systematic and structured phonemic awareness and phonics instruction with strong integration of fluency practice, comprehension skills, and writing. In second grade, we continue to build on those areas, but we begin to shift to comprehension and deep analysis of text through close reading and writing. We integrate fluency practice and word work to strengthen those areas. Our language arts units are collaboratively developed by our teachers and other teacher representatives across the school district. We use the Iowa Core Learning Standards as a guide to identify text, activities, and resources. We also build unit assessments and formative assessments to help monitor our students' learning and to guide our instruction. We meet on a weekly basis to plan, monitor data, and evaluate students' progress. We work as a team to identify language arts areas that need strengthening or enriched for our Altoona Elementary learners. The relationships between our classroom teachers, reading interventionists, TAG, and special education teachers are strong. We frequently collaborate between all stakeholders so we can best serve our readers and writers. We discuss instruction, growth in data, qualitative observations, and instructional strategies that are aligned to the needs of our students.

1c. Mathematics

At Altoona Elementary we incorporate the content and teaching practices as outlined in the Iowa Core State Standards in Mathematics. The guiding principles include a balance between highly effective instruction and rigorous, cohesive content. The principles include: Characteristics of Effective Instruction, Teaching for Understanding, Student-Centered Classrooms, Teaching for Student Differences, Rigor and Relevance, Assessment for Learning, and Common Core State Standards for Mathematics. The Iowa Core math standards endeavor to follow such a design, not only by stressing conceptual understanding of key ideas, but also by continually returning to organizing principles such as place value or the properties of operations to

structure those ideas. Our teachers incorporate the characteristics of effective instruction in their classrooms to meet the instructional needs of all students.

Altoona Elementary teachers also integrate teaching for understanding through the concrete-representational-abstract continuum of learning. Math instruction is grounded in problem solving and includes rich mathematical tasks. Students make sense of the math and engage in classroom and small group discussions around their thinking. Math teachers assess students, both formally and informally, to determine next steps in their learning. Through teacher feedback and the use of levels of proficiency scales, students are able to self-reflect on their learning and celebrate growth throughout the year.

1d. Science

The district's vision and mission for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) is "At Southeast Polk Schools, all students engage in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics to identify challenges and design solutions. We provide opportunities for our Altoona Elementary students to collaborate, communicate, create, and think critically to solve real-world problems. Our students participate in hands-on learning opportunities to build the skills they need to be the next generation of innovators." Currently, Altoona Elementary has implemented the STEM curriculum from Project Lead the Way. Project Lead the Way Launch is a framework to successfully address that vision.

Additionally, we continue to implement several other STEM programs and projects. These include Defined STEM, A World in Motion (engineering), Spheros (coding), Engineering is Elementary, Virtual reality systems, Everblock systems (engineering), Making STEM Connections (makerspace), Drone training, and The Hour of Code. Our students benefit from these programs by growing a passion for STEM subjects. Students decide in elementary school if they think they are good at math and science, and they develop their interests in these subjects at a young age. Confidence in STEM subjects is vital to our students as they continue their learning progression into junior high, high school, and post-secondary experiences. Students participating in these activities learn to solve problems, think critically, and follow a structured design process. They also better understand that making mistakes is not only okay but an important part of learning. Our building continues to receive positive feedback on STEM from students, parents, teachers, school board members, and others in the community. We are excited about the level of STEM implementation, student engagement, academic rigor, career skills relevance, and commitment from school leaders.

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

The Iowa Core Standards in Social Studies come from the C3 Framework for College, Career, and Civic Life. The guiding principles include these ideas: 1) Social studies prepares the nation's young people for college, careers, and civil life; 2) Inquiry is at the heart of social studies; 3) Social studies involves interdisciplinary applications and welcomes integration of the arts and humanities; and 4) Social studies education should have direct and explicit connections to the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts. We understand that a focus on Social Studies can help build the knowledge and vocabulary needed to understand both texts and the world around us. It builds on the natural curiosity and wonder that our students bring to learning and provides authentic opportunities for integration, communication, and problem-solving. In addition, our district vision includes "Success for college, career, and civic life." A curriculum rich in social studies helps us meet this vision for our students. Altoona Elementary uses the Inquiry Design Model as a design for unit and lesson structure at all grade levels. The Inquiry Design Model (IDM) is an approach to creating curriculum and instructional materials that builds on teachers' knowledge and expertise, and focuses on the main elements of the instructional design process as envisioned in the Inquiry Arc of the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards (2013). This model is used to design lessons that shape the classroom experience through inquiry-based teaching and learning. Through this design, our grade level teams recognize that curricular integration supports authentic application of literacy skills and builds background knowledge in content areas. Therefore, lesson design includes opportunities to meet literacy goals while building social studies content at Altoona Elementary.

1f. For secondary schools:

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

Little Rams Preschool at Altoona Elementary follows the Iowa Early Learning Standards. These standards align to the Iowa Core and are designed for children birth to five years. Our preschool classrooms are certified by Iowa's Quality Preschool Program Standards, and the Quality Rating System. Our teachers are dual certified in both early childhood, and early childhood special education. The classrooms in our building are inclusive, serving and educating all students. These rooms incorporate nationally recognized curriculum in all domains; Creative Curriculum, Heggerty Phonemic Awareness, Second Steps Social/Emotional Curriculum, and Handwriting Without Tears. We provide developmental assessments to track student progress and these assessments include: Teaching Strategies GOLD, Individual Growth and Development Indicators (IGDI), and Ages and Stages Questionnaire.

Little Rams Preschool has a significant impact on school readiness, 93% of students who attend our program are successful on fall FAST screening. The remaining students are considered low risk. This success comes from our collaboration with all staff at Altoona Elementary. We also work closely with community organizations to identify and enroll students who are considered at-risk, increasing the district's rate of kindergarten readiness.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Altoona Elementary provides our kindergarten through fifth grade students with instruction in the curricular areas of art, guidance counseling, media, music, and physical education. Band is also introduced to students as they enter their fifth grade year. In order to have a cross-curricular impact on student learning, the specialists work collaboratively within their group and with our classroom teachers to discuss units of study, learning patterns of students, and methods to enhance the engagement of student learning. Each teacher, within a particular content area, is required to state the purpose of the lesson and the learner objectives for that lesson. Expectations for learner behaviors are introduced at the beginning of the school year and are then reviewed periodically throughout the school year. These expectations are consistent throughout the building and students appear to appreciate and respond to these in an appropriate manner. By doing so, teachers are provided with the opportunity to present their lessons in a setting that is positive, effective, efficient, and consistent.

The medium of art allows our students to explore and create artifacts that show personal expression through their works. We have also worked extremely hard to incorporate writing into their lessons to provide another means of self-expression. Our students receive one hour of art instruction each week.

Students attend guidance classes on a weekly basis for a period of thirty minutes. During their lessons, our counselor provides a curriculum that targets a series of areas that focus on making safe choices, developing strong and trusting relationships with others, and dealing with conflict in a productive manner. The interactive lessons that are provided are engaging and students thoroughly enjoy the opportunity to share in a safe and caring environment. College and career readiness is also a major component of the guidance curriculum. During this unit of study, students begin to understand the importance of being respectful and responsible. These are contributing factors to becoming a motivated learner in the school setting and beyond to support their employability skills in the future. We want our students to develop a strong skill set that includes a strong work ethic and the ability to take ownership of their learning. Students also work with our counselor to better understand and value diversity. Accepting and appreciating others as they are works wonders in developing productive classrooms and playgrounds that promote active, engaging, and safe behaviors.

Media is provided to our students on a weekly to bi-weekly basis, dependent on the grade level. Media also provides a perfect opportunity for cross-curricular learning. Our media instructor does an excellent job of collaborating with our teachers to provide learning extensions that are supported through the use of technology. Whether it's a power-point presentation or a research project, students acquire the skills necessary to take ownership of their learning to complete project-based activities. Media's curriculum also focuses on 21st century skills that are essential to our students' success in communicating effectively in a school and future work environments.

Our students attend physical education classes twice each week to develop physical skills, stay active and understand the importance of collaborating with others to establish a team that works well accomplishing a common goal. Whether the focus is on fine motor skills or efficient loco-motor movement, students utilize the learned skills to become more productive in playing games with peers. Physical education classes also promote the importance of self-discipline in accomplishing complex tasks and students also begin to understand how to persevere when challenged. These learner traits become equally important when a student is challenged with rigorous academic tasks. The last component of physical education aligns with wellness and self-care, which happens to also align with the 21st Century Skills framework.

Music and band continue to also provide cross-curricular connections and support the development of 21st Century Skills. Whether students are reading music or counting the measures, students are expected to utilize learner behaviors that stay the course when learning how to play a new instrument or sing a song. The world of music also provides our students with another means of communicating to connect with others in a much more creative and complex way. Student discipline is put to the test when they must manage their own time and develop a schedule for weekly, if not, daily practice time to play an instrument or write music. It should be noted that the importance of these curricular areas goes a long way in developing a motivated and well-balanced learner at Altoona Elementary. Currently at this time, we do not offer a foreign language at Altoona Elementary.

3. Academic Supports:

3a. Students performing below grade level

Altoona Elementary aligns the priority standards and classroom instruction with our unit assessments that are given in both English Language Arts and math. Throughout the units being taught, teachers administer common formative assessments to provide them with up-to-date data on how students are progressing. Summative assessments are also provided at the end of each unit. This information is used, along with universal-screener assessments and the Iowa State Assessment of Student Progress (ISASP) to give us a series of data points to determine specific student needs. Students who fall into the group performing below grade level receive targeted small group instruction from their classroom teacher approximately four times per week. They also can be identified to receive reading specialist support and/or Title I support in the areas of reading and/or math, depending on what the data indicates. Teachers also collaborate on a weekly basis to look at student data to determine the level of multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) for their students. Typically, the group of teachers at a specific grade level will then determine which students need intensified instruction that is aligned to a standard or standards that are being taught. Grade level teachers can also flex their schedule as needed to prioritize extra time for those students who are struggling. If the instructional interventions are not showing academic growth over time, with the analysis of progress monitoring data, teachers reconvene as a differentiated collaboration team to determine if a suspicion of disability exists. The school team, with the support of Heartland Education Agency and the child's parents, will then complete an evaluation over a period of up to sixty days to determine if the student could be entitled and supported in a special education program. It is our goal to strengthen core instruction and provide as many instructional supports as needed to close the achievement gap for our students.

3b. Students performing above grade level

Altoona Elementary utilizes teacher observations, unit assessments, universal-screeners, Cognitive Abilities assessments, and the Iowa State Assessments of Student Progress to determine if students could benefit from consistent enrichment opportunities and potential placement in our talented and gifted program. From the start, grade level teams identify students who are consistently performing at high academic levels. They implement targeted, small groups to accommodate the learners' needs. They also provide additional learning opportunities that enhance problem-solving and critical thinking skills. The level of rigor is increased and the implementation of enrichment opportunities becomes more consistent. In the area of math, if students demonstrate positive achievement gaps that are well above the student average at a particular grade level, we can provide further assessment opportunities to gather more data. We do this by administering an end-of-the-year math assessment at the next grade level. If students score eighty percent or higher on this assessment, we consult with all of the stakeholders, including our parents to determine if math acceleration

should take place. Acceleration support can be provided by our talented and gifted teacher, our math acceleration teacher, or a grade level teacher that teaches math at the next grade level. Our math acceleration teacher provides coverage at all eight elementary buildings in our district so the support we receive from this specialist is somewhat limited. In the area of English Language Arts, teams of teachers provide levels of multi-tiered systems of support to accommodate specific learner needs. Our goal continues to focus on our students and their academic growth in all subject areas. When looking at other subject areas, such as science and social studies, most enrichment activities take place within their own room with the support of their classroom teacher, the instructional coach, and the curriculum content representative.

3c. Special education

Altoona Elementary School's mission is to provide a safe community in which all students can reach their full academic, social, and emotional potential in and beyond the classroom. In an effort to close the achievement gap for students in special education, we focus on four primary areas. First, we encompass an authentic approach of "all means all," and our staff is dedicated to support every student, every day. We strive to have a growth mindset with a primary focus always on the students. Secondly, all teachers are committed to meeting the diverse needs of our students through use of effective instructional methodology and differentiated instruction. Our special education teachers collaborate weekly with the grade level teachers to align our instruction with the individual student's goal. We use research based instructional materials and strategies to support our students in both reading and math. The following elements highlight our instruction, intervention, and assessment methods at Altoona Elementary. They include literacy instruction focused on phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension; Explicit math instruction that includes clear models, time for practice, and extensive feedback; Assessments focused on standards and learning objectives that provide deeper insight into student proficiency and growth; and Use of formative assessment to consistently monitor student progress and adapt instruction to meet student needs.

Another focus for Altoona has been to design a Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) approach, that ensures all students receive strong core instruction with supplemental instruction when there is a need. Through a collaborative process, driven by data, students are assigned to groups. These groups are small, flexible, and targeted towards areas of growth. Finally, in conjunction with our tiered system, we prioritize differentiated collaboration with all stakeholders ongoing throughout the year. During these collaborative meetings, teachers and staff discuss the student's individualized education plan (IEP), progress monitoring data, interventions, teacher observations, and educational resources that collectively help make instructional decisions for student's success. At Altoona, we believe that all students can reach their full potential through collaboration, a growth mindset, and high-quality, individualized, research based instruction.

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

Altoona Elementary focuses on tailored instruction for its ELL students in order to close the learning gap. Classroom teachers meet in Professional Learning Communities weekly to examine data of all students, including ELLs. The ELL teacher is a part of these meetings on a regular basis. She provides effective instructional strategies for classroom teachers to use with ELLs. For example, one strategy is to seat lower-level ELLs next to native English speakers so the ELL student has someone to model. Another strategy she shared is for classroom teachers to provide a condensed version of directions, verbally and in writing.

The ELL teacher provides direct, explicit instruction tailored to data when she meets with ELLs individually and in small groups. For example, classroom teachers give weekly reading probes, and small ELL groups receive targeted reading instruction based on data from the probes.

Altoona Elementary provides Title I reading and math services to supplement classroom learning. ELLs are included in these opportunities, based on student data. Title I reading and math teachers are supported regularly to implement effective instructional strategies by the building instructional coach, district literacy coach, and district math coach. Altoona Elementary's ELL teacher collaborates with classroom teachers to tailor assessments to each ELL's individual needs. For example, she adapts district math assessments for ELLs by providing an appropriate reading level for math assessments. The math standard stays the same, but she rewrites the context of word problems so ELLs can use their background knowledge to relate to the

problems.

Altoona Elementary teachers participated in four professional development opportunities focused on best practices for teaching ELLs, as well as cultural awareness and valuing diversity. Teachers studied the English Language Proficiency Standards in order to learn what each level of English proficiency entails for reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

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

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

Altoona Elementary teachers continue to be committed to building healthy and trusting relationships with our students and their families. We want our students to be motivated learners during each school day and value the importance of learning and doing their very best in the classroom setting and beyond. Classroom teachers host classroom meetings with their students on a weekly to bi-weekly basis to cover important items that are aligned to Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) and Character Counts. This includes developing and sharing mini lessons on how we treat, value, and respect others in our school. Students receive several opportunities to share their thoughts and ideas which involves student to student and student to adult collaboration and interaction. The goal is to get our students comfortable with sharing their thoughts with others. When this is accomplished, the sky is really the limit on how frequently our students engage with their teachers and their peers. Our teachers implement the model of gradual release to promote appropriate modeling that eventually leads to students applying their own learning. Teachers have mastered the ability to use effective questioning to generate enlightening conversations and have a better understanding of how students are comprehending the shared information. Teachers have also developed more project-based learning activities which promotes cooperative learning in a positive, collaborative environment. Students enjoy the use of manipulatives and technology, with the use of effective communication, to address a series of tasks that must be completed in order to share their final product. The final step is to provide a lesson summary and utilize common formative assessments to promote learner reflection and the assessment of student learning in the moment.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Connecting with our families and the community continues to be an ongoing area of focus to ensure that our stakeholders are well informed, engaged, and supported in helping our students learn to the best of their ability. We provide continuous communication through our school website, Facebook page, and the monthly newsletter that is distributed to all of our school families. Teachers are also connecting with parents on a weekly basis to provide guidance on how to assist their child in preparing for upcoming learning events that take place throughout the school year. Altoona Elementary also has a series of evening events scheduled throughout the school year to stay connected with our most important stakeholders, our parents and guardians. Events include: Back to School-Meet the Teacher Night, Kindergarten Round-Up, Preschool Family Night, Music and Band Concerts, Talented and Gifted Parent Meetings, 504 Annual Meetings, Special Education Meetings, and Parent-Teacher Conferences.

The 504 Annual Meetings, Special Education Meetings, and Parent-Teacher Conferences serve as prioritized meetings that must take place in order to keep our parents informed on how their child is growing in their academic, social, emotional, and physical learning environment. Altoona also has a very strong Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) that meets on a monthly basis to support our school by planning events that provide networking opportunities for our families. During these meetings, the building principal shares our building's annual School Improvement Plan. This plan highlights the previous school year's student achievement data and focuses on the action plans that are in place to address prioritized areas where student achievement did not meet the established goal for academic growth and/or proficiency.

With regard to outreach within our community, Altoona Elementary works closely with our Altoona Police Department to provide a safe and positive school environment for our students and staff. We also work with our local Facebook branch to seek financial support through learning grants to support creative and challenging technology instruction for all students. The Southeast Polk Foundation has been a significant partner in bringing new, innovative technology to our building to enhance the learning experiences for our students and staff. Altoona Elementary continues to partner with the Southeast Polk High School to provide placement, in our building, for high school seniors who are interested in going into the field of education. These valuable experiences support high school students who want to become promising and effective teachers in the future.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

Over the past four years, Altoona Elementary has committed the time and resources necessary to help our teachers build collaborative teams that focus on student learning. Altoona Elementary has sent twenty staff members to the “Professional Learning Communities (PLC) at Work” conferences during the summer months to help promote professional development in the area of collaboration. Each summer, Rebecca DuFour, Mike Mattos, and Anthony Muhammed, along with many others, presented on how to build effective and efficient teams of teachers who value the opportunity to collaborate. Our building goal was to focus on creating a purpose for developing professional learning communities. We then turned our attention to the challenges that can exist when a building truly commits to the collaborative way we do business at our school. We addressed these challenges by setting aside many hours of talk time to list our concerns and then develop a high leverage, action plan to provide professional solutions that everyone could follow to support our number one priority, “Our Students”! We developed norms for how our meetings should operate. We became much more reflective of our work and we realized the importance of mutual support and mutual obligation in the process. By taking these steps, we developed a common focus on student learning and came to the meetings prepared to talk about student data, learning styles, and ways to keep our students engaged and motivated to learn. Our grade level teams and job-alike teams currently continue to meet once a week, for a period of 45-60 minutes, to collaborate and adjust instruction based on teacher observation, common formative assessments, teacher feedback, and student feedback. Altoona Elementary has also scheduled a dedicated time to host our professional development sessions. Our staff members meet every Wednesday afternoon for a period of one to two hours to complete work that is centered around Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, Standards-Based Learning, Instructional Playbooks, and Content Area Standards and Supports. We want to ensure that we are building understanding in the work we do. We want our teachers to engage in developing clear learning targets and provide mental modeling to support our students. We want our teachers to feel confident in developing proficiency scales that focus on student learning and provide effective feedback to support our students in their learning pathway. Finally, we want our teachers to incorporate authentic learning to personalize these learning opportunities for our students.

4. School Leadership:

Teacher Leadership and Compensation emerged from the 2013 Iowa Education Reform Legislation. All school districts were given three years to implement their plan to collaboratively create a transformative system of teacher leadership. Altoona Elementary, within the Southeast Polk School District, elected to start implementation of their plan in 2013-2014. This new system of teacher leadership was designed to improve classroom instruction through professional growth and raise student achievement. The plan also focused on attracting promising new teachers to our district and retaining effective teachers with enhanced career opportunities. The final point of emphasis centered around providing more collaborative opportunities for our teachers. Altoona Elementary began its implementation plan by adding an instructional coach and four model teachers to the leadership team. The building principal was also a part of this team and other teachers within the building were given volunteer opportunities to join the leadership group if interested. The job of the principal was to set the tone for the culture of our building and it was equally important that the principal listen to the teachers and create roles based on student need and teacher expertise. Emphasis continues to be heavily placed on student engagement, student motivation, and academic growth. Our instructional coach establishes coaching cycles with other staff members to move toward consistent and exemplary teaching practice. The coach participates in instructional rounds and assists teachers as needed to keep the focus on student learning. Our coach also promotes professional learning for continuous improvement and assesses and uses research to improve the practice of teaching. Our coach helps facilitate weekly collaboration meetings and professional development sessions throughout the school year and provides appropriate modeling when using student achievement data to drive instruction. The instructional coach truly advocates for student learning and the profession of teaching. Our model teachers welcome other teachers into their classroom and model how to effectively use data to make instructional decisions. They also participate in instructional rounds and the development of our staff development plan and school improvement plan each school year. They assist other teachers as needed and play a significant role in upholding the mission and vision of our school. It should be noted that everyone on our leadership team have a major responsibility to keep our students safe and also at the forefront of all decisions we make at Altoona Elementary. This cannot and will not be compromised!

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

At Altoona Elementary, we believe all students can learn. This continues to be accomplished by using the Multi-Tiered Structures of Support. Under the umbrella of this belief, our staff committed to the following outcomes that truly have had an impact on student growth and achievement at our school. 1) We believe that all students must leave our school with the skills, knowledge, and dispositions necessary to succeed in their future pathways of learning. They must have access to coursework content and they must also possess the 21st century skills that will prepare them for a pathway beyond high school. 2) Because our students do not learn the same way and at the same pace, we must provide additional time and support to achieve these rigorous expectations. Learning is the constant, while time and support are the variables. 3) We realize that collectively and collaboratively, we can meet the diverse needs of our students by creating and implementing a systematic intervention process to ensure that our struggling learners get the support of a team of teachers who go above and beyond what an individual teacher can provide. 4) We know that we must provide the best core instruction through excellent teaching. We accomplish this by having strong content knowledge, strategies to utilize flexible grouping, effective instructional techniques, and appropriate pacing. 5) We understand the importance of having a school that focuses on building and sustaining highly effective and efficient collaborative teams. 6) We need to make sure that we provide both supplemental (Tier 2) and intensive (Tier 3) interventions. This is an area that has been identified as a target for growth for our building and we will continue to address this need to improve and reflect upon our practice of teaching. 7) Interventions are provided to students at times that do not interrupt core instruction. This “on top of” instruction is embedded during the school day by using creative and flexible scheduling. 8) Failure is not an option for our students at Altoona Elementary. Interventions will take place and supports are provided to ensure this does not happen. 9) If we are addressing the needs of all students, we must also provide extra assistance to enrich the learning experiences of those students who are high performing. Rigorous coursework is consistently provided to those who have this specific need. At Altoona Elementary, by turning our beliefs and commitments into actions, we get the results we desire to help our students grow and learn in a safe and positive learning environment.