

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

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

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

Official School Name James B. Congdon Elementary School  
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 50 Hemlock Street  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City New Bedford State MA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 02740-3120

County Bristol County

Telephone (508) 997-4511 Fax \_\_\_\_\_

Web site/URL http://congdon.newbedfordschools.org/ E-mail daungst@newbedfordschools.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\* Mr. Thomas Anderson E-mail tanderson@newbedfordschools.org  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name New Bedford Public Schools Tel. (508) 997-4511

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 Mayor Jon Mitchell  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_  
(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

The original signed cover sheet only should be converted to a PDF file and uploaded via the online portal.

*\*Non-public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, write N/A in the space.*

## **PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION**

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The signatures on the first page of this application (cover page) certify that each of the statements below, concerning the school’s eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education and National Blue Ribbon Schools requirements, are true and correct.

1. All nominated public schools must meet the state’s performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
2. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 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

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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):
- 19 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 3 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 3 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 25 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	20	21	41
1	24	29	53
2	19	25	44
3	23	28	51
4	24	23	47
5	26	29	55
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	136	155	291

\*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
  - 15 % Black or African American
  - 37 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 1 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 40 % White
  - 6 % 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: ≤1%

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

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

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2018 until the end of the 2018-2019 school year	0
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2018 until the end of the 2018-2019 school year	3
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	3
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2018	323
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	<.01
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	<1

6. Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):  
Spanish, Portuguese, Crioulo Cape Verdean, Creole (Haitian French), K'iche, Tagalog, Vietnamese

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 40 %  
116 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 75 %

Total number students who qualify: 218

8. Students receiving special education services: 11 %

33 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>2</u> Autism                  | <u>5</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>6</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>11</u> Other Health Impaired                |
| <u>6</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>22</u> Specific Learning Disability         |
| <u>2</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>8</u> Speech or Language Impairment         |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment      | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>0</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>1</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

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

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	15
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	12
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	3
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 20:1

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

<b>Required Information</b>	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014-2015
Daily student attendance	95%	95%	95%	95%	94%
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.

<b>Post-Secondary Status</b>	
Graduating class size	0
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	0%
Enrolled in a community college	0%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	0%
Joined the military or other public service	0%
Other	0%

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

Yes  No

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

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

The mission of Congdon School is to enable and inspire our diverse student body to achieve academic excellence, self-confidence, healthy relationships, and a life-long love of learning through high-quality instruction, student supports, and school-wide systems that work together to meet the individual needs of each of our students. Congdon's vision is that all students will speak, read, write, and solve problems at their grade level and beyond, that 100% of students will show growth in all areas, and that all students, faculty, staff, families, and community partners will feel safe and supported at our school.

16. **For public schools only**, if the school is a magnet, charter, or choice school, explain how students are chosen to attend.

## **PART III - SUMMARY**

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Founded in 1907, James B. Congdon Elementary School is nestled in the heart of a working-class neighborhood in the south end of New Bedford, Massachusetts. The sixth largest city in Massachusetts, New Bedford boasts the number one commercial fishing port in the world, a creative and active arts community, textile factories, and a rich historical footprint on the American story. New Bedford residents are known for their diversity, passion, and hard work. Many Congdon families work tirelessly in difficult jobs within the fishing and textile industries for which New Bedford is known.

Congdon students and staff are also known for working hard. During daily announcements, each and every person in the building promises aloud to work hard, be nice, and stay safe. These promises ring true in everything that occurs inside Congdon School from academics, social-emotional learning, recess, student leadership opportunities, our approaches to Special Education and English Learners Education, professional development, to family and community engagement. In 2015, the principal along with the teaching faculty developed a set of shared values and beliefs which are: what we do every day is important, we know all students can achieve at high levels, and we will never give up on any student, ever. These shared expectations, norms, and values are not only announced daily, they are also posted throughout the school and in every classroom.

Congdon's hard work and belief in all students led to remarkable progress over the last four years. Congdon has been recognized for two years in a row by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) as a "School of Recognition". Congdon Elementary was also highlighted as one of only six schools in Massachusetts receiving commendations in all three areas of high achievement, high growth, and exceptional performance relative to improvement targets.

The belief that all students can achieve at high levels is what drives the key strategies Congdon uses to encourage and challenge every student to develop their full potential academically, emotionally, physically, socially, and culturally. Congdon uses a whole-child, strengths-based approach to education. For example, nearly half of Congdon's student population are learning English as a second-language. In order to accelerate English language acquisition for these students, Congdon incorporates a co-teaching model using both the classroom teacher and the English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher to support the students while exposing them to grade level instruction, especially in math and science. It may seem counter-intuitive to focus on math and science with students who are just learning English, but those subjects are universal languages, as well as more hands-on and visual. If students come with any schooling from their native country, teachers can build on what students already know in these subjects. This approach builds student confidence which allows them to take academic risks while they are learning English. To provide additional support, Congdon runs an after-school, English Learner (EL) tutoring program where there is 100% participation from students and families.

Co-teaching is also a key strategy for supporting our students with disabilities. Each inclusion class is made up of a General Education teacher, as well as a licensed Special Education teacher. In addition to co-teaching, Congdon has developed systematic small group supports based on individual student need and Massachusetts' Learning Standards.

After pouring over data in 2015, Congdon's principal and School Instructional Leadership Team (SILT) determined that the school needed accelerated improvement in vocabulary acquisition and use across all grade levels. As a result, Accountable Talk became Congdon's first school-wide, evidence-based instructional practice to be utilized in every classroom, every subject, every day. Professional development was given, resources such as anchor charts and student resource cards were created, and planned opportunities for increased student talk using academic vocabulary was included in every lesson plan. Accountable Talk stimulates higher-order thinking helping students learn, reflect on their learning, and communicate their knowledge and understanding. This key strategy has helped shape Congdon students into being not only better speakers and listeners, but also into better readers and writers.

Some of the other innovative programming at Congdon comes through community partnerships with

programs such as Playworks, The Mindful Collaborative, Trauma-Sensitive Schools, Child and Family Services, and Community Counseling of Bristol County. Congdon is committed to serving the community by providing school-based services such as counseling and mindfulness for students, staff, and families. Our goal is to create and maintain a safe and supportive school for everyone in our school community by using a trauma-sensitive approach and practices. Some of these practices include but are not limited to: individual student welcome with a greeting of their choice that is posted outside of each classroom, a calming corner in every classroom with sensory tools, and mindfulness incorporated into the daily routine. Congdon School has also worked hard to make recess a safe and supportive environment so that all students can learn through play, strengthen social skills, increase physical activity, and promote student leadership through Congdon's Junior Coaching Program.

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

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### **1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.**

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

Congdon’s educational philosophy is that given a high-quality, universal curriculum, engaging, rigorous, and effective instruction, high expectations, informed and targeted individual interventions, scaffolds, and supports, all students will achieve grade-level proficiency and beyond. Congdon utilizes the elements of the comprehensive framework known as Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) to defend this premise and provide an overall approach to curriculum, instruction, and assessment. MTSS is designed in support of the whole child, whether the child is above, at, or below grade level. Rooted in the belief that all children can learn when given just right supports, MTSS is the perfect framework for Congdon School.

In partnership with Focused Schools, Congdon staff have created and currently thrive in a culture of data. Staff consistently collaborate in analyzing and acting upon qualitative and quantitative data using both formative and summative assessments. Some examples of these assessments include: DIBELS, STAR Early Literacy, STAR 360, Quick Informal Phonics Inventories, Reading Street and enVision Math 2.0 unit tests, New Bedford Public Schools common formative assessments, and the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS.) Congdon holds weekly grade-level data meetings where teachers, administrators, interventionists, and the counselor present student data, brainstorm solutions, develop plans for intervention or extension, and determine next steps. Often in these meetings, the team examines student work or writing examples, norms the grading, and collectively composes effective and specific, growth-producing feedback. In addition to the weekly grade-level meetings, teachers collaborate in grade-level and vertical PLCs twice weekly to plan, evaluate, and collaborate about teaching and learning. Each of these meetings drive improvements in teaching and learning at Congdon School.

After a thorough analysis of student work and data, action plans are developed for individual students, classrooms, and/or grade levels. These action plans are constantly revisited to evaluate their effectiveness and are adjusted based on any new information and data. This data cycle repeats itself all year to ensure 100% of Congdon students reach their full potential and that no student ever falls through the cracks.

### **1b.** Reading/English language arts

Congdon’s approach to teaching reading is to ensure that the essential components of reading or “The Big 5” of reading instruction are explicitly taught every day, in each grade, at a developmentally appropriate pace. Using the Massachusetts English Language Arts Comprehensive Framework and grade-level learning standards as our guides, Congdon teachers plan daily lessons incorporating phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. Every student is exposed to grade-level text, as well as grade-level, subject-specific vocabulary during our universal, Tier 1 instructional period. Then, based on data, teachers at Congdon tailor their small-group, reading workshops to extend or review standards for each student according to their specific needs. Congdon’s reading/ELA block is 2 hours long, every day. This block includes Tier 1 grade-level instruction, formative assessments, small-group extension or intervention time, and writing.

Highly engaging routines, including movement, singing, and rhyming, help Congdon teachers bring phonemic awareness and phonics to life for students in all grades. Utilizing the Speech Sound Development Chart, developmentally appropriate lessons in grades K-2 consist of at least 50% of instructional time devoted to phonemic awareness and phonics. Decodable texts are aligned to the phonemic and phonics patterns being explicitly taught that day. Quick, informal phonics inventories or screeners are completed to ensure students are getting what they need during small-group time. Students in grades 3-5 explore advanced phonemic and phonics patterns with explicit instruction in morphology (manipulation of root words, prefixes, and suffixes.)

Fluency, or the ability to read quickly with accuracy and expression, is emphasized and practiced starting in

Kindergarten. On a weekly basis, students are provided with fresh reads at their level then, track their own progress as their fluency increases.

In the summer of 2015, using both formative and summative assessments, including the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS,) Congdon's School Instructional Leadership Team (SILT) determined that the learning standard regarding vocabulary acquisition and use was an area for growth across all grade levels. The SILT then determined several school-wide, evidence-based, instructional practices (SWEBIPs) that were tied to vocabulary acquisition and use. The SWEBIPs for vocabulary were Accountable Talk/academic discourse, use of the Frayer Model or adapted versions of it, and explicit instruction of context clues and figurative language. SILT then created and delivered professional development for all staff, held learning walks, hosted classroom visits, provided feedback, and revisited the data for the vocabulary standards. This approach led to an almost 40% improvement across the school in vocabulary acquisition and use. Nearly 5 years later, these SWEBIPs for vocabulary development are still part of Congdon's school plan and daily instructional practice.

Congdon's approach to reading comprehension is to first develop excellent listening comprehension skills through intentional read-alouds, especially in the primary grades. Effective listening and speaking skills are explicitly taught and opportunities for student practice of these skills are incorporated into daily lesson plans. Combining strong listening comprehension, with reading fluency, and vocabulary development helps lead students to excellent reading comprehension. Explicit and systematic instruction in determining the main idea of a passage, summarizing, and analyzing text structure all help build an even stronger foundation for reading comprehension.

Part of Congdon's success with teaching reading comes from the shared expectation that literacy needs to be integrated and explicitly taught across all subject areas including math, science, social studies, art, music, health, and physical education. Many times, these specialty subject areas lead to more relevant and engaging opportunities for informative texts and meaningful vocabulary development. Collaborative planning meetings have led to the development of key strategies and SWEBIPs for literacy that are implemented by all staff in the building.

### **1c. Mathematics**

Productive struggle is at the forefront of Congdon's approach to teaching mathematics. Each math lesson starts with time to grapple with solving a complex problem. First, using any strategy they choose, students work independently to answer a posted problem while the teacher circulates making note of the different strategies being utilized. Next, students work in teams to respectfully defend their thinking or work collaboratively to solve the problem. Finally, the teacher asks for students to share their thinking with the class using Accountable Talk. The teacher launches the lesson with the student team who used the strategy of the day. If no student used the strategy of the day, the teacher will model the strategy using the Gradual Release of Responsibility, otherwise known as "I do, we do, you do."

Following the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks for Math and the New Bedford Public Schools' Math Curriculum Maps, the math block at Congdon is 90 minutes per day including the productive struggle problem-solving time, Tier 1 universal instruction, guided practice, numeracy for math facts practice, quick formative assessments, and small-group extension or intervention groups. The flexible and intentional math groupings are set daily using the quick formative checks for understanding. The Tier 1 universal instruction is a balanced program that includes conceptual understanding, opportunities for problem-solving, computation/mental math, math numeracy with math facts, explicit mathematical vocabulary instruction, and the standards for mathematical practices. The use of math manipulatives, visual models, and other math tools such as dice, cards, and dominoes are also integral to Congdon's high rates of math proficiency.

The pacing of the New Bedford Curriculum Map for math is quite brisk, introducing a new lesson each day. Because of this, Congdon has developed spiral reviews for every Massachusetts Learning Standard in math. The spiral review problems contain relevant, engaging, and rigorous review problems of previously taught math standards and are differentiated based on student need. These spiral reviews are completed independently during workshop or small group time.

In the summer of 2015, using both formative and summative assessments, including the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS,) Congdon’s School Instructional Leadership Team (SILT) determined that the learning standards concerning solving complex word problems were an area for growth across all grade levels. The SILT then determined a school-wide, evidence-based, instructional practice (SWEBIP) that was tied to solving word problems. The SWEBIP decided upon by SILT was KNSA, an annotation strategy for math word problems coming out of the program, Keys to Literacy. SILT then created and delivered professional development for all staff, held learning walks, hosted classroom visits, provided feedback, and revisited the data from the math word problem standards. This approach led to an almost 50% improvement across the school in solving word problems. Nearly 5 years later, this SWEBIP for solving complex word problems is still part of Congdon’s school plan and daily math instructional practice.

With KNSA now in our instructional practice toolbox, Congdon teachers set out to take a deep dive into “model with mathematics”, one of the standards for mathematical practices. By developing real world, relevant, and complex problems and by giving students the opportunity to interpret and analyze data, draw conclusions, and revise their work, Congdon students are now above the state average in math proficiency.

#### **1d. Science**

Congdon School teaches science following the Massachusetts Comprehensive Science Curriculum Framework. Students at Congdon benefit from studying science and technology/engineering (STE) in every grade, every single day. Building on the knowledge that students are naturally curious and motivated to know more about the world in which they live, Congdon’s STE curriculum is carefully designed around engaging, relevant, real-world scientific phenomena, problems, and questions. Congdon’s approach to science, technology, and engineering education is for students to not only develop a deep, conceptual understanding of the content, but also to apply that understanding through hands-on experiments and labs. Each classroom at Congdon is provided with science kits in order to provide enough tools and materials so all students can participate in these hands-on labs. This experiential approach to science education also increases student motivation and engagement.

Furthering student engagement in science, Congdon teachers help students make connections between STE, literacy, and mathematics. This enables students to apply, transfer, and adapt their learning to new situations and problems. The use of non-fiction, informative texts is an important part of Congdon’s science curriculum.

Investigation, experimentation, and analytical problem solving are central to Congdon’s science and technology/engineering program. Congdon believes that all students can develop proficiency in STE if instruction provides them with relevant and engaging opportunities. This is why Congdon students perform well-above the state average for science proficiency. Congdon provides a range of scientific experiences, including, but not limited to: inquiry and investigation, collection and analysis of evidence, analytical reasoning, and communication and application of information.

Congdon teachers are passionate about providing opportunities for students to collaborate during scientific explorations and communicate their ideas and thinking. Students practice real world scientific skills such as, testing hypotheses and theories, creating written and oral presentations, fielding questions, responding to critiques, and developing replies. Congdon students often embark on scientific field trips with our community partners at Sea Lab, Buttonwood Park Zoo, The Museum of Science, and The New Bedford Whaling Museum.

Each and every day you will find Congdon students spread out around their classroom and sometimes, their school, conducting experiments, taking academic risks, presenting their findings, and defending their thinking.

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

Congdon creatively and closely follows the Massachusetts Comprehensive Curriculum Framework for History and Social Science. Congdon students have a 30-minute, daily social studies block in all grades in order to gain insights into history, society, and its peoples across the globe and time.

Students in the primary grades learn about classroom democracy, respect for one another, local geography, roles of people, national, state, and community traditions, and economics in the context of work and money. They also learn about leadership on many levels, and are given leadership roles and opportunities within the classroom and school. Integrating art and map studies, Congdon students get to experience map making firsthand.

Third grade students at Congdon study Massachusetts and New England, beginning with their own city or town. Fortunately for Congdon students, they live in New Bedford which is rich with history and culture. Students explore interactions among Native Peoples, European settlers and Africans, and learn about the Massachusetts people who led the American Revolution. Congdon 3rd graders take a yearly pilgrimage to Plimoth Plantation to bring this learning to life.

In grade 4, Congdon students study North America. They learn about ancient civilizations on the continent and early European exploration. They also research how the westward expansion of the United States created a modern nation of 50 states and 16 territories. Congdon fourth graders present their research during a culminating community and family event known as the Congdon States Fair.

Grade 5 students learn more about the history of the colonies, the American Revolution, the development of the Constitution, Bill of Rights, the early Republic, and the westward expansion of the United States. They study the sectional conflicts over slavery that led to the Civil War and the long struggle in the 19th and 20th centuries for civil rights for all. Embarking on a journey along the Freedom Trail in Boston brings this content alive.

Literacy skills using Informational text, along with research, writing, and speaking skills are essential components of Congdon's social studies curriculum. Students at Congdon also participate in history related plays, projects, fairs, and field trips.

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

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

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

In keeping with the belief that every student deserves an integrated, well-rounded and whole-child centered education, Congdon School offers a variety of meaningful, specialty curricular programming. All students in every grade have one to two, 40-minute classes in art, music, physical education, and health every week for the entire year.

The art program at Congdon helps students gain an appreciation of the arts through direct instruction, guided practice, and individual exploration. Congdon's curricular units of art explore color, line/shape, cultural art, famous artists through history, sculpture/3-dimensional art, and perspective. Students take pride in seeing their artistic creations displayed in the halls of Congdon School. Visitors often marvel at the gallery style presentation of student art throughout the building. Congdon also offers students a twice weekly after-school art club in addition to a community led, after-school program, ArtWorks, sponsored by the New Bedford Art Museum.

There are three different music programs offered at Congdon Elementary School; general music, band, and chorus. All students in grades K-5 have, at least weekly, general music classes where they learn the foundations of music through movement, song, and a variety of hands-on instruments. Congdon's music curriculum is built on exploring musical concepts such as rhythm, musical styles/genres, and the history and

appreciation of music and music theory. General music classes provide students the opportunity to create, perform, respond and connect. All third graders learn to play the recorder in general music which allows them to apply all of their previously learned musical skills, such as sight-reading. This experience prepares them to play a band instrument in fourth grade.

Instrumental Band is offered to all fourth and fifth grade students. The band program consists of weekly small group lessons tailored to instrumentation and ability level, weekly full band classes, and free, private and small group lessons after school.

Chorus is also offered to all fourth and fifth grade students at Congdon. In addition to school concerts, our choral students perform for the community, bringing joy to those in nursing homes, and sharing in such important events as Art-History-Architecture (AHA) Night and the New Bedford's annual Martin Luther King Junior services. Both band and chorus provide students an opportunity to work together in creating music, and are programs they can enjoy all the way through high school.

Quality Physical Education (PE) is crucial to the development of the whole child. PE builds self-confidence, develops motor skills, and instills the importance of lifelong fitness. When Congdon students leave their PE classes they are happy, sweaty, and filled with new information, knowledge and skills for both individual and team sport. Congdon's physical education program is centered on learning the importance of physical activity and wellness as well as developing good sportsmanship and other important social skills.

Congdon's health program uses a comprehensive and integrated approach to wellness including units of study in physical, social, mental/emotional, and environmental health. All of Congdon students are provided the opportunity to practice newly acquired health skills such as assertiveness against negative peer pressure by using evidence-based activities like role-plays. Students in fourth and fifth grade can sign up for an elective health advocacy course where they conduct research on a public health issue, mentor younger students, and advocate for health improvements at the school and district level.

In addition to art, music, physical education, and health, Congdon staff have worked hard to create a leveled school library filled with high interest books, both fiction and nonfiction, as well as class sets of engaging novels. Over the last four years, Congdon has also invested in technology for every child's use which has led to the procurement of highly personalized online learning platforms such as DreamBox Learning, Keyboarding Without Tears, English in a Flash, Xtramath, and STAR 360 for online assessments. The investment and implementation of these programs has upgraded the quality and effectiveness of independent daily centers during workshop time, leading to more time in teacher-led small, differentiated groups.

Additional programming in character building and social-emotional learning (SEL) are offered to all Congdon students in every grade. One hundred percent of Congdon staff have been trained in Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS,) Trauma Sensitive Schools (TSS,) mindfulness, and Zones of Regulation. The health teacher and school counselor collaborate to teach universal, Tier 1 lessons using Second Step, Social Thinking, and Zones of Regulation to all students. The counselor provides follow-up lessons, or Tier 2 and 3 interventions, to any student who may need additional support in this area.

### **3. Academic Supports:**

#### **3a. Students performing below grade level**

At Congdon, we take a proactive and strengths-based approach to meeting the diverse needs of students who may be performing below grade level in any subject. We know that many children who struggle in one subject, excel in another. Congdon also knows that highlighting these strengths builds the child's confidence and increases their willingness to take academic risks, leading to accelerated growth in closing learning gaps.

All students at Congdon are closely monitored to ensure they are progressing at a rate that will allow them to meet grade level expectations. If a student is found to be performing below grade level even after attempts are made to provide additional small group supports, Congdon teachers complete a Whole Child Support

Team (WCST) Referral Form. This referral signals members of the team to begin investigating the child's strengths as well as areas for improvement. Members of the team include administration, reading specialist, general education teacher, instructional coach, counselor, the guardian, and if applicable, the special education and/or ESL teachers. The reading specialist gives an in-depth assessment and members of the WCST conduct informal observations of the child. There are conversations with the child and the family to determine mindset/confidence and any relevant family history or concerns. The team also looks at physical health, medical history, and the child's ability to build and maintain positive relationships with peers and adults.

Building upon the child's strengths, the WCST develops goals for accelerated improvement as well as a targeted intervention action plan. Adults with strong connections to the student begin a daily check-in and communicate with the family. The team schedules follow up meetings to assess the progress of the goals and the effectiveness of the interventions. At the follow up meeting, adjustments are made, new goals are set, or the child is graduated out of the process because the gap has been closed.

By using this Whole Child Support Team process with fidelity, believing that all children can meet grade-level expectations, building a strong home to school connection, and providing targeted, creative, and specific supports and interventions, Congdon has seen students grow 1-3 grade levels, sometimes in as little as a few months.

### **3b. Students performing above grade level**

Our goal at Congdon Elementary School is for 100% of our students to grow in their learning every single day; this includes students who are already performing above grade level. Congdon School tailors instruction in rich and creative ways to meet the very diverse needs of our entire student population. Students who are excelling in any subject have the opportunity to explore extension activities and research projects inside of their classroom, participate in flexible groupings outside of their classroom, attend small groups with higher grade-levels and with the reading specialist and math instructors, mentor/teach younger students, and hold leadership positions both inside and outside of the classroom.

Congdon does not believe in giving students who are performing above grade level more work; instead we believe in having our accelerated students go deeper into the learning standards. Students above grade level at Congdon can be observed debating, analyzing, synthesizing, drawing conclusions, teaching, and leading.

Additionally, Congdon's investment in personalized digital learning platforms has helped meet all students where they are and helps to push them to the next level. This investment in technology also included online assessments that teachers can use to ensure students have books and problems at the appropriate level. Students reading above grade level also have access to our leveled school library.

Congdon staff intentionally commends students on their effort, work-ethic, collaboration, and communication skills. We work to instill a growth mindset in our students. This is especially true for our students who are performing above grade level. We do not want to label any child, even if that label is smart. This can lead to a fixed mindset and frustration when they eventually come across personally challenging problems or material. Congdon stretches, extends, and challenges students to grapple with complex work through perseverance, determination, and hard work.

### **3c. Special education**

For the last several years, Congdon students with disabilities on Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs) have consistently performed in the 90th percentile and above in their subgroup on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS.) We believe Congdon's approach to special education is the reason for this success. The key pillars to Congdon's approach are quality universal curriculum, instruction, and assessment for all students, targeted, innovative, and differentiated small group or one to one supports, shared expectations, values, and beliefs that all students can learn, and collaboration among teachers, families, and the students themselves.

Congdon's special education programming consists of full inclusion classrooms utilizing highly effective co-teaching on a daily basis. When guests to the building visit Congdon's inclusion classrooms they often wonder which adult is the general education teacher and which one is the special education teacher; this is the mark of a truly successful, co-taught inclusion classroom. Both teachers work hard to build trusting relationships with the students and families. They collaborate in order to personalize and differentiate the learning, and provide support for all students' academic, social, emotional, and behavioral needs. High expectations, exposure to quality grade level instruction and content combined with scaffolds, appropriate accommodations, multiple modalities and strategies are the goals and strategies of Congdon's co-taught classrooms.

The inclusion classrooms at Congdon are made up of students performing at grade level, above grade level, and students with disabilities. There are role-model and mentor students for academics as well as social and behavioral skills. Small group or individual accommodations are provided both inside and outside of the room depending on need and the student's IEP.

During workshop time, the special education teacher works with a small group of students, including students who have small group time written into their IEPs. Students on IEPs also participate in afterschool tutoring with both the general education teacher and the special education tutor.

Another innovative special education practice at Congdon is looping for our inclusion classrooms. This practice ensures a strong student-teacher-family connection, builds trust, and allows for accommodations to start on day one of the following year.

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

Because Congdon School was the first in the district to have 100% of their teachers become Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) endorsed by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, we became the home to a high number of students who had just immigrated to the United States from non-English speaking countries around the world. Congdon students who are learning English as a second language have consistently performed in the top 20% for their subgroup on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS.) Congdon's programming for English Learners (ELs) includes both short pull-out periods and push-in models. Licensed English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers, in collaboration with SEI endorsed classroom teachers, design units of instruction that not only complement the general education curriculum, but accelerate it.

Congdon's instructional focus is built around the 4 domains of language development: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Designing our instruction to follow that model has been tremendously successful. Students are provided opportunities to speak using supports like sentence starters and stems for Accountable Talk and writing.

Using our whole-child, strengths-based approach with our ELs, Congdon recognizes that being bi-lingual is a tremendous asset to our students, our families, our community, and our country! Therefore, while we work diligently to accelerate English acquisition for our ELs, we also encourage them to retain their native language and even further their literacy in that language. Congdon celebrates the diversity present within our school and shows our appreciation through events like Family Cultural Night. We highlight our students' diverse cultures in art and music as well.

In addition to our in-school programming for English Learners, 100% of Congdon's ELs participate in our after-school, accelerated English acquisition program. This program is staffed by Congdon teachers and paraprofessionals so that the groupings remain small and targeted. The after-school program utilizes plays, projects, art, and music to immerse our ELs in relevant, engaging instruction and experiences.

Teachers at Congdon participate in yearly SEI refresher professional development activities, learn effective strategies to accelerate English acquisition and vocabulary development, and explore ways to further support our English Learners by learning about their cultures, languages, traditions, and dreams.

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

At Congdon, all children from migrant families are welcomed and encouraged to attend our after-school tutoring program. We also ensure that each child who enters Congdon for the first time, regardless of the time of year, is connected to a buddy mentor/classroom ambassador. The student ambassador gives the Congdon newcomer a tour of the building, gets them set up with supplies for the classroom, and introduces the new student to the class. Congdon makes it a priority to provide a home-away-from-home experience to all students, especially those who may have to move a lot due to seasonal work

## **PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE**

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### **1. Engaging Students:**

“When a flower doesn’t bloom, you don’t fix the flower, you fix the environment in which the flower grows.” This quote is displayed prominently in the principal’s office at Congdon School and is used when regularly reflecting upon our positive school climate, culture, and overall learning environment.

Each and every day, all Congdon students are welcomed at the door by a smiling adult with their choice of greeting; most students choose a hug as their morning greeting. Next, while eating universal breakfast together, the entire Congdon community celebrates accomplishments, reviews our instructional focus, shares our school beliefs, recites the Pledge of Allegiance, and promises aloud to work hard, be nice, and stay safe. Together we end this morning ritual and start our day by sharing a mindful moment with the beautiful sound of our meditation bowl.

At Congdon, we realize that off-task behaviors are not signs of a lack of motivation, laziness, or other inherent personality flaw. In fact, most off-task behaviors stem from lagging social or emotional skills. Congdon staff is committed to helping students develop positive and healthy social and emotional skills through engaging and motivating systematic approaches such as PBIS and Collaborative Problem Solving. Congdon staff explicitly teaches desired behaviors to all students using a behavioral matrix with visuals, provides multiple opportunities to practice these desired behaviors, loudly acknowledges and praises the desired behaviors when we see them, and quietly redirects and reteaches as needed.

Each Congdon classroom has a calming corner with sensory tools available to any student throughout the day to take a break, alleviate anxiety, or refocus. Congdon also incorporates specific mindfulness practices shown to improve student engagement.

Congdon proudly acknowledges students who are seen following our schoolwide expectations of working hard, being nice, and staying safe. The school-wide acknowledgement system includes a chain of kindness, morning announcements, code cards, and visual displays both inside and outside of classrooms. Additionally, each classroom has a positive acknowledgment system to motivate and engage students.

Leaving no stone unturned in improving the school climate for our students, Congdon staff also elevated the quality of recess and harness the power of play. Partnering with Playworks, all Congdon staff were trained in running recess in a way that increases student participation, student engagement, and play. Throughout the year, PlayWorks staff taught students and staff how to play more than 100 games for both inside and outside recess. Students got to practice these games in small groups during class game times before playing them at grade-level recess times. At Congdon we now see 100% participation in physical activity at recess, conflict resolution skills at work, less recess related injuries, and students cheering on other students while playing. PlayWorks also helped Congdon develop one of its most successful student leadership programs, junior coaching.

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

Congdon has found that creating a welcoming, open, and safe school environment is the most successful strategy in working with family and community members. We realize that families are our most important partners in our students’ success. Congdon staff work hard to build positive, trusting relationships with families and are open to feedback from all of them. We reflect on every ounce of feedback we get from our families through multiple surveys, social media, phone calls, emails, and face to face interactions. Congdon sees itself as an advocate for the whole child, including that child’s family. Our leadership teams, administrators, counselors, and other staff work tirelessly to connect families in need with appropriate resources.

At Congdon we engage families in the learning process by holding events that celebrate and acknowledge diverse family backgrounds, needs, and schedules. We hold three separate open houses at the beginning,

middle, and end of the year. There is a variety of just-for-fun and academic events offered throughout the year that are open to all.

Congdon's team of family and community volunteers has been instrumental in our school's success. These volunteers can be seen on a daily basis helping in small groups and classrooms, making copies, running incentive programs, and chaperoning field trips. They also act as a welcome committee to new families who join our Congdon school community. Several Congdon parents/guardians also serve on school leadership teams and councils.

Congdon staff are always available to meet with families individually before, during, and after school hours. Every Congdon faculty member develops a meaningful, two-way communication plan where they map out strategies for regularly sharing student achievement and growth as well as actively listening to families' concerns, questions, or needs. Every teacher uses Class DOJO or Remind to send photos, work samples, or texts in real time. Families often contact us through our school Facebook page as well.

Congdon prides itself in developing meaningful and collaborative community partnerships that enable us to provide our students with a well-rounded, rigorous, and relevant education. Some of Congdon's partnerships include: Bristol County Savings Bank, Blue Cross Blue Shield of New England, PlayWorks, Child & Family Services, Community Counseling of Bristol County, The Carney Foundation, The Mindful Collaborative, Trauma Sensitive Schools, Trauma Learning Policy Initiative, Lesley University, Focused Schools, ArtWorks through the New Bedford Art Museum, Buttonwood Park Zoo, The New Bedford Whaling Museum and Historical National Park, Sea Lab, The May Institute, PBIS, the Massachusetts and New Bedford Departments of Public Health for oral health in school, and the EOS Foundation for Breakfast in the Classroom.

### **3. Creating Professional Culture:**

Teacher capacity, agency, and expertise at Congdon are built through the systematic use of targeted and aligned professional development, growth-producing feedback, and empowerment through participation in teacher leadership teams.

We have found that to be effective, Congdon's professional development needs to be targeted and aligned to our instructional focus and school-wide, evidence-based instructional practices (SWEIPs,) and data. Congdon designs professional development adhering to adult learning practices where prior knowledge and expertise are honored and new information or strategies are not just delivered, but that the opportunity to practice and apply this new information or strategy is also provided. Congdon teachers are given time and space to safely develop new skills through role-plays and honest dialogue and questioning.

Honoring the professionals in the building, Congdon teachers are often called upon to deliver professional development in their areas of expertise. Some of the best feedback received about units of professional development have been when one of our own planned and delivered the information. School leadership also encourages, models, and sets up opportunities for life-long learning by partnering with colleges, universities, and educational consultants. One example of this is Congdon's partnership with Lesley University's Institute for Trauma Sensitivity (LIfTS.) Roughly 40% of Congdon staff have taken graduate level courses from this partnership and 100% have engaged in book clubs or other trainings out of the LIfTS program.

Teachers serve on various school leadership teams where they reflect on current practices, analyze data, pilot innovative practices, create professional development, and determine systems and policies. The leadership teams at Congdon are: School Instructional Leadership Team (SILT,) Climate and Operational Leadership Team (COLT,) and the Family Engagement Leadership Team (FELT.)

SILT members at Congdon analyze academic data, reflect upon curriculum, lesson plans, units of study, develop professional development in the area of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, pilot new online learning platforms and other innovations related to teaching and learning. SILT meets twice monthly to ensure Congdon stays on course toward reaching our academic goals.

Congdon COLT members meet together two times per month to develop a positive climate and culture. This team is also split into two sub-committees: Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Trauma Sensitive Schools (TSS.) COLT has been responsible for creating the following: school-wide behavioral expectations and matrix, anchor charts with visuals in order to teach desired behaviors, PBIS lesson plans, school-wide acknowledgement systems, arrival, dismissal, hallway, and cafeteria routines, classroom greetings, calming corners, a behavioral data analysis system, and more!

FELT members brainstorm innovative ways to engage our families in their children's learning. The FELT team is responsible for creating and maintaining the school Facebook page, along with a QR Code reader to go home with every student that made it easier for everyone to find our page. FELT also designs very engaging family events throughout the year such as at least 3 open houses, literacy nights, spaghetti suppers, math game nights, book clubs, and more. Congdon's FELT also vetted online texting and contact applications to be utilized by all staff in order to get better two-way communication with our families.

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

Keeping the best interests of the children we serve at the forefront of every decision is what drives Congdon's school leadership. The leadership philosophy and ultimate aim of the principal and assistant principal is to exemplify transformational leadership. The school leadership at Congdon works to positively influence student outcomes by collaboratively developing high achievement and growth expectations, building capacity in staff, nurturing trusting relationships with all stakeholders, and by providing instructional support and focus. As a result of this leadership pedagogy, team-building, and child-first approach, Congdon has gone from the bottom 20% of schools in Massachusetts, to the top 10% in just 5 years!

One of the most essential roles for the Congdon principal is to cultivate leadership qualities in others. To this end, the leadership structure at Congdon includes not only administrators, but a formal guiding coalition made up of counselors, reading specialists, and instructional coaches, as well as teacher leadership teams, and student leadership programs. Through these teams, school administration asks for opinions, ideas, and solutions. Congdon School leadership teams work intentionally and diligently to improve the school in all areas. The principal and assistant principal play a role in each of these teams and attend every meeting. This hands-on approach helps teams feel validated and empowered to become valuable change agents for the betterment of the entire Congdon School community.

Ensuring the leadership teams are cross-representative of the entire school and that team members have expertise in the area of the team's purpose and goals are tantamount to the teams' successes. The school leadership at Congdon consistently and collaboratively reflects on current practices and fearlessly changes any practice found to be ineffective. Relentless communication around school improvement is also critical for school leadership.

School leadership is responsible for providing feedback on lesson plans and instructional practices to ensure they are reflecting Congdon's high expectations, that they engage all students, and accommodate diverse learning styles and needs. Administrators at Congdon are also responsible for analyzing data from multiple sources to guide goals and decisions. Congdon leadership created a school-wide, living data wall that includes every student's data, along with the child's photo, in order to track the effectiveness of our curricula, instruction, and interventions. The Congdon data wall is used to visualize and personalize Congdon's overall progress toward its learning and growth goals for every student in the building.

To stay current and effectual, the Congdon principal follows the Focused Schools Framework as a template and guide for school improvement. Knowing that the work of a principal can be isolating and realizing that this work should not be done in a silo, the Congdon principal often opens up her own leadership practice to colleagues, supervisors, and mentors for coaching, advice, and feedback.

## **PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

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The one practice that has been the most instrumental to Congdon School's success is our work around building a safe and supportive school for all stakeholders using trauma sensitive practices.

Congdon works with the Trauma Learning and Policy Initiative (TLPI) to create a shared understanding of the impact of traumatic experiences on student learning. This work is central to creating a safe and supportive school for three important reasons. First, the majority of our school-aged children have undergone some form of adverse experience. Knowing this is important to understanding how our students learn and behave. Secondly, understanding the needs of students impacted by traumatic experiences serves as a benchmark for creating safe and supportive environments for all students. In other words, if it is safe and supportive for those students impacted by trauma, it is safe and supportive for all students. Finally, understanding the impacts of traumatic experience on student learning can be disruptive to existing assumptions about student motivation, punitive discipline policies, and engagement. This disruption is important as it supports trauma-sensitive problem solving and decision making throughout the school.

Positive relationships are at the core of Congdon's systems, values, and beliefs. At Congdon we think in terms of the whole child, ensure that all students feel connected to the school and classroom communities, and make certain students feel safe and valued. Working together as a team, and openly identifying our local, school-based issues, Congdon takes innovative action to address these concerns. Some of the specific initiatives and programs in this area include PBIS, Zones of Regulation, Social Thinking, Second Step, Mindfulness, and PlayWorks.

Urgently taking understanding and putting it into practice is at the forefront of Congdon's success. Congdon staff does not just learn about or talk about this work, they do it, and they do it well. Congdon's principal has worked hard to create a sense of psychological safety for students and staff to help them take academic risks and try new and innovative practices.

Right now, we are in the midst of unprecedented school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Congdon staff are working feverishly to create a safety net of supports for each and every one of our students and their families. Congdon teachers are delivering work packets and groceries to porches, mailing letters, doing drive-by parades and visits, making phone calls, sending emails and texts, creating videos, virtual classrooms, and more. They are up early for families with essential workers who need help before work and up late for those who need them after work. At Congdon School we do whatever it takes to help our kids succeed. We realize that creating a safe and supportive school extends beyond the walls of this old, brick building.