

**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) [ ] Title I [ ] Charter [ ] Magnet [ ] Choice

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

Official School Name Timber Lake Middle School - 03  
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 500 Main Street PO Box 1000  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Timber Lake State SD Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 57656-1000

County Dewey County

Telephone (605) 865-3654 Fax (605) 865-3294

Web site/URL http://www.timberlakeschool.org E-mail julie.marshall@k12.sd.us

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent\* Mr. Dan Martin E-mail dan.martin@k12.sd.us  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Timber Lake School District 20-3 Tel. (605) 865-3654

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board  
President/Chairperson Mrs. Marie Gross  
(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):
- 1 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 1 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 3 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	0	0	0
1	0	0	0
2	0	0	0
3	0	0	0
4	0	0	0
5	0	0	0
6	14	19	33
7	14	13	27
8	19	8	27
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	47	40	87

\*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): 55 % American Indian or Alaska Native  
0 % Asian  
0 % Black or African American  
0 % Hispanic or Latino  
0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander  
45 % White  
0 % Two or more races  
**100 % Total**

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

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2018 - 2019 school year: 13%

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	5
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2018 until the end of the 2018-2019 school year	5
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	10
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2018	77
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.13
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	13

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

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 49 %

Total number students who qualify: 43

8. Students receiving special education services: 7 %  
6 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>1</u> Autism                  | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>1</u> Other Health Impaired                 |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>2</u> Specific Learning Disability          |
| <u>1</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>0</u> Speech or Language Impairment         |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment      | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>1</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 10
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	1
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	9
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	5
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	1
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 6:1

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	97%	97%	96%	96%	95%
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. 2014

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

Timber Lake School provides a safe environment that empowers students to become critical thinkers and responsible, lifelong learners in a changing society.

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

## **PART III - SUMMARY**

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“The Timber Lake School provides a safe environment that empowers students to become critical thinkers and responsible lifelong learners in a changing society.” This is the mission statement of our school district and what drives us to do our best as we have the honor of working with our scholars each and every day! We expect excellence from our students and have high expectations academically and behaviorally. Along with that, we provide the supports and programs to help them reach that success and excellence.

A safe environment includes physical, social, and emotional safety for the students in our building. The school-wide mantra used to teach and provide this is “The Panther Way: Respect Self, Respect Others, and Respect Property.” Within this Tier I MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Supports) intervention, we promote pride in our school, selves, and community. We are fortunate to have a low student-teacher ratio as well as two school counselors on staff who focus on social-emotional learning and proactive strategies to build our students’ confidence and resilience. We work hard to recruit and retain high-quality teachers who work diligently to provide top-notch educational experiences that are student-centered. Constant attention is given to updating safety features in our school by analyzing school entry points and procedures, emergency drills, and professional consultations on the physical safety of our building. Local law enforcement is an important partner in promoting and maintaining school safety.

The Timber Lake School District chose to transition from a junior high school to a middle school over fifteen years ago. The change that this has made in meeting student needs has been phenomenal. We have implemented a Teachers As Advisors program which allows each student to connect and build an adult relationship and increase their sense of belonging in our school. The middle school concept has also allowed us to build connections between subject areas and increase the meaning of our lessons. Educators can departmentalize and specialize in an area that makes their content knowledge stronger and focuses deeper. The daily teacher team planning time allows us to enhance our instructional strategies and stay abreast of student issues. Students do not fall through the cracks because of the diligence and efforts of the team of middle school teachers. Tutor times and extra help sessions have increased with parent and family engagement becoming proactive rather than reactive.

Timber Lake is on the Cheyenne River Indian Reservation in northwestern South Dakota, but also serves students on the Standing Rock Reservation. Our town boasts a population of nearly 450 people, but we are surrounded by a largely rural farming and ranching community. Our district covers over 1200 square miles of Dewey and Corson counties; spanning from the Missouri to the Moreau Rivers. We attract students from not only Timber Lake, but also Trail City, Glencross, Isabel, Firesteel, White Horse, Ridgeview, Little Eagle, Mobridge, and Eagle Butte. Some students and their families choose to drive over 40 miles one-way daily to attend our school. Demographically, we are a mix of Native American and Caucasian families and many of our students qualify for free and reduced lunches. Community and parent support is key to the success of Timber Lake School. They have celebrated with us in the accolades of being named a National Blue Ribbon School in 2014, an exemplary, high performing South Dakota High School, a National Title I Distinguished High School, as well as employing the South Dakota Teacher of the Year, State History Day Teacher of the Year and Secondary School Principal of the Year. The school is the hub of our small town and there is pride taken in it by students, staff, alumni, parents, business owners, community members, and many other stakeholders.

## **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

Our overarching educational philosophy at TLMS is that our students come first. We meet students where they are with hands-on, meaningful lessons while providing support for all levels. NWEA MAPS testing has allowed us to gather data on student needs and plan instruction and appropriate grouping techniques from this information. Students are given this assessment three times during the school year. After each testing session, scores are analyzed. Instructional groupings and lessons are designed around these results as well as assessments within the classroom. Interdisciplinary units are key to our educational planning and allow students to see the connections between subject areas. We recognize the technological world for which our students must be prepared and offer each student a laptop to use during the school day. The instructional methods implemented in our district vary among teachers and grade levels. Teachers use interactive programs, word processing, spreadsheets, and desktop publishing to complete research and assignments. Student choice is incorporated where possible as this increases student engagement. The SmartBoards located in middle school classrooms also allow technology to be incorporated into lessons daily. We are a one to one district so each student has a laptop. Multisensory learning is a method that many teachers use in order to reach all learning styles and needs. Questioning techniques are essential in promoting higher-order thinking. Teachers strive to ask questions that are open-ended and require students to elaborate and expand. Chunking classes into sections to maintain student focus and attention is also used by several teachers. Teachers incorporate reading and writing skills across the curriculum to show how content areas connect.

Power standards have been developed for each subject area and grade level within the district's Professional Learning Communities. Students can track their progress on each power standard and reflect upon whether they have mastered it or need more assistance on that standard. Power standards then mesh into curriculum maps that allow teachers to track the coverage of their curriculum. Common formative assessments are used when possible to group students for intervention and enrichment opportunities.

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

Reading and writing are intertwined into all subject areas in our middle school. Content area, as well as ELA classrooms, use the RACE method for answering essay questions. This includes Restating the Question, Answering all parts of the question, Citing Textual Evidence, and Explaining the response using that evidence. All teachers using a consistent writing method has proven beneficial in improving students' reading and writing skills. This strategy has been expanded into our high school for optimal vertical alignment. For specific ELA instruction, our school offers separate reading and English classes for each grade each day. English teachers loop the same group of students for all three years of middle school. This strategy allows instructors to know their students and their skill sets well. Pride is taken in the low student-teacher ratio with class sizes ranging from ten to fifteen. Our ELA department focuses on a solid balance of grammatical skills along with practicing a variety of writing genres. Daily Grammar Practice is used as a bell ringer for each class and hones in on specific grammar rules and usage. This is balanced with multiple types of writing that are based on South Dakota State Standards. Student choice has proven to increase student engagement and we incorporate this whenever it is possible. In reading, we focus on nonfiction and text structures while weaving in novel and literature units based on student wants and needs. Teachers choose a variety of contemporary, nonfiction reading materials that have high student interest and are engaging. Critical thinking activities and open-ended questions are used often during classroom discussions.

**1c.** Mathematics

Over the past five years, we have implemented a curriculum called College Preparatory Mathematics. The gist of this curriculum is to allow students to have a deep understanding of mathematical concepts rather than just memorizing algorithms and formulas. The lesson design is very exploratory and inquiry-based with students working in groups to discover answers with the teacher as the guide and facilitator. Students

develop the ability to communicate mathematically with their peers and express their ideas and understanding. Open-ended questions that promote critical thinking are key to the success of the program and our three middle school math teachers are experts! We can differentiate by offering two math classes in sixth and seventh grade, with eighth grade having three classes, including Algebra I for high school credit.

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

Science is an essential component of our curriculum and we are fortunate to have a National Board Certified Teacher at the helm of our middle school program. There is a focus on building foundational knowledge as well as applying that core into more substantial understanding and application. Labs include the scientific method with data collection and analysis of results to draw conclusions. Some labs require students to brainstorm and create a procedure to answer a posed science question. Various branches of science labs are included in grades 6-7-8: chemistry, forces and motion, cells (plant, animal, protist), body systems, populations and ecosystems, variables, weather and water, and earth history. Reading and writing strategies are incorporated to allow students to demonstrate their knowledge through reflection and critical thinking skills. Current science news articles are read which include maps, graphs, and tables to analyze and write formal responses citing evidence to support the conclusion.

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

Social studies instruction is required for all middle schoolers with a wide scope and sequence. Sixth graders are exposed to map skills, ancient civilizations, and global events that focus on historical events that help shape the world today. While seventh graders are exposed to geography concepts. Students focus on the five themes of geography, economies, culture, and governments of all hemispheres. Eighth graders cover content standards in American History with the primary focus being colonization, Revolutionary War, Western expansion, Civil War and Ratification, and American government. At all three grade levels, students are exposed to current events. All three classes analyze primary and secondary sources, maps, charts, graphs, and the Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings standard to enhance student learning. We have one teacher who instructs these classes and she uses nonfiction reading and writing strategies, hands-on lessons and higher-level questioning techniques to present her content.

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

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

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

We believe in educating the whole child, so Timber Lake Middle School students are also exposed to a variety of other curriculum areas. These include the fine arts of band, chorus, and art, as well as a one-week theatrical experience each year. Computer classes are offered in all three grade levels and include subjects of keyboarding, coding, and desktop publishing. Life skills classes are offered as an essential part of our curriculum and include study skills, drug and alcohol education, mental health awareness, puberty and reproduction, abstinence education, and career exploration. As sixth graders move into the middle school from elementary, study skills and time management are covered to allow students to adapt to their new environment. Physical education is also offered in all three grades with students being exposed to a variety of sports, games, and workouts. The Teachers as Advisors program allows us to address social-emotional needs as teachers build relationships with their core group of children.

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

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

Academically, we strive to ensure each student is successful. We require students to maintain a 2.0 GPA and have no failing grades in subjects to remain eligible for extracurricular activities. We have implemented a program called ICU. Just as a hospital has intensive care for sick patients, we have ICU for students with "sick" grades. Each week, we run an eligibility report that identifies students who have a GPA of below 2.0 or an F in any class. These students are first put on a warning list, and after two weeks put on an ineligible

list. At the beginning of the week, parents are informed and asked to help support their students. These students are asked to stay after school at least two days during the school week to receive extra help in the class in which they are struggling. Parents willingly make transportation arrangements for their children to help them gain success. The teachers in our district are willing to come early in the morning, stay after school, and sometimes give up their preparation periods to work with students and improve their grades. This program has significantly decreased the number of at-risk students. We also have revamped our Student Assistance Team processes in order to better identify struggling students. This SAT process has become cohesive district-wide, which is helpful as students transition from elementary to middle school and middle to high school.

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

Students who excel academically at Timber Lake Middle School are offered a variety of enrichment opportunities. Within the last year, our school has implemented an intervention and enrichment program called Panther Academy. Using data from a variety of sources, students are placed into groups based on their academic needs in mathematics and language arts. These groups change frequently to meet students' changing needs. One of our Panther Academy groups focuses specifically on student-led enrichment opportunities for students who need challenges. The focus of this group of Panther Academy students is entirely student-led and student-driven. Some projects that the "Double 4's" have implemented include public address information for our school foyer, service-learning projects to benefit community members and school events to improve the culture and climate of the middle school. Each Friday during Panther Academy, enrichment opportunities are offered, where all students can have a choice of an area of interest they would like to explore including strategy games, robotics, physical fitness, theater, art or music. In our small school, a large majority of our students participate in extracurricular activities which are also enhancements and extensions of the classroom.

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

Timber Lake Middle School employs one special education teacher and two paraprofessionals to educate our special education student population. Nearly all of our students with disabilities are included in the regular classroom with inclusion support. This allows them to be exposed to the regular education curriculum in the least restrictive environment while allowing focus on their individual goals during intervention times and life skills times. We are able to gather data and complete paperwork during our team planning time which allows for productive goals and objectives to be created for IEPs. NWEA MAPS testing is vital to our special education students as this data helps us determine their current levels of performance and design goals that are most beneficial to their learning plans. The transition from elementary and into high school is a high priority for all students, but we take extraordinary care in the special education department. Specialized meetings with teachers are held in the spring and fall to most optimally transition our students to the next level of their education. Vital information about students' strengths, needs, accommodations, and modifications are shared in advance to allow teachers to plan and prepare the best instructional strategies to allow success.

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

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

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

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

Our students are the hub of our existence, so keeping them engaged and educated is our highest priority. We conduct daily attendance checks as we know that students' consistent presence will lead to academic success. If a student is not in school, a phone call is made to the family to ensure they are safe and accountable. If attendance becomes an issue, home visits and parent meetings are conducted to alleviate the issue. As a last resort, truancy measures are enacted. However, at Timber Lake Middle School, our kids WANT to be in the classroom. Our teachers are constantly striving to create innovative, engaging lessons that are meaningful and encourage critical thinking skills. More importantly, relationship building is a priority for every staff member in our building. We want our students to know that we care for them and their well being; education and success are why we come to work!

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

Family and community support is vital to the success of our district and we are fortunate to have an abundance of this in our small town. Our school is the hub of the community and our facility is often used for community events and gatherings. Attendance at our extracurricular events is high and includes community members who no longer have students in school, but still, wish to support our current student body.

We constantly strive to maintain and improve our relationships with parents. Our website is always changing and evolving to meet our patrons' needs. This includes weekly calendars, pictures, teacher lesson plans and newsletters, handbooks, policy books, and many other useful links. Parents can access their students' grades through our website as well. The Timber Lake School Facebook page is a popular venue for sharing positive happenings and important information with our patrons.

As a principal, a goal is to make phone contact with parents often in a positive fashion and to highlight students when they are making a difference in the school as well as when there are concerns. Our staff is encouraged to keep the lines of communication open with parents through email and phone calls. Our homework policy helps to ensure this. If a student does not have his or her homework done for a class, they are sent to the office to call or send a letter home to inform the parents. In this regard, we can work together to ensure the child completes assignments and stays on target for completing courses. Parents of students who are on the warning or ineligible are contacted on the first day of each school week to encourage participation in our ICU program.

Student-led conferences are an exciting initiative that has been implemented. With teacher direction and guidance, students prepare a script ahead of time that has them consider their strengths and areas of needed improvement within each class they are taking. When conferences arrive, the student is the guide in the conversation with the teacher and their parent. We have found this to be a powerful tool to open up the lines of communication between all involved in the child's education. It also allows students to become more aware and invested in their learning and achievement. The results of student-led conferences have been phenomenal, with over 90% of families attending!

Twice per year, special school board meetings are set aside specifically for public input on our educational programs. During monthly school boards, principals and the superintendent give reports on the state of the school. As a school, we are always open to input from parents and community members to maintain and improve the district.

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

Professional Learning Communities have been the focus of the professional development drive of the Timber Lake District for several years, but we continue to hone and evolve with our implementation to meet our changing needs. There are three foundational purposes to the professional learning communities in our district. Our first purpose is to focus on learning. The fundamental purpose of our school is to ensure that all students learn at high levels. To bring this idea to life, educators work together to answer the following four critical questions: 1. What do we want students to learn? 2. How will we know if students are learning? 3.

How will we respond when students don't learn? 4. How will we enrich and extend the learning for those students who are proficient or advanced? Our second foundational principle is a focus on collaborative teamwork. Certified teachers are organized collaborative teams to develop a group objective, achieve common goals, and hold each other accountable. Our third and final big idea is a focus on student achievement. Our ultimate goal is to ensure that all students are successful and making gains in their learning. Tracking power standards for each subject area and student mastery of these standards is an essential component of our PLC time. Educators can share data tracking methods, common formative assessments, and other best practices in instructional strategies. The administrative vision of Timber Lake Professional Learning Communities is that educators will increase their professional capacity in the areas of the curriculum and instructional strategies through positive, professional, and collaborative communications within each PLC.

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

There is a positive climate in our school, and though school leaders cannot take all of the credit, we know that our roles as leaders contribute to it. The heart and soul of a school district are relationships. Our mission as leaders is to make our students feel welcome in the building and let them know that we truly care about them as students and people. We want kids to know we are their biggest cheerleaders and we are invested in their lives. This includes meeting and greeting them in the mornings, at lunch, and between classes, as well as attending their events. The "Caught Doing It Right" initiative in our school is an opportunity to recognize students for going above and beyond to show their excellence. Having these positive interactions allows the principal to build trust and positive connections. When young people do get sent to the office for redirection, the hope is to always treat them with kindness and respect to make the situation a learning opportunity and a way for them to get better.

The staff in our district go above and beyond to provide outstanding educational opportunities. It is the principal's responsibility to let them know that their efforts are recognized and appreciated. A school leader's role in building relationships with staff is similar to students: they need to know they are welcome and important. This is accomplished by greeting each teacher every morning. On Mondays, a specific quote is distributed to get them started for the week called "Monday Motivation." Supporting teachers in continuing their professional growth, listening to their feedback and concerns, and including them in the decision-making process are components of our leadership philosophy. Our teachers are the heartbeat of our school and willingly take on leadership roles including serving as PLC facilitators, members of the Data Leadership team, and teacher mentors for new staff. In our middle school specifically, a team leader has been designated to facilitate the daily team planning meetings. This includes creating agendas, interdisciplinary units, student success meetings, and lesson plan sharing sessions. As leaders, we strive to create a caring, fun environment for staff where they love to teach!

We all know that one of the keys to student success is family partnerships. Building positive connections early is key to gaining support. Visiting with parents by phone or at school events to let them know the positive things their kids are doing as well as how happy we are to have them in our school. It can be as quick and easy as "Your daughter has such amazing manners! She thanks the cooks every day when she leaves her tray!" or "Wow, Joe did an outstanding job with his trumpet at the concert!" An open-door policy allows the principal to visit with parents about their questions and concerns. It is important to be an active listener and truly hear the parent's concern without becoming defensive. A significant part of every Monday afternoon is spent on the phone with parents whose students are struggling academically. This allows early intervention as well as potential proactive solutions. Each time there is an interaction with a family, the principal imagines the child is their own. Families need to know that their kids are precious gems, and we take our jobs educating them seriously.

Our little town is small in population but large in heart and support for our school. A double-header high school basketball game or music concert is a social event in our community, and it brings many into our building. This is an awesome opportunity to make connections with community members and business leaders. We want to make sure they feel welcome in our school and are proud of the job we are doing to educate Timber Lake students.

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

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We are a high performing school and I believe the ONE practice that has helped us achieve this excellence is hiring and retaining high-quality teachers. Many of our teachers have been on staff since the inception of the middle school concept in Timber Lake. They have been crucial in the evolution of the best practices that are currently in place. From the effective use of our daily team planning time to establishing success meetings for at-risk students, these ideas were created by middle school teachers. Student success is their number one priority and they are always willing to go the extra mile to ensure success. Our families are extremely supportive but teachers initiate contact with the parents when there is even the slightest concern about their child. In this respect, we can intervene early and effectively. Even though we have a veteran staff, they do not rest on the same lessons each year. They are constantly striving to stay abreast of the most current, innovative instructional strategies that will optimally benefit their current classroom of students. Our teachers are the heartbeat of our school!