

U.S. Department of Education
2021 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

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

Official School Name Mt. Laurel Elementary School
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 1 Jefferson Place
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Birmingham State AL Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 35242-6669

County Shelby

Telephone (205) 682-7230 Fax (205) 682-7235

Web site/URL
<https://www.shelbyed.k12.al.us/schools/mtles/index.htm> E-mail cdeem@shelbyed.org

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

Date _____

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent* Dr. Lewis Brooks E-mail l2brooks@shelbyed.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Shelby County School District Tel. (205) 682-7000

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

Date _____

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board
President/Chairperson Mr. Aubrey Miller
(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, leave blank.*

PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION

The electronic signature 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 2021 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 must include one or more of grades K-12. Schools located on the same campus (physical location and mailing address) must apply as an entire school (i.e. K-8; 6-12; K-12 school). Two (or more) schools located on separate campuses, must apply individually even if they have the same principal. A single school located on multiple campuses with one principal must apply as an entire school.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2015 and grades participating in statewide assessments must have been part of the school for at least the three years prior to September 2019.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 or 2020.
6. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. If irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state, the U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school’s application and/or rescind a school’s award.
7. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as “persistently dangerous” within the last two years.
8. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
9. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
10. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district, as a whole, has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution’s equal protection clause.
11. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Data should be provided for the current school year (2020-2021) unless otherwise stated.

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

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

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools. Only include demographic data for the nominated school, not the district.)

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, 2020 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent at the school. Include all students enrolled, in-person, participating in a hybrid model, or online only. If online schooling or other COVID-19 school issues make this difficult to obtain, provide the most accurate and up-to-date information available:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	34	45	79
1	39	55	94
2	28	40	68
3	47	53	100
4	40	50	90
5	31	49	80
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	219	292	511

*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):
- 1 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 5 % Asian
 - 8 % Black or African American
 - 4 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 82 % 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 2019 - 2020 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.

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	0
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	0
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	0
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	0
(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, Japanese, Vietnamese, Russian, Portuguese, and Italian

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 6 %
29 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 13 %

Total number students who qualify: 64

8. Students receiving special education services: 12 %
61 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. All students receiving special education services should be reflected in the table below. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <u>12</u> Autism | <u>2</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>12</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>4</u> Developmental Delay | <u>4</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>5</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>3</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>2</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 7
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. If your current staffing structure has shifted due to COVID-19 impacts and you are uncertain or unable to determine FTEs, provide an estimate.

	Number of Staff
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	27
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	15
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	9
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	1

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

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

Required Information	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016
Daily student attendance	97%	96%	96%	96%	96%
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 2020.

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

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.
 Yes No

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

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

To Make Every Student a Graduate and Every Graduate Prepared.

16. Briefly describe how your school has been operating during the current 2020-2021 school year (e.g., open as usual, online only, a hybrid model, etc.)? If different grade levels in your building operate in different ways, include this. If the school began with one model and switched to another partially through the year, include this as well.

Parents were given the choice of in person or virtual learning. The first month of school began with the Hybrid Model. Using the alphabet, half of the students came on Monday and Tuesday, closed Wednesday for cleaning, and the other half on Thursday and Friday. After four weeks, all students were allowed to attend school in person or choose virtual learning. Each nine weeks parents could choose for their child to come back in person or go from in person to virtual learning. As the year progressed, MLES had more students return to in person learning.

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

PART III - SUMMARY

Mt Laurel Elementary School (MLES) is a caring and supportive family. Our school consists of a broad spectrum of socioeconomic families. We have successful professional families as well as working-class families struggling to meet basic needs. Although our families differ in backgrounds, they all come together to support our students, teachers, and staff. Students eagerly accept each other and don't recognize differences. The team works to provide a safe and non-threatening environment for students to express themselves and learn.

MLES uses many strategies to make sure students are meeting their academic potential. Each classroom teacher utilizes small group instruction in his or her Tier I teaching block. When students are still struggling, classroom teachers offer students Tier II instruction. Walk-to-Win, which stands for "What I Need," is our school's Tier II/III plan. Every student in our school attends intervention daily. Students who struggle work on lessons that bridge the gap to grade-level performance. Students who are performing on grade-level practice skills learned in their classroom. At the same time, students working above grade-level work on accelerated lessons. Every certified staff member facilitates a group during this protected block of time. Grade-levels frequently meet in their Professional Learning Communities (PLC) to analyze and discuss student data. These meetings allow teachers to discuss difficulties with student learning and brainstorm ways to meet each student's needs. If a student is still struggling in a particular area, teachers refer him or her to the Problem Solving Team (PST). This team works together to create a plan that helps the student achieve success.

Along with classroom strategies, PST can also refer students to our interventionist who works with struggling students. Our Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) pays for our school to have an interventionist to help students. This teacher offers small group, researched-based Tier III instruction.

Our school works diligently to meet our students' emotional, physical, and social needs. The school counselor offers small groups to meet the various needs of our students. A certified mental health counselor talks with a select group of students to work through family and emotional issues. We also strive to create proactive programs to encourage character in our students. Every staff member in our building can give out brag-tags to highlight student achievements. In addition, we have a group of students who deliver food bags to classrooms where it is discreetly given out to students who struggle socioeconomically. Student Council elections offer leadership roles for students who work to provide community service hours. Mentor programs using both teachers and students guide our at-risk population.

MLES helps students learn about different cultural backgrounds. Our librarian intentionally picks books that highlight a broad range of experiences for our students. Several classes complete a unit-of-study on different cultures around the world yearly. Our school also encourages our students from different cultures to share their stories and language.

The word family is embodied throughout our daily life at MLES. As a team, we want to create a true sense of the word family. One of our teacher leaders read an article about a school that had created houses within their school. She took the idea to our administration, and that was the day our school's five "Houses" were created. The Houses were created to help students and faculty get to know each other and collaborate. The five Houses consist of a mixture of general education classes from different grade levels, special area teachers, special education teachers, paraprofessionals, and office, cafeteria and custodial staff. The Houses are named for the five key traits school leaders want the students to exhibit: Honestidad (Honesty in Spanish), Rispetto (Respect in Italian), Uaminifu (Loyalty in Swahili), Amable (Kindness/Friendly-In Spanish), and Magtiyaga (Perseverance in Filipino). During the House meetings, relationships are built through collaborative projects that inspire community outreach. Students and staff members are able to mentor through teacher-created activities. Relationships have taken on a deeper meaning for students and adults. You see huge smiles when students see family members wearing their MLES shirts at lunch, recess, and the hallway. Our "Family" tree is rooted in respect, honesty, loyalty, perseverance, and friendship.

In March of 2020, our school moved to an online platform due to COVID-19. Although this presented many

challenges, our community worked together to continue to meet our students' needs. Our teachers worked tirelessly to learn and become proficient at using online platforms, video conferencing, and recorded lessons. In the fall of 2020, our teachers were excited to come back to school with a staggered schedule for most of our students. Some teachers were charged with being full-time virtual teachers, while others provided lessons for both face-to-face and virtual students. However, by the end of the 1st nine weeks, we had almost 90% of our students back in the building full time.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

Mt Laurel Elementary School’s curriculum is based on the Alabama College and Career Readiness Standards for our core subjects. Teachers break down the standards into manageable daily learning targets and success criteria. Teachers and students monitor daily learning through their “I Can” statements. ELA and Math instruction is taught through a three-tiered approach, while Social Studies and Science are taught through a meaningful hands-on approach.

Our ELA classes consist of explicit modeling, guided practice, and authentic learning experiences. Some examples include book clubs, Socratic circles, and hands-on word-building centers. History standards are interwoven into our ELA instruction, providing a context for ELA skills and building students’ vocabulary and background knowledge. Students use close reading strategies with primary and secondary sources. Students are engaged in role-playing, project-based learning, and hands-on activities. For example, in 5th-grade, students immersed themselves in the Boston Massacre by reading eyewitness accounts, debating who was at fault, creating visual presentations, and writing opinion essays. In younger grades, teachers use engaging speakers who role-play famous people throughout history and have students present a wax museum of historical figures. We address ELA standards, social-emotional learning, and critical thinking skills through these engaging activities.

In math, our students are encouraged to be thinkers from kindergarten. We teach number sense, critical thinking, and problem-solving using tools such as number talks, manipulatives, and visual models. The students learn multiple strategies to solve problems. In upper grades, we celebrate Pi Day by having the students sample pies, collect data, and create graphs to show their results. Our younger students participate in hands-on activities such as creating a garden that incorporates comparing, graphing, and sorting across all settings.

MLES teaches science through the Alabama Math Science Technology Initiative (AMSTI) program. Our teachers attended a multi-week training that allowed them to receive the resources needed to implement these STEM lessons in their classrooms. For example, our third graders studying force and motion work in teams to build cars and then redesign them to make them more aerodynamic. Our teachers also created a STEM lab from grant money, which allows our students to explore technologies such as Ozobots, Cubelets, and Beebots.

All students receive well-planned Tier I instruction. Our teachers work collaboratively within grade levels to design engaging and thought-provoking learning experiences. Teachers facilitate these lessons using the gradual release model. Classes begin with the “I Can” statements, so students know what they are expected to learn and what success looks like in the classroom. Throughout Tier I, teachers continually use formative assessments to take the students’ temperature through quick writes and exit tickets with student engagement strategies before allowing them to practice the learning target independently.

Classroom teachers use formative assessments to identify students who need Tier II instruction. The teacher plans targeted instruction for students who did not master their learning targets, using teacher tools from the iReady computer-based program, close reading materials, and teacher-made instructional lessons. The district has also provided multisensory research-based programs, including Phonics First and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (HMH) Math programs. Tier II is provided daily in the classroom in a small group setting. The students move fluidly in and out of the group based on their needs and mastery of learning targets.

The formation of Tier III groups is through multiple data points, including summative and formative assessments, teacher observations, and a state-provided diagnostic assessment. We have established a school-wide Tier II/ III intervention time called Walk to WIN. We use research-based, multisensory programs such as SPIRE, iReady, Lexia, and Orton Gillingham to address our struggling readers. Six faculty members in our school are Orton Gillingham Certified Teachers. The students are progress monitored to check for growth; then, teachers meet in Professional Learning Communities (PLC) to make adjustments within groups.

Starting in March 2020, due to the COVID regulations, our school pivoted to virtual learning for the remainder of the year. We transitioned to using an online platform, where all teachers posted daily lessons, weekly video conferences, and individual video interventions. Our teachers safely visited students' homes leaving encouraging signs in their yards, sweet cards, and treats to remind them they were loved and missed.

In the Fall of 2020, we started our year with a drive-thru Meet the Teacher, where the teacher could safely greet the new students and their parents. Our year began on a hybrid, staggered schedule for four weeks. During this time, our teachers continued to post daily videotaped lessons, communicated with individual students through the online platform, and did in-person interventions. Currently, we have in-person and virtual classes taught by our teachers. Our virtual students receive the same instruction as our traditional students. Our virtual teachers hosted a drive-by holiday party, special guest readers, and virtual field trips in addition to instruction. They also dropped off holiday gifts and instructional materials at the students' houses.

1a. For secondary schools (middle and/or high school grades):

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

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Our school offers exceptional art and music programs. Art pieces constructed by our students are shown in a district-wide art show. We host an annual art night where parents and community members can enjoy different art mediums generated by students in our school. In addition to our visual arts program, our school's music program offers opportunities for hands-on lessons with various musical instruments. Two musical programs are presented annually to allow students to perform several songs. A singing group is offered to our 4th and 5th-grade students. They perform at various locations throughout the year, including fairs and amusement parks.

Our physical education program offers students activities to keep them active and engaged in their daily lessons. This program received a grant to purchase electronic wristbands so students can visually monitor their healthy heart rate. A skating unit is offered yearly to target students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, which allows them to enjoy an otherwise potentially unavailable activity. Holiday centers are organized to keep students active in well-planned and intentional activities. Track club is conducted and requires students to run and track miles achieved weekly. Finally, engaging speakers are invited to come and offer hands-on activities for our students.

MLES puts equal amounts of effort into our students' academic preparedness as well as building their character. Our counselor created a program called Noble Knights that allows students to work as hall monitors, deliver food bags to classrooms, and implement food drives for needy individuals. Our school's student council members create projects to feed the needy, provide coats to the county's homeless population, sing carols to nursing home patients, and collect snacks for our local first responders. We also have school-wide teams made up of several grade levels that perform acts of kindness for different groups during the year. One example is writing messages for children in the hospital. The counselor also coordinates an Angel Tree program that creates the opportunity for many of our classrooms to sponsor a child and provide gifts for those families.

Our school has invested in gaining information equitably. For the past few years, we have been making our school a 1 to 1 device environment for all students. When schools shut down last year, we were able to pass out Chromebooks to students who did not have access to technology so they could complete the year. Students have access to academic support and programs through Clever and Google Classroom. Also, our students participate in a computer class that supports classroom instruction. They learn keyboarding, digital

citizenship, and digital breakout rooms. We have invested in ozobots, bee bots, and sferos to teach coding. With COVID restrictions, we had to limit the sharing of devices but continued to incorporate Science, Technology, Robotics, Art, and Math (STREAM) activities such as Virtual Makerspace and digital breakouts. Also, with the need for more access to authentic texts to read, we have invested in e-books. The media specialist wrote and received a community grant that matched school media center funds to gain more e-books that students can access.

3. Academic Supports:

MLES provides opportunities for academic support and interventions. Our Walk to WIN program is a school-wide initiative that uses certified personnel to provide small group instruction. We have an extensive range of groups, including reading and math instruction, where students are grouped based on the skills they need to work on, such as fluency, comprehension, or number sense. Our gifted specialist provides accelerated learning groups, art and music teachers provide book clubs, and our counselor provides social skills lessons. Students who struggle are referred to our PST team, which collaborates to make an individualized intervention plan. Based on this plan, the interventionist provides research-based instruction.

For our students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), we provide a continuum of services such as small groups, inclusion support, and a resource room. Our special education teachers and paraprofessionals are trained in behavior management and crisis response. In our inclusion classrooms, the teachers and paraprofessionals work together to provide extra instruction and accommodate the general classwork to meet our students' needs. Individualized Tier III interventions, Speech-Language Services, OT, and PT, are also provided in a small group setting. Our students who are in the resource room have individualized one-on-one instruction and inclusion PE, specials, and special class activities. Our school has also provided our students with two sensory rooms and adaptive playground equipment.

Our county follows state guidelines in offering a program for identified gifted students who show potential verbally, non-verbally, and creatively. Students are identified in second grade using a matrix of various components, including a teacher behavior rating scale, ability tests, and products obtained through classroom experiences. Once students are identified, services are provided in Grades 3 through 5. Students attend their gifted class once a week to receive specialized instruction. Virtual gifted students receive services via an online platform. The gifted curriculum encompasses all subject areas along with addressing the social-emotional needs of the students.

Students who are identified as English Language Learners (ELL) receive services by a certified teacher. They work on their language skills as well as have support for their classroom assignments. Students are able and encouraged to discuss issues impacting their learning, social topics, and emotional wellness. In addition to instruction, these students are offered help with medical care, extracurricular activities, and home issues. Our ELL teacher performs interpreting services for our families. The ELL teacher forms strong bonds with families to ensure the highest level of service is given to these individuals.

MLES works to ensure all populations in our school are served. Services offered to our lower socioeconomic students include a food service where needy students receive a bag of food weekly. When these students are out of school, our bus drivers deliver bags to these families' homes. Our counselor has implemented a program where at-risk youth are partnered with a teacher. The school offers opportunities for these partners to have lunch together, create projects, and spend time talking together. MLES is committed to ensuring all students reach their full potential.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

A priority for MLES is to create an environment and culture that nurtures student engagement. Our year always starts with each classroom teacher, special area teacher, and administrator making weekly phone calls to our parents to build strong relationships to foster student engagement. This practice is repeated every week during the first month of school. The phone calls work to build relationships that will benefit student engagement throughout the year. One practice used to keep students focused on their goals and accomplishments is annual student-led conferences. This activity allows students to track their progress in all subject areas and choose exceptional work products to share with family and community members. Many teachers implement five-minute talks throughout the year to talk with students about subjects other than academic work. This time helps teachers identify obstacles that may keep students from reaching their full potential. Each classroom uses brag tags to spotlight exceptional work and behavior. Names are announced weekly over the school-wide intercom of students who received this honor. School-wide teams pair up different grade levels in one group. These teams meet monthly to talk about character traits and create projects that practice these traits. Some examples of these teams' activities are cards to veterans, letters to sick children, posters against bullying, and thank you notes to community leaders.

Professional pictures of students and teachers working together line the hallways to reinforce the school's purpose. A school-wide, family sing-a-long occurs yearly to build relationships in our school. During COVID, MLES used creative ideas to keep the students engaged and excited during remote learning. Weekly online meetings were held with each classroom to allow students to talk with their teachers and classmates. These meetings included show and tell, books read aloud, questions of the week, and time for the teacher to answer questions about assignments. One-on-one intervention meetings took place throughout the week with struggling students and their parents. Classroom teachers created videotaped lessons posted to an online learning site to keep students engaged under challenging conditions. Teachers had signs made to place in students' yards to show the students' community they were loved and missed by their school. Teachers delivered work, goodies, and sweet notes to the front door of each of their students. A school-wide shirt that read "MLES Strong" was given to each teacher and student to wear during this time. MLES worked diligently to keep the students of the school engaged and excited about learning.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

One of the many ways our school is successful is through the involvement of ALL stakeholders. Our community takes pride in knowing that everyone that walks through our door is an integral part of making our students successful citizens for years to come.

We have a very supportive PTO. They work behind the scenes to get volunteers to prepare our building for the new year with community workdays. A local church has a Serve Day where members prepare the grounds for the new year. Throughout the summer, the PTO works to gather community partnerships that adopt classrooms so teachers can buy materials they need at the beginning of the year. Each business is recognized outside the teacher's classroom, and students write thank you notes. At the beginning of each school year, with the help of parents, businesses, and the staff of our school, we have a school fair. Businesses donate goods, high school students volunteer, and corporations give sponsorships to support school projects. Our PTO works diligently through the year to create funding for projects and fund an Interventionist. Our community's investment in our school supports student success.

Our community continues to invest in our students through grants, volunteering, career development, and a shared vision of success. The Highland Lakes Women's Club donates school supplies and provides support for students throughout the year. We have community literacy volunteers trained to work with students; they sit in supervised areas and support students in our school. We have a career week where parents and local businesses come and share their careers with our students. Students then dress up as their future careers. The City of Chelsea provides teacher grants. Teachers can write a grant twice a year to receive funding to make the unimaginable imaginable. Teachers receive money to start gardens, buy interactive whiteboards, expand

classroom libraries, purchase STEM materials, invest in collaborative furniture for classrooms, and much much more. Our students thrive because of the support our community invests in our school. Even though community support has looked a little different this year with more Zoom presentations, virtual fundraisers, and low-touch options, our community has risen to the occasion. We have reached fundraising goals, given support to our businesses through social media, and had Google Meets for our parents to see class projects. We have not forgotten through all this that our students are our future, and they are an investment in which the value only goes up.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

At MLES, leadership is a theme throughout our school. We created a leadership motto that our whole school recites each morning. Our leadership creates an open-door policy that has a trickle-down effect. Teachers and staff are welcome to share their ideas and initiatives. For the past few years, our school culture survey supports our open-door policy. The questions that deal with principal support and feeling open enough to share opinions have been 100%, and 99% agree and strongly agree. Our administration believes in the three R's, relationships, relationships, and relationships, and that is reflected throughout our staff.

Our school leadership team empowers teachers as leaders and creates buy-in for our whole faculty. Teachers give input into master schedules and class rolls. Also, they examine school surveys to see what areas we need to focus on to increase achievement and culture. Teacher leaders then discuss areas we need to focus on in professional development, programs, and resources to focus on student achievement. Through Continuous School Improvement (CSI), we have developed in-house professional development, with book studies, teacher observations, reflection meetings, and extra PLC times during the day to examine data. With support from our administration, teachers feel they are leaders of their learning that best supports our students.

Our school leadership understands that supporting its students and staff is a 24-hour job. Teachers feel comfortable enough to text and call the administration after hours for support socially, emotionally, and professionally. At the beginning of the year, teachers can wear school t-shirts and jeans and only focus on relationships. Teachers intentionally focus on building relationships for the first few weeks and continue throughout the year. You will see teachers playing during recess, sitting on the floor in small groups, crafting, and giving our students support.

Another way that our administration values teacher input is teacher PLCs during the day. They pay for subs to rotate throughout the building so grade levels and support teachers can collaborate on student achievement. Collaboratively, the administration and PTO show they value our time and work by working with the PTO to provide snacks and give away items at faculty meetings. At the beginning of each faculty meeting, our administration gives teachers time to shout out praises and events for which they need support and encouragement. Throughout the day at MLES, our faculty and staff work together for one goal, student success.

4. School Leadership:

Mt Laurel's leadership philosophy is simple: It's all about the kids. The administration has an open-door policy for teachers to share freely. Administration and teachers understand that if all decisions are based on what is best for the student(s), everything else will be fine. The most important aspect of our school is that we believe in building relationships. Teachers and staff work as a family and build relationships with students and their parents.

The Continuous School Improvement committee (CSI) helps create buy-in for the faculty by giving them leadership roles such as making the master schedule, students placement rolls, and brainstorming ways to celebrate students' achievements. MLES culture surveys are always 98% or higher, which we attribute to everyone working as a family to do what is best for students.

The administration has embedded PLC meetings into teachers' schedules. These meetings enable teachers to analyze student data and discuss the four critical questions:

1. What do we want students to know and be able to do? MLES is currently working to strengthen Tier I instruction. 2. How will we know when they know it? MLES is constantly reviewing current student assessments across settings to determine mastery of the content. 3. What will we do when they don't know it? MLES examines tiered intervention practices to learn more about effective strategies that will benefit students. 4. What will we do when they already know it? MLES integrates techniques that allow students to increase depth and complexity in a way that extends their learning.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the administration worked with our PTO to purchase extra PPE and partnered with the City of Chelsea to receive grant monies to add supplies for students' Chromebooks. MLES participated in a thank you drive-thru for the city mayor and city council. The administration also worked with CSI to create a schedule around CDC guidelines. For example, MLES separated PE students by utilizing the gym and the cafeteria, and students enjoyed their lunch in the classroom. MLES put in place a new car rider line for kindergarten students and their siblings in order for them to enter and exit a different door to avoid overcrowding. Students were also spaced apart on buses. Teachers and administrators took needed supplies to virtual students and conducted home visits for our at-risk students. In August, MLES shared with parents via listserv and school Facebook about the safety precautions that were going to be put in place.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

We as a school understand that diversity and inclusion improve teaching and learning. Engaging in conversations across differences allows students and teachers to learn and enrich their abilities to think critically and creatively. Our teachers understand that diversity in the classroom builds better thinkers. Students hearing different perspectives allows them to draw more decisive conclusions. Teachers challenge students to consider different perspectives, which teaches them how to interact with their peers socially and equip them with skills they will use throughout their adult life. Students in fifth grade created cultural dolls in traditional dress that represent people from different cultures. Students explored and appreciated the many things that make families and their cultures unique. Another example from fifth grade would be their black-out poem in which students took Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous I Have a Dream speech and selected ten or more words to create a poem with the theme Equality. Our first grade celebrated Chinese New Year with traditional food provided by a student. In third grade, the students rotate to different classrooms to learn about holidays around the world. Our media center provides diverse materials for students to read to broaden their ideas of how other people live. Our ELL teacher provides additional support for our ELL learners and offers translations when needed. To provide an inclusive classroom, teachers also use different strategies like project-based learning, differentiated instruction, and blended learning to provide a safe and collaborative learning environment. Our belief as a whole community is that fair does not equal the same; fair means making sure that every student has what he or she needs to succeed regardless of race or gender. We have a zero-tolerance policy on harassment, bullying, and discrimination.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

The most instrumental strategy MLES uses is building positive relationships with students, parents, and the community. Before the school year, we start developing solid and positive relationships with parents and students by having teachers call parents in their new class. They also send cards and emails to make sure they know how excited the teacher is to have their students in their class. Once school starts, the phone calls continue weekly to solidify that relationship. Our school also has Math Nights, All Pro Dads, and other events to engage both parents and students.

In the classroom, teachers work to build relationships by doing activities to get to know the students. Our teachers are encouraged to get on the floor, play with the students, have class share time, walk and talk with students during recess, and eat lunch with students. All of our classrooms have an emotional check-in board to help our students identify their feelings and for our teachers to help any students who might be struggling. Student-teacher conferences are done one-on-one to give students individualized attention. Many of our teachers go above and beyond to attend ball games, recitals, and birthday parties. But most importantly, our teachers and staff take the time to listen and know what is going on in our students' lives.

MLES has an outstanding community and PTO that is supportive of our school. Our PTO hosts a Renaissance Faire where the community vendors can show their wares, and the students can play games and ride the rides. The City of Chelsea has made many monetary donations and given grants to support our school's needs. Our students have done philanthropic activities, such as collecting goods and making baskets for first responders, and collecting socks for the homeless.

When the school closed in March of 2020, our school had to change some of these practices. We were online having Google Meets with show and tells, scavenger hunts, and videoed lessons. Our teachers were making home visits and dropping off supplies. Teachers mailed cards, letters, and lessons for students who did not have them. There were daily emails, and interventions were done one-on-one with parent permission. This year our open house was done drive-thru style, and our hybrid learning included Google Meets and virtual field trips. Since our parents are unable to come into the building this year, it has been even more crucial to build those positive relationships in order for parents to feel included and know what is happening in our classrooms.