

***U.S. Department of Education***  
***2021 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 [X] Magnet [ ] Choice

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

Official School Name Park Magnet School  
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 617 Main Street  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Hot Springs State AR Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 71913-4948

County Garland

Telephone (501) 623-5661 Fax (501) 620-7855

Web site/URL https://pm.hssd.net/ E-mail oatsvalls@hssd.net

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. Stephanie Nehus E-mail nehuss@hssd.net  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Hot Springs School District Tel. (501) 624-3372

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 Dr. Cindy Rogers  
(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**

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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

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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):
- 4 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 1 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 6 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	6	5	11
K	29	31	60
1	28	39	67
2	35	36	71
3	25	45	70
4	16	28	44
5	19	19	38
6	21	20	41
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>	179	223	402

\*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
  - 3.2 % Asian
  - 18.6 % Black or African American
  - 19.9 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0.5 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 44.6 % White
  - 13.2 % 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: 11%

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, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	16
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	21
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	37
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	343
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.11
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	11

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

French, Gujarati, Romanian, Spanish, Tagalog (Filipino), Urdu, Vietnamese

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 13 %  
51 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 100 %

Total number students who qualify: 402

8. Students receiving special education services: 2 %  
7 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>1</u> Autism                  | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>3</u> Other Health Impaired                 |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>2</u> Specific Learning Disability          |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>12</u> Speech or Language Impairment        |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment      | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>0</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 4
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to the nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below. If your current staffing structure has shifted due to COVID-19 impacts and you are uncertain or unable to determine FTEs, provide an estimate.

	<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.	19
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	8
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	6
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 21:1

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

<b>Required Information</b>	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016
Daily student attendance	98%	97%	97%	98%	98%
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.

<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. 2015

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

The mission of Park Magnet is to foster an engaged global learning community with high levels of learning for all students through inquiry and reflection.

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.

At the start of the 2020-2021 school year families at Park Magnet were offered the choice of having students attend school fully in-person, fully online, or a blended part-time schedule with two days in the classroom and three days of virtual learning at home. After the first nine weeks of instruction, our district eliminated the blended option due to logistical issues and unsustainable demands on teachers. For the remainder of the 2020-2021 school year families have had the option of fully in-person learning or fully virtual learning with the flexibility to switch between the two options, as needed.

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

Enrollment at Park Magnet is open to all students residing in the Hot Springs School District. There is not a selection criteria or lottery process in place. Additionally, Garland County operates under a school choice plan between all seven school districts in the county. Therefore, students from surrounding school districts can also attend.

## **PART III - SUMMARY**

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Park Magnet, an IB World School, is located in historic Hot Springs, Arkansas. Hot Springs lies in the shadows of the Ouachita Mountains and draws tourists from nearby regions to enjoy its bath houses filled with therapeutic water from natural hot springs and to enjoy hiking and outdoor activities in the Hot Springs National Park and surrounding state parks.

The Hot Springs community, falling within city limits, is a low income urban area that is the 11th-largest city in the largely rural state of Arkansas. The Hot Springs School District has four elementary schools, utilizing a magnet model of school choice and enrollment. Additionally, seven school districts exist within Garland County providing school choice options for families. Given the availability of multiple school choices within our own district as well as outside of our district, Park Magnet enjoys the benefit of being able to enroll students from a wide geographical area. However, it also presents the challenge of perpetually needing to recruit students to participate in our program, given the number of other options afforded to local families. Currently, approximately 18% of students reside outside of the Hot Springs School District boundary, attending Park Magnet via school choice regulations. It should also be noted that through the Community Eligibility Program, all students in the Hot Springs School District qualify for free/reduced breakfast and lunch.

When Park Magnet first opened its doors, it was created as the Gifted and Talented (GT) campus for the Hot Springs School District, and, as such, attracted high achieving students from both within and outside of the district. In 2017, the Hot Springs School District began providing services for students identified as GT at all three elementary schools, with Park no longer serving as the designated GT campus for the district. This change in practice, along with gradual changes in our student population mean that now, in 2021, the demographic makeup of the study body at Park much more closely mirrors that of our Hot Springs community. As an IB school and a majority minority school, we have embraced our increased inclusion and diversity such that we can truly represent the international mindedness mission of the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO).

Park Magnet is proud to consistently rank in the top 4% of schools in the state, based on state assessments and Every School Succeeds Act (ESSA) measurements. Recently, Park has been recognized as the top ranking elementary school in the state of Arkansas for two consecutive years: 2016-2017 and 2017-2018. Currently, Park ranks 19th out of 519 elementary schools in the state of Arkansas.

In comparison to the many elementary schools in our county, region, and state, what sets us apart is our commitment to the tenets of the International Baccalaureate (IB) Primary Years Programme (PYP). Park was the first authorized IB PYP school in the state of Arkansas, of which there are still fewer than five statewide.

PYP is the framework of our educational program, and all that we do is centered within its components. As such, we are committed to engaging students in a rigorous and challenging curriculum that develops compassionate, knowledgeable, lifelong learners who are empowered to create a more peaceful world through an understanding and respect of cultural diversity and inclusion. Most specifically, we focus our instructional program on student engagement through inquiry. As an IB school, inquiry-based learning is our chief form of instruction and it is clearly visible through our classroom learning engagements. For example, fifth grade classrooms transformed into operating rooms staffed by teachers and students taking on the role of surgeons to deepen the understanding of mathematical order of operations and second grade students were challenged to solve real-world problems using bubble wrap as their primary material. The hallways of Park Magnet are filled with evidence of student-centered inquiry, which serves as a catalyst for further curiosity.

Park was honored to receive a National Blue Ribbon School award in both 2009 and 2015. We are the only recipient of this award in our county, which enables us to stand out among our peer institutions. As a National Blue Ribbon School, we have had the increased ability to recruit students from neighboring districts whose families seek a unique and high quality learning experience for their children. Since we

reside in a competitive school choice environment, the ability to recruit motivated students and families has also required us, the teachers, staff, and administration, to maintain incredibly high expectations for both ourselves and our students.

As our student population has shifted over the last several years to reflect more closely the demographics of our community--lower income, more non-white, and often entering our school with higher needs --we, as educators, have had to push to become even more effective at ensuring that all students achieve at high levels. Simply put, we have had to improve in what we do each day, and we have gladly accepted that challenge.



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

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

The International Baccalaureate (IB) Primary Years Programme (PYP) curriculum framework consists of six Transdisciplinary Themes in the Programme of Inquiry. The tenets of IB implore Park Magnet teachers to embrace and encourage international mindedness as they teach grade level content through a global lens. The Learner Profile, Approaches to Learning, Approaches to Teaching, and Key Concepts are all essential elements of the PYP. These components are the bedrock of the IB PYP educational program and set our school apart from others in our region of Arkansas.

While the IB PYP provides a curriculum framework for students learning, all Units of Inquiry are based upon Arkansas state standards, ensuring that students meet grade level standards and requirements for preparedness for future grades.

Essential standards for each grade level were determined by grade level teams and district level administrators over the course of the last several years. While learning standards for each grade level are taught by each classroom teacher, essential standards are incorporated daily into both in-person and virtual instruction. It is imperative that all students have access to all essential grade level content, regardless of which learning option their family has chosen.

Of course, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has challenged our implementation of those ideals. The shift to virtual learning has required new pedagogical approaches from teachers and both students and teachers have had to learn copious new skills and technologies. However, while the mode for inquiry based instruction may have shifted, the premise did not. Teachers continue to encourage and expect virtual students to expand their thinking, albeit through Zoom, by posing questions and leading them to inquire about content within their Unit of Inquiry.

Teachers at Park Magnet utilize a variety of assessment strategies based on the needs and interests of their students. COVID-19 has allowed and encouraged teachers to embrace and implement a diverse array of assessments. In former years, rubrics, checklists, and oral presentations were all a part of the practices used to assess student learning. Since March 2020, teachers have continued using these measures, but the medium and tools to demonstrate learning have altered. Teachers and students have worked collaboratively to gauge how these tools effectively represent mastery when some students are attending school remotely and others are attending school traditionally. While continuing to expect and maintain rigor, students have been given more autonomy in expressing success in grade level content. Digital presentations have been more prevalent this school year in comparison to previous years when 3D models were once the norm. Students are also encouraged to present their understandings orally while working remotely, in place of written submissions that have previously been expected.

At Park Magnet, inquiry-based instruction will always remain the primary strategy for instruction, however, there are specific lessons and subjects that warrant a more explicit approach. Our Response to Intervention (RTI) process aims to address students who are in need of support through early intervention and universal screening. Tier I instruction is given by classroom teachers in whole group settings targeting grade level standards and skills. Explicit phonics instruction is implemented in each classroom at Park Magnet, as part of Arkansas' commitment to literacy instruction rooted in the Science of Reading (SoR). Tier II intervention takes place in a small group setting, both in the classroom and in pull out services from literacy and math interventionists to address skill deficiencies.

The data collected from weekly common formative assessments are utilized for the reteaching of standards as well as the creation of small instructional groups. These assessments are created collaboratively amongst grade level teachers and are presented in a variety of ways, but are brief in nature and meant to demonstrate mastery on one to three specific learning targets. The Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) test is a formative assessment given to all kindergarten through sixth grade students three times a year and the ACT Aspire Interims are given to third through sixth grade students two times each year. Both of these assessments are instrumental in the planning of future instruction of grade level standards, including

reteaching as well as grouping students in small group learning. The Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy Skills (DIBELS) assessment is a diagnostic screener given twice a year to determine the acquisition of early literacy skills. All three of these assessments are formative data points that Park Magnet uses to guide our instructional program.

At the culmination of each Unit of Inquiry, understanding of the central idea is assessed using teacher created summative assessments. Students demonstrate mastery by presenting information orally, through performance tasks, and/or with a product. Students have autonomy to present in a form that is representative of their own personality and style. The ACT Aspire Summative Assessment is given to all third through sixth grade students as part of Arkansas' Every Student Succeed Act measurements.

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

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

We are proud to offer the only IB pre-K program in the state of Arkansas, setting us apart from all other educational institutions in the state. The IB PYP Early Years curriculum framework utilizes play as the primary mode of instruction. Students are engrossed in play-based and inquiry rotation centers to introduce early literacy, math, science, and social studies skills and content in the context of four Transdisciplinary Themes. Students and teachers strive to exemplify the Learner Profile by encompassing attributes, such as caring, knowledgeable, principled, and balanced.

Early literacy skills, including phonemic awareness, letter and sound acquisition, letter writing, as well as basic numeracy skills are fundamental areas of instruction taught during small and whole group instruction. Students utilize multi-sensory games and manipulatives to reinforce these foundational skills.

We are fortunate that there has been minimal impact of COVID-19 for our pre-K program. Students were already largely isolated from the rest of the student population since its inception due to the Department of Human Services, Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education guidelines. As a result of these protocols, there have been no significant adaptations, modifications, or interruptions in the daily instruction of Park Magnet's pre-K classroom. It should be noted that we have not offered a virtual learning option for the pre-K program during the 2020-2021 school year, however, we did provide virtual enrichment activities for families during the school closures in March, April, and May of 2020.

As this is only the second year for Park Magnet's pre-K program, there is little data to show trends asserting the impact on school readiness or success in the primary grades. However, this year the Kindergarten Inventory Screener (KIS) used to assess incoming kindergarten students, showed higher results from students who were enrolled in the pre-K program at Park in comparison to those in other programs or no programs at all. We are excited to see this program grow in the coming years as we work to provide our families with an early childhood experience that will prepare their students for future educational endeavors.

**2. Other Curriculum Areas:**

In addition to the rigorous academic coursework of the Primary Years Programme, our students participate in several other curricular areas including physical education (PE), Spanish, art, and music (band or choir in sixth grade only). Kindergarten through sixth grade students attend each of these classes for forty-five minutes per week while pre-K students attend one activity class each day for thirty minutes. Virtual students learning remotely from home access an online learning management system (SeeSaw or Schoology) to receive instruction and submit assignments in these disciplines.

Weekly art and music classes are an opportunity for each grade level to address subject specific content skills and standards, with an emphasis on technical vocabulary and language. The art and music teachers meet collaboratively with grade level teachers to coordinate lessons and learning engagements that are

connected to the Primary Years Programme (PYP) Units of Inquiry. Students are exposed to artists and musicians of different backgrounds, genres, and time periods. While all students in pre-K through fifth grade participate in weekly music classes, all sixth grade students choose between twice weekly band or choir classes.

In physical education (PE), students are challenged to set exercise and fitness goals at the beginning of the school year and periodically assess progress, with a culminating assessment at the end of the school year. Students start the beginning of each class with a warm up and end with a cool down exercise to build lifelong fitness habits. Yoga, basketball, soccer, and badminton are some of the activities that Park Magnet students are fortunate to offer students. Park students also learn about important athletic figures and how they made significant contributions, both locally and globally, in connection with grade level Units of Inquiry.

Unfortunately, COVID-19 directly affected Park Magnet's library and media education when our Library Media Specialist abruptly took an early retirement due to health concerns related to the pandemic. While we were able to staff this position on an interim basis, the global learning engagements and collaborations that students have become accustomed to, was not possible this year. However, we look forward to beginning the 2021-2022 school year with a permanent staff member in this position to continue the important work of supporting classroom teachers in exposing students to fundamental literary vocabulary and as well as connections to Units of Inquiry at all grade levels through unique learning engagement opportunities that take place in the library.

Lastly, Park Magnet is the only elementary school in our county with a foreign language component. As an IB PYP school, all kindergarten through sixth grade students attend Spanish classes taught by a certified Spanish teacher. Kindergarten through second grade students attend Spanish for forty-five minutes once each week, while third through sixth grade students attend Spanish class twice a week for forty-five minutes. The rigor of this second language instruction increases at each grade level with progressive scaffolding until, ultimately, ninety percent of the class time is conducted in Spanish.

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

As indicated in previous narratives of this application, Park Magnet has historically been a very high performing school. As our student population continues to become more inclusive and diverse, we are proud that we have been able to maintain high expectations for both adults and students in our learning community. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were not able to complete end-of-year state assessments in the spring of 2020. As such, we do not have recent official scores for our annual assessments. However, our students did complete the ACT Aspire Periodic (Interim) Assessments last year in both the fall and spring, in preparation for the summative assessments in April. Scores on these assessments do not show a gap of more than 10 percentage points between any single subpopulation of students and the overall average of all students. We are hopeful that we will be able to maintain similar equality of scores when we participate in ACT Aspire Summative Assessments later this spring.

To accomplish such widespread achievement, differentiation of instruction is paramount in our educational programming. At the beginning of each school day, thirty minutes is designated for intervention, remediation, and extension, for all students, schoolwide. This time is protected and is used to accommodate the needs of learners based on the data collected from formative assessments. All certified Park Magnet staff members are utilized to provide support for students during this time. Collaborative planning meetings are held between classroom teachers and support staff to determine the needs of students.

Additionally, students performing below grade level work daily with reading and math interventionists in small groups to address specific skills and learning targets that have been identified through multiple forms of assessments. Students participating in these intervention

groups change often based upon data collected during intervention and remediation sessions as well as data collected in the regular classroom.

Park Magnet's English Language Learners are our fastest growing population. We are proud that our ELL students generally achieve at or above grade level. The English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) facilitator tailors her support for ELL students by "pushing in" to classrooms of students who are achieving at grade level proficiency and "pulling out" for direct instruction of specific skills and standards to students who are achieving below grade level proficiency. The level of support provided is adjusted throughout the year to meet the needs of each student based on data collected from formative assessments, summative assessments, and classroom observations. Translators are provided for parent and teacher conferences and other parent meetings.

Every student matters at Park, therefore Park's Response to Intervention (RTI) Team, consisting of the principal, assistant principal, counselor, and interventionists meets every six weeks with each grade level team to monitor the progress of students in need of academic or behavioral support. During these meetings, we closely examine attendance patterns of our struggling students as well as changes in home life situations that may be contributing to difficulties at school. Through these meetings we guarantee that no students "fall through the cracks," but instead work to ensure success for all.

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

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

As an International Baccalaureate (IB) school, Park Magnet uses questioning and provocations to stimulate student inquiry. Students leverage hands-on experiences to take ownership of their education and demonstrate their learning on summative assessments. We believe that student success increases when they have voice, choice, and ownership in their learning.

Additionally, we engage and empower students to have a voice in schoolwide decision-making, especially through our student leadership organization, The Agency. The Agency consists of one student representative per classroom, selected via application. Prior to March 2020, this group met once per month to discuss issues such as improving lunch and recess, celebrating student success, and other issues of importance to our students. This group has continued to meet virtually since March 2020, when schools initially closed.

Park Magnet utilizes Capturing Kids' Hearts (CKH) as our model for building authentic relationships between students and teachers and students as peers. Classroom communities share daily "Good Things" with each other and learn to use genuine positive affirmations as a way to create a positive environment. Our staff members also focus on using language that fosters a growth mindset for both students and adult learners.

The CKH program is one component of our commitment to supporting the social-emotional needs of our students. Our school counselor meets with small groups of students throughout the year giving them a chance to talk with other students facing similar situations. Groups are formed to help build friendship skills, reframe thinking, manage and cope with emotions, and practice a growth mindset. There is also a group at the beginning of the year to help new students transition into their new school. The counselor also teaches monthly classroom lessons that promote the social and emotional well-being for all of our students.

The 2020-2021 school year has been uniquely challenging as we continue to meet the diverse needs of our students, given that some are learning virtually, at home, while most are in-person at school. During this challenging time, we have utilized social media heavily as a way to reach our families and students who are learning virtually. Our teachers include virtual students in lessons via zoom every day and through this time continue to include them in the classroom community by sharing their "Good Things," receiving and giving affirmations, greeting each other each day at the start of school, and frequently presenting their learning virtually.

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

Park Magnet works diligently to engage families and community partners in our commitment to ensuring students' success. We have done so through a focus on communication, the support of an active Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO), and through partnerships with local community organizations.

Frequent and relevant communication is key for student success at Park Magnet and has been even more critical this school year because so many of our students and families are not physically present on campus. A bi-monthly schoolwide newsletter provides photos and articles related to classroom and single-subject classroom learning engagements. Additionally, each classroom teacher sends home a monthly newsletter to keep families informed of student learning so families can engage in communication with their child about their learning.

Social media is another tool to provide parents and families with a snapshot of student learning during the day and for special event reminders. Digital communication has thus been critical during the last twelve months. Throughout the pandemic, we have also provided families with as many options as possible for engaging with the school. To wit, we have provided options for in-person and virtual Open House events, parent-teacher conferences, meetings, and all events, in an effort to maintain a sense of inclusion and connection during this unusual year.

We are fortunate to have the financial support of a strong PTO, which provides additional supplies for classrooms. The PTO also partners with school administration for celebrations, large and small, to show their support and appreciation for the work of our teachers and staff members.

Community partnerships have also been crucial to meeting our students' emotional and physical needs. As is the case in many schools, the level of basic needs of our students and families has increased noticeably in the past few years. As such, we leverage our partnership with the local United Way organization and our school district's outreach center to help meet the needs of our students and their families by providing shoes, clothing, food, and help with utilities, thereby attending to students' access to basic needs that might prevent them from learning.

Learning engagements outside of the classroom, or field trips, allow students to connect learning to their community through partnerships with local businesses like Alliance Rubber, an international leader in rubber manufacturing, located in our community. Our students and classes have also designed and led fundraising projects, in conjunction with classroom learning, that have benefited local nonprofit organizations including Habitat for Humanity and the Garland County Humane Society.

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

At Park Magnet, we believe creating an environment where teachers feel valued and supported is based upon empowering staff members to focus on their continual professional growth while also acknowledging and celebrating the success of individuals and teams along the way. As such, we are proactive and intentional in both our approach to professional development as well as creating a culture of support and celebration.

We believe that professional development for educators should be ongoing, frequent, relevant, specific, and timely. We make decisions regarding professional development opportunities based on student and teacher needs, curriculum and technology demands, International Baccalaureate Organization requirements, and district/state-mandated initiatives.

We intentionally utilize our collaborative time to ensure that professional development is ongoing throughout the school year. This includes one hour of protected collaboration time each Wednesday afternoon, as well as our monthly staff meetings, which are used for professional learning rather than simply logistics. Finally, as a way to support new staff, we provide a two year induction program for all teachers new to the building. Each of these sessions is directly focused on the curricular and instructional needs of teachers.

This year, professional learning opportunities have focused on creating blended and virtual learning engagements, using instructional technology, and managing digital learning platforms. At the beginning of the pandemic, our staff independently sought out learning opportunities and shared their learning with their peers. Teacher leaders sprouted up among the staff, and the building administrators took notice and encouraged the staff to continue sharing with one another during a beginning of year professional development session titled; "Show Us What You've Got."

In conjunction with our focus on meaningful professional development we are also intentional in celebrating the success and effort of our staff. This has been particularly important during the 2020-2021 school year, which is arguably the most difficult any of us have ever encountered. We highlight a "Staff Member of the Month" selected by their peers each month, give out weekly "shout outs" in the principal's weekly email "wrap up," deliver surprise treats like Sonic drinks, coffee, drawings for extra planning time, book giveaway, etc. The "weekly wrap up" also includes a segment called, "Name It, Claim It, Explain It," which uses photos throughout our building to highlight positive behaviors. The teacher being celebrated explains the learning engagement or example and how they used it in their classroom. Doing so combines teacher recognition with professional development, allowing teachers in our educational community to learn from each other.

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

Park Magnet’s philosophy of leadership is one of collaboration. Our Pedagogical Leadership Team (PLT) consists of the principal, assistant principal, school counselor, and lead teacher. This PLT actively solicits input from stakeholders throughout the year by surveying parents, students, and staff members. Park Magnet’s Guiding Coalition serves as an additional layer of shared leadership, consisting of twelve staff members, representing each grade level and team within the school. The work of this group is to provide two way communication between the collaborative teams and the school administration with a focus on curriculum and instruction.

Park’s assistant principal facilitates weekly collaborative meetings with grade level teams focused on our IB Units of Inquiry, which address state standards through transdisciplinary instruction. These units are created collaboratively by each grade level team and provide teachers with high levels of professional autonomy. Additionally, Park’s principal leads weekly meetings with grade level teams focused on addressing student achievement data through the ongoing planning, instruction, assessment, analysis and intervention cycle of the Professional Learning Communities at Work (PLC) process.

The master schedule committee serves as a highlight example of the collaborative leadership philosophy of our education community. We create the next year’s master schedule with a focus on meeting student needs, rather than adult conveniences. Our principal sets the tone of this committee with the chapter “The Best Schools Make Decisions Based on the Needs and Passions of the Students, Not on the Interests and Traditions of the Adults” from *Essential Truths for Principals* by Danny Steele and Todd Whitaker.

That group approach to large tasks, as exemplified by the master schedule committee, has been especially useful managing the COVID-19 crisis during the 2020-2021 school year. Like all school employees, administrators have seen their roles expand, especially in the implementation of new health and safety protocols. But we have also sought to become tireless cheerleaders for staff members who are working harder than ever before, in new and more challenging conditions, while managing their personal anxieties and fears.

Park offered both full time in-person and fully virtual learning options for all students beginning in August 2020. This means that teachers have been teaching both in-person students and virtual students at the same time, every day, all school year. That flexibility is, in and of itself, an incredible accomplishment. The administration at Park Magnet has, whenever possible, protected the time of teachers, supported their need for additional resources, and created an atmosphere of respect for the incredible talents and diverse skill sets needed to be successful in the current educational climate.

#### **5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:**

Over the last three years, we have worked diligently on ensuring that our school is one of culturally responsive teaching and learning. As an IB school, we are committed to the International Baccalaureate Organization’s mission statement, which focuses on creating young people who help to “create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect.” As a nearly majority-minority school, it is natural that our Units of Inquiry, created by our teachers, delve into important themes in modern society, intentionally selecting diverse curricular resources and focusing on the inclusion of social emotional lessons with the school counselor.

Similarly, our professional focus for the 2020-2021 school year is “Perspective,” in an effort to be consistently mindful of the multiple perspectives present in our school, classrooms, and families. Park’s principal and assistant principal kicked off this theme with a presentation by a local college professor entitled “Implicit Bias and Microaggressions in the School Setting.”

Throughout the year, we have revisited the idea of “Perspective” during our staff collaboration and

professional development, which has included modeling hands on activities that can be used with our students. We have continued this conversation, as a staff committed to our own professional growth, because we believe that in order to improve educational outcomes for all of our students we must first shift the mindsets of adults and alter adult behaviors.

We believe in the power of students seeing themselves in all that we do and have intentionally added book titles representing various races, ethnicities, and cultures to our curricular resources. Classroom teachers and staff utilize these resources, via Units of Inquiry, to engage students in conversations about race, diversity, equity, perspective, and open-mindedness.

English Language Learners (ELL) make up our fastest growing subpopulation. Our ESOL facilitator provides support for qualifying students and serves as a strong advocate for them and their families. Our district has a full time translator we use for communicating with families through in-person and virtual conferences/meetings and translating our written communication. All written communication is sent home in Spanish for our Spanish-speaking families.

We are fortunate, as an IB school, to offer Spanish as our second language. At Park, speaking Spanish and learning about Spanish-speaking cultures are explicitly taught in grades K-6, which further supports our commitment to a culture of inclusion and international mindedness. We embrace our growing ELL population and are proud that these students feel welcomed into our community and thrive as learners.



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

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In hindsight, it is clear that our intentional commitment to being truly student centered is chiefly responsible for our success in the past year following initial school closures. Being “student centered” is a phrase often used and in many different contexts. But for us, at Park Magnet, this has simply meant keeping students at the forefront as we make all decisions, thereby meeting student needs while also maintaining the rigor of our instructional program.

In particular, we have offered families, and thereby students, extreme levels of flexibility in how students access instruction each day. This level of flexibility means that our teachers have had to significantly shift the ways their curriculum and instruction had been offered and provided in the past.

Another component of our student-centered approach has been our increased differentiation of instruction for students. At its core, differentiation of instruction is nothing more than a student-centered approach in which teachers are committed to meeting the needs of students at their current level of achievement and helping them progress forward, no matter their current abilities. This commitment to student-centered instruction through differentiation has been critical to our work this year as our students returned to campus in August with wildly different levels of learning during the months of March, April, and May.

On a larger scale, over the past several years, we have harnessed our focus as an IB school to provide students with agency in how they demonstrate their learning. Providing agency allows students to choose how they present their learning for summative assessments, including, but not limited to, written narratives, oral presentations, digital presentations, creating models, 2D or 3D artwork, and performances. In light of educating during a pandemic, this student-centered approach to assessments has been essential in two ways: logistically allowing students to complete assessments from home, and motivating our students to fully engage in their learning through assessments and inquiry projects in which they are keenly interested.

The last twelve months have further cemented our student-centered approach to education. This means that we have provided real flexibility for our students and families, all the while ensuring differentiation of instruction in the classroom (whether it be in-person or online), and providing agency in how students demonstrate their learning for the culminating summative assessment at the completion of each IB Unit of Inquiry. Through these efforts, we have been able to maintain the structure of our instructional program, level of expected rigor and engagement, and still meet the needs of our students during a highly atypical time.