

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. Diane Vargo
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

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

School Mailing Address 9455 East Rita Road
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Tucson State AZ Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 85747-6300

County Pima County

Telephone (520) 879-2100 Fax (520) 879-2101

Web site/URL https://mes.vailschooldistrict.org/ E-mail marvinc@vailschooldistrict.org

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

Date _____

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent* Mr. John Carruth E-mail carruthj@vailschooldistrict.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Vail Unified School District Tel. (520) 879-2000

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. Jon Aitken
(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):
- 10 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 6 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 5 High schools
 - 1 K-12 schools
- 22 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	62	42	104
1	56	49	105
2	43	51	94
3	56	48	104
4	53	63	116
5	44	64	108
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	314	317	631

*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 % Asian
 - 3 % Black or African American
 - 43 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 1 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 41 % White
 - 9 % 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: 10%

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

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

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	35
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	29
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	64
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	652
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.10
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	10

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

Spanish, Italian, Kirundi, Vietnamese

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 2 %
14 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 27 %

Total number students who qualify: 169

8. Students receiving special education services: 11 %
70 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>6</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>1</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>11</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>5</u> Developmental Delay | <u>10</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>1</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>34</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>1</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>1</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 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.	25
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	9
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	28
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	2

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 26:1

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	95%	96%	96%	95%	95%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

13. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**

Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 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. 2014

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

Our mission provides a positive and safe environment to nurture academic achievement. Our success depends upon the partnership with our parents, students, and the community.

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.

Due to the pandemic, the decision was made by the district to delay the start of school for four weeks. The first day of school began remotely on August 10th, and Chromebooks were provided for all students who requested devices.

In order to meet the needs of our families, we conducted a school-wide survey. Survey results indicated 70% of our families wanted to have their students on campus for in-person learning, and the remaining 30% chose to remain as remote learners. On September 21st we opened our campus to our families in a hybrid model. The hybrid model for our in-person learners consisted of a four day week with a one hour earlier, staggered dismissal, and online synchronous Fridays for all students. Flexibility was given for families to join the remote classes if they were required to quarantine for an extended period of time. This greatly reduced interruptions in instruction for students.

Based on the results from the survey, staffing decisions were made deliberately to assign specific teachers as remote only teachers. Each grade level had a teacher dedicated to remote families, and they joined the grade level team in planning. We utilized our Specialists (Music, Art, PE, Library Enrichment) and specific grade level teachers as our remote teachers. Therefore, hybrid teachers would only be responsible for their students in-person in their classrooms. This decision was pivotal in preventing staff burnout and meeting the needs of both families and staff. We were able

to provide daily live instruction for our remote families, similar to the in-person schedule. Remote families were pleased with the amount of time provided for face-to-face interactions with their teachers. This model continued up to the winter break.

Our school district decided to extend the winter break by three weeks due to a rise of COVID-19 cases in our community. At that time, all students returned to remote learning with their assigned teacher. On January 19th, we re-opened our campus in our hybrid instructional model we had previously used.

Before spring break families were surveyed again, and results increased to 82% of our families wanting to return to in-person learning. Due to this high interest, more families were welcomed on campus, and we increased our instruction to five days a week for our in-person learners. Remote schedules and teacher assignments remained the same. We plan on finishing the school year in this model.

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

Mesquite Elementary School is a nurturing hub of our community. Our mission, vision, and value base are the durable roots that solidify who we are. The innovations we pursue, the accomplishments we earn, and the challenges we overcome represent our ever growing branches. The positive and lasting impact we impart on students, the trusting relationships we foster with families, and the involvement we maintain with the community are the seed pods that spread throughout our community and beyond.

Mesquite Elementary resides within neighborhoods in southeastern Tucson, Arizona. We serve a diverse population of students with over half of our student population enrolled through Open Enrollment. One significant challenge regarding the continuation of partnerships is the changing demographics of our community. The community around Mesquite is aging as many of the surrounding neighborhoods have maturing families with children who have moved out. This presents the unique challenge of convincing the community to stay engaged with the school and to continue supporting education despite not having school-aged children. This can be especially daunting when underfunding needs to be addressed through a bond election or override. Currently, we are welcoming new families that reside in newer developments as well as the opening of a new luxury apartment complex adjacent to our school campus. We continue to serve our military families from Davis Monthan Air Force Base.

Mesquite is proud to be a lighthouse school within the Vail School District. It is through the principal's leadership and vision that Mesquite sustains a vibrant close-knit culture with an unwavering commitment to achieve and sustain excellence. Sustaining excellence is a key catalyst annually for embracing innovation and challenges that arise. This excellence is derived from an incredibly collaborative school culture in which everyone has a valued role.

The leadership, staff, students, and parents adhere to a consistent standard of high expectations. Mesquite has developed several teacher-initiated programs that have been adopted throughout the district. Proven programs include the Chinese Immersion Program, Daily Math Reteach and Enrichment, and our Bell to Bell Learning culture. Staff members constantly work to ensure we maintain a rigorous environment that focuses on clear goals, essential skills, high expectations, and authentic learning experiences based on the changing needs of each student. In order to challenge all students to develop and grow, teachers focus on providing instruction at a highly proficient level along with using higher order questioning routinely in their daily lessons.

Mesquite features a variety of rigorous and unique programming, but perhaps our greatest strength as a school is a 'family' culture that fosters mutual respect, collaboration, and enduring relationships. In the 2014/2015 school year, Mesquite established the first Chinese Immersion Program in the Vail School District in Kindergarten and first grade. Currently, we serve 165 students in grades K-5. Due to its success and high student achievement on standardized tests, it is a highly requested program each year and draws open enrollment families to Mesquite.

The culture of Mesquite is cultivated through school-wide programs including Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) and the Be Kind Campus programming. Mesquite students exude behavior that is aligned with the school's ACT statement. The ACT statement is an acronym standing for: we Are respectful and trustworthy, Care about each other, and Take responsibility. By respecting each other's feelings and ideas, an environment is created in which students feel safe in sharing their own ideas. Because of the increased challenges this year, and how the challenges were affecting our students, we were intentional about creating a time to teach Social Emotional Learning in lieu of their Social Studies curriculum. Our goal was to maintain normalcy for our students as much as possible throughout the changes that were occurring in their lives.

Mesquite staff implemented an effective response to the COVID pandemic and its unprecedented challenges. In partnership with the school district, we created a COVID Task Force Team and a plan to open safely. Mesquite faithfully implemented mitigation measures including face masks, social distancing, sanitizing, cohorting, temperature checks, signage, staying home when sick, rotating zones for lunch and

recesses, and a staggered dismissal. Our school COVID support team responds to potential exposures or positive cases and is responsible for communicating the quarantine/isolation requirements to families and staff. These mitigation strategies and contact tracing have kept our school open throughout the pandemic.

Mesquite's commitment to excellence is evident by the prestigious recognition granted throughout our 21 years of existence. In 2014, Mesquite received recognition as a National Blue Ribbon School , the first school to earn this title in the Vail School District. We have earned the Arizona Education Foundation's A+ School of Excellence Award in 2005, 2010, and 2019. We have been identified by the Arizona Department of Education as an Excelling School/A school since 2004. These recognitions bring value to our school and community, validating what our teachers and staff practice daily. Families choose to come to our school because of these recognitions. Mesquite continues to sustain the lighthouse image within the Vail community, and we proudly raise our National Blue Ribbon School flag.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

The philosophy at Mesquite is to challenge students with a high quality education that focuses on State standards and district curriculum while preparing them for the future. Our staff strives to give our students the tools and strategies to be successful in their educational career.

In the spring of 2020, schools were approached with new challenges that affected students, staff, and families in our district's community. To accommodate these challenges, teachers had to become flexible in creating lessons while finding a balance between students with technology and students without. Lessons were presented to students live via Zoom using the district's platform, Schoology. Live lessons shared on Zoom incorporated the Essential Elements of Instruction for Math, Reading, Writing, Science, and Social Studies. For those students who did not have access to technology, hard copies of all materials were provided and either picked up on campus or delivered to families by teachers.

At the beginning of the 2020/2021 school year, Mesquite stood out among the district by finding a balance between hybrid students and remote learning students. Parents were given the opportunity to choose between a hybrid model or a remote learning model. Mesquite used highly qualified specialists to work with students participating in remote learning. At each grade level, teachers created lessons, activities, and materials which were implemented in both hybrid and remote learning models. Technology has always played a major role in Mesquite's daily curriculum usage, and because of this, students' transition from traditional pencil and paper was seamless.

The Balanced Literacy program at Mesquite encourages active student participation in reading, writing, listening, speaking, and language skills. Whole group lessons are taught using the Essential Elements of Instruction and incorporates Webb's Depth of Knowledge. Group, partner, and independent work is based on teacher-created lessons that focus on hands on high rigor and meaningful activities.

Mesquite's approach to math instruction aims for higher level thinking skills through fluency, conceptual, and procedural methods. It is our focus to develop a strong foundation for higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills aligned with the Arizona College and Career Readiness Standards. At each grade level, students participate in Math Project Based Learning activities that have an emphasis on higher-order thinking, hands-on learning, while allowing them to apply math solving skills in real world situations.

Our science and social studies curriculum incorporates real life experiences. New science standards allow students to explore and investigate by learning to construct logical explanations. Programs, such as Junior Achievement and Biztown, provide students with an understanding of economic and business concepts. In addition to our core curriculum, Mesquite implemented Social Emotional lessons to help students cope with their feelings during this challenging time.

We seek high student achievement and excellence in instruction at Mesquite. One way in which we ensure that we achieve this vision is through our balanced approach to assessment. The purpose of assessment is to guide classroom instruction. Students' academic achievements are evaluated on a regular basis through a variety of formal and informal assessments. These assessments directly measure students' achievement with regard to the Arizona College and Career Readiness Standards.

Technology has always played a major role at Mesquite, where students in grades third through fifth have been equipped with the knowledge and understanding of on-line testing. This allowed a smooth transition for those students who remained remote during the 2020/2021 school year. In kindergarten through second grades, teachers helped students transition to taking assessments online. Additionally, teachers created assessments for students in Google Forms.

Teachers use formative assessments in Reading, Math and Writing, such as Curriculum Based Measures, weekly formatives, and quarterly benchmarks, to assess the mastery of grade level essential standards. These formative assessments provide teachers, students, and parents with timely feedback regarding student

mastery of objectives. The data is used to modify instruction to better meet the needs of students. Based on classroom results, teachers use the data to construct lessons in efforts to improve weaknesses found in specific areas. Mesquite currently has several programs and practices in place to respond to these needs including Math Reteach and Enrichment, small group interventions, and skill specific tutoring.

AzM2 and AzSCI are state assessments designed to measure a student's understanding of the state standards. Assessment summaries are reviewed, shared, and discussed with teachers at the beginning of the year during Mesquite's Data Dig. The data is used to identify and reflect on areas of strengths and weaknesses to improve instruction for the current school year.

Teachers participate in bi-monthly Data Team meetings that provide an opportunity to examine and analyze all the different forms of student assessment data. The team works together to collaboratively analyze assessment results, set or modify goals for improvement, monitor results, and discuss implementation strategies in order to drive instruction and meet the goal of success for all students.

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:

Mesquite Elementary offers acquisition of essential skills through our Music program, Art, physical education (PE), Library Enrichment, and by offering a foreign language. During our first six weeks of remote learning, all of the specials' classes offered innovative weekly on-line activities for our kindergarten through fifth grade students. Normally, each class attends a specials' class daily. When we returned to in-person instruction, our specialist teachers became on-line teachers to support the overwhelming need to teach our standard curriculum, while still continuing the implementation of their programs in creative ways.

Our art teacher continues to see each class in-person, having students participate in a wide range of activities to promote creativity, critical thinking, and community involvement by displaying their work. Art Outside Day offers opportunities for all of our students to contribute to the beautification of our school campus, including painting, making murals, fence decorating, and kindness awareness activities.

Typically, our music teacher helps graded K-5 students prepare for and participate in grade-level musicals and performances. This year, our music teacher will be conducting our first ever virtual musical by holding three afterschool clubs where students build the costumes and props, rehearse their acting skills, and perform the dance numbers for their musical. Most of this has been done virtually, recording each individual student, and then editing. Through these opportunities students develop confidence, build a love for performing, and enhance their creativity.

Traditionally, our PE class includes education of overall health focusing on nutrition, mental health, social skills, and cooperative learning. Students develop physical skills appropriate to their age through play. Students learn about the dangers of smoking and the importance of healthy eating. Our PE teacher continued the tradition of raising money for the American Heart Association through promoting physical activity through a virtual gym.

During library enrichment, students work on multi-week research projects where they collaborate and conduct online research to develop creative presentations. Students are taught to evaluate and navigate websites. They work collaboratively on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) activities using the engineering design process. They are given a variety of materials to design, create, and test their creations through different challenges. As in past years, students wrote and submitted creative work that is often recognized in many local and state writing contests.

Mesquite has the unique opportunity to offer a Chinese Immersion Program (CIP) to graded K-5 students, with one or more classes at each grade level. A Chinese teacher provides 50% of instruction for the day in math, science, language, and Chinese culture. Normally, we offer a field trip to the Tucson Chinese Cultural Center for cultural learning and attend the Chinese New Year's Festival, and our students have performed at both. We have also offered cultural celebrations, Chinese Art Club, and Martial Arts Club. Each grade level continues to offer an on-line Chinese Language Club and lessons created by our Chinese teachers. Students have access to on-line books that are read in Mandarin by some of our Chinese paraprofessionals. Through language acquisition, students are proving to think more critically, creatively, and often have some of the top test scores in our district.

3. Academic Supports:

Mesquite identifies students who need additional instructional support through various programs. The System to Enhance Educational Performance (STEEP) is a program that is used for the implementation of response to intervention. These schoolwide screenings in reading are given three times a year. Students who fall below proficient despite a "Can't Do/Won't Do" check are given a three-week individual intervention to promote growth in oral reading fluency. Students, who show minimal progress during these interventions, are provided with intensive instruction by a specialist on a daily basis and will be referred for evaluation, if appropriate. Other struggling readers are pulled into small group lessons with a reading specialist overseen by the resource teacher. These lessons were given on-line while school was remote and take place in-person when students are on campus. Math progress is monitored, and interventions designed using the Spring Math online platform.

Students who are in special education, performing below grade level, or English Language Learners (ELL) receive an intervention plan and are monitored throughout the year. The Student Solutions Team (SST) and ELL team discuss ways that teachers can help individual students achieve academic success in and out of the classroom. Both teams offer recommendations for academic or behavioral interventions that the general education teacher can use to help the students achieve success. The student's teachers and the SST will meet to discuss and resolve a problem if a student seems to be struggling.

During remote learning, educational technology, that personalizes instruction based on the individual student's learning levels to maximize growth, was implemented in math and reading. Reflex is a program used to improve math fact fluency in addition to subtraction, multiplication, and division. For reading, students were able to use MindPlay Virtual Reading Coach, a web-based reading program. It delivers one-to-one, personalized, systematic reading instruction that helps fill in the skill gaps that are preventing reading mastery in phonics, fluency, and comprehension. Targeted tutoring in math and reading is available each week for 1st through 5th grades via video conferencing. The small group tutoring sessions focus on the standards that were taught in previous weeks.

Students with disabilities spend close to 80% or more of their day in the general education classroom. These students receive supports and services such as targeted adult support, assistive technology, related services, accommodations, and modifications. Students receive specialized instruction as well as scaffolded work on grade-level objectives. During the pandemic, students with disabilities who had the highest needs were instructed on campus, while the general population of students was learning remotely. All other special education instruction was given in one-on-one sessions remotely until in-person learning resumed.

Students who are performing above grade level are being challenged through our reading and math

enrichment programs like Advanced Math, Junior Great Books, Math Enrichment, and our Extended Learning Program. Advanced Math students have been taught asynchronously this year due to the pandemic. In grades first through fifth, all students are challenged through our daily Math Enrichment block. Students who score proficient on their weekly formative are enriched the following week in that standard.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

We strive for 100% engagement of all students 100% of the time through our Bell to Bell philosophy. Teachers are constantly checking for student engagement and understanding. Based on student responses, teachers increase the rigor of questioning. Throughout each lesson teachers check for understanding through verbal and nonverbal cues, whiteboard responses, monitoring discussions, group work, and independent assessments.

The culture of Mesquite is cultivated through schoolwide programs such as Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) and the Be Kind Campus program. Over thirty afterschool clubs and activities are offered on campus to help students enrich their learning while engaging in positive and collaborative interactions. One such club is our “Be Kind” Club. This club is connected to the Ben’s Bells Project, a local non-profit community organization created to encourage people to spread kindness and positivity. Upon entering Mesquite a large green mural is visibly inscribed with the words “Be Kind.” Relationships and positive interactions are a valued aspect of our school’s culture. Though the pandemic delayed in-person learning, teachers were still committed to continue after school clubs, but they would be held virtually.

During remote learning, we implemented many new strategies to keep students focused and engaged. Teachers adjusted lessons and created on-line activities. Together, teachers collaborated and learned to use applications, including Notability, Duet, and Schoology. Teachers were able to utilize Duet to see students on a monitor while using a separate monitor to model instruction. The Notability application allowed teachers to edit PDFs (portable document formats) as if they were modeling instruction on a whiteboard. Each week, teachers posted materials and communicated with parents through Schoology. Students were engaged through many online resources, such as Nearpod, interactive Google Slides, Quizizz, Padlets, and interactive polls using our on-line video conferencing. Teachers were able to create breakout rooms for students to collaborate and interact with each other. Teachers also implemented Social Emotional Lessons (SEL) into weekly instruction. Together, students and teachers were able to connect on a deeper level.

Even through on-line learning, effective and engaging instruction was our most powerful resource. This created a positive and eager campus for our return. Staff had a newfound love of technology, and students were eager to learn in-person. By incorporating SEL into weekly planning, teachers and students had already built positive relationships. Home visits, which were held virtually, allowed teachers to make personal connections with their students and families. This created a nearly seamless transition from online learning to in-person learning.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Our mission emphasizes that we cannot reach our vision without our partnerships with parents, students, staff, and community. COVID-19 has not changed partnerships for Mesquite, but it has served as a reminder of how critical these relationships are.

When our campus closed, Mesquite organized a vehicle parade throughout the community to reassure families that we were still there for them. Communication continued through emails, Gila Monster Weekly school newsletters, phone calls, PowerSchool, Schoology, and social media. Staff worked on campus to deliver meals to families, and the school’s COVID Task Force team collaborated on ways to open our campus safely.

Last spring, promotions for kindergarten and fifth grade were planned creatively. Staff lined up with masks, gloves, and signs to cheer on families as they drove through the decorated parking lot to celebrate our students. A local business, Steamy Concepts, displayed student names on a large digital billboard.

Parents are involved in the mission and execution of school driven initiatives. Our Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) continued to be active conducting meetings virtually. Although we had to cancel school

events, our PTSA was able to create virtual events. Our PTSA supports the following programs that enhance student learning: RazKids Reading Program, Book Fair, Love of Reading, teacher grants, and Craft Day. Our Mesquite Site Council and our Chinese Advisory Group are composed of parents, community members, staff, and teachers. Both groups advise and meet with our principal monthly on issues proprietary to the school.

We opened our campus to families for Welcome Back Night. Those who were not comfortable attending in-person were given an alternative online option. Parents were given the same choices for Parent Teacher Conferences for fall and spring. Most families requested virtual home visits this year.

Community partnerships have continued to grow. The office of the U.S. Census Bureau graciously donated boxes of sanitizer, face masks, and office supplies. A local company, Rita Ranch Automotive and Tires, donates money to our school annually. Tucson Firefighters volunteered to virtually read to all students for Love of Reading. Our school community participated in a diaper, food, and shoe drive, as well as the Pennies for Patients fundraiser for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society.

The relationship that Mesquite forges between students, parents, and our community demonstrates the value that is placed on each individual student's success and achievement.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

Mesquite Elementary is highly supportive of all teachers and staff. This stems from an administration team engaged in transformational leadership and consistent, meaningful recognition of school staff members. When transitioning to hybrid, Mesquite supported staff by reorganizing teams, allowing teachers assigned solely to in-person or on-line classes. School teams continued collaboration and shared accountability of student success.

Some of the ways staff felt valued and supported were through teams like our COVID Task Force team, Instructional Team Leaders, and our Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Core Team. These teams allowed all staff, at all levels, an opportunity to participate in the planning process for reopening our campus successfully. Additionally, Mesquite maintains committees dedicated to the needs of staff such as PBIS Core Team. Various ways we appreciate each other are through staff meals, weekly recognitions during staff meetings and school announcements, Be Kind notes, coupons for Jean Day and Leave Early Day, and the favored Staff of the Week parking space.

During remote learning, staff were supported with district and team level created materials. Our Site Technology Coordinator provided critical information on how to adapt lessons to meet the needs of our teachers and students remotely. Additionally, they were provided with physical and digital tools needed for lesson delivery. Therefore, teachers had flexibility to teach the same content through unprecedented methods. Resources, such as standing desks, additional monitors, and projectors, were purchased to support remote instruction for all teachers. By supporting teachers technologically for student contact, without abandoning valuable content, teachers proudly knew that quality instruction was not lost, despite remote learning obstacles.

This year teachers attended and led workshops on new technology and digital classroom management. Individual staff members are encouraged to further their development with access to virtual conventions, speakers, and tools. Our remote teachers participated in the Student Engagement District Committee where the sole objective was to increase the level of student engagement during the remote phase of learning. This committee provided useful professional development for remote instruction.

Throughout the pandemic, no staff member maintained traditional roles. All employees expanded existing skill sets and gained new ones. Committing to professional and technological growth during times of change and stress, the entire staff grew together. This is a reflection of how Mesquite's culture is maintained by staff supporting each other, and they are now better equipped to tackle any further challenges.

4. School Leadership:

The leadership team at Mesquite is composed of a principal, assistant to the principal, and Instructional Team Leaders. Our leadership team employs an approach where all stakeholders are empowered to take on leadership roles. The principal exhibits a servant leadership style with an emphasis on empowering others. Her vision is to foster Mesquite's healthy, positive culture with the mindset of sustaining academic excellence and inspiring our school, students, and staff to become better each day. When making decisions, the principal values the input of formal and informal teacher leaders before making the final decision.

The principal's leadership philosophy includes delegating responsibility to the various stakeholders of Mesquite to catalyze the decision making process. The involvement of Instructional Team Leaders (ITLs), the Chinese Advisory Group, and our Site Council illustrates this inclusive vision of leadership. Our ITLs are valuable extensions of the administrative team and carefully selected from each grade level or department for their identified leadership skills and track records of success. They collaborate with the principal to coordinate and lead curriculum to the advancement of school goals. The Chinese Advisory Group is selected by the principal and consists of parents, teachers, administrators, and district staff. The Site Council is designed to represent and include all areas of the Mesquite community and consists of parents, certified staff, and classified staff members. Through our Site Council and Chinese Advisory Group meetings, our leadership develops a close relationship with parents and community members.

The administrative team attends grade level data team meetings with the Student Achievement Teacher to discuss student academic progress. Discussions are held regarding how and when the highly proficient level instruction is taking place. These meetings allow teachers time to use the data and reflect on ways to improve student outcomes. Goal setting, guided by leadership, is the foundation of Mesquite's pursuit of academic excellence.

A COVID Task Force team was created and consisted of administrators as well as classified and certified staff. In order to develop an opening plan, we created schedules, procedures, and mitigation strategies, and we purchased resources. Communication to our community was vital throughout this past year to address the constantly changing conditions. Since March of last year, the administration has had many individual conversations with staff addressing their concerns and emotions involved with returning to campus. As the instructional phases changed, we addressed the emotional needs of the staff, overcame change fatigue, and walked the emotional walk with staff members. One of leadership's major roles was assuring the staff, families, and community members that school was indeed a safe place.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

At Mesquite we welcome all students regardless of cultural and diverse backgrounds to ensure equity amongst all students. We have a non-discrimination statement that is posted on our school web page which clearly communicates our school expectations and policies within our student handbook. Mesquite follows the "ACT Statement." The ACT statement is recited daily by all students and encourages students to ACT, an acronym standing for: In the Vail Schools, we Are respectful and trustworthy, Care about each other, and Take responsibility. We foster open communication with our students and their families that encourages different viewpoints without judgement or condescension.

Mesquite staff employs a variety of strategies for all learners to meet their diverse needs and maximize their learning potential. Mesquite teachers build strong, meaningful relationships with their students. Teachers listen and respond to student questions and concerns in a way that makes them feel valued and respected. Teachers are aware of students' home life and interests outside of the classroom. Home visits are a staple at Mesquite. During these visits, teachers make personal connections and strengthen relationships with their students and families.

Within the classroom, teachers incorporate learning strategies into each lesson that allow personal connections within content areas. At the beginning of each lesson, teachers ask questions to activate prior knowledge and elicit responses that contribute to group discussions. Students are

empowered to share their thoughts that bring different points of view to these discussions because of their diverse experiences, which in turn, enhances their “buy in” to and understanding of the lesson. During direct instruction, teachers model visually and use think alouds to provide examples of how to do the learning task for not only ELL students, but all students, to demystify a teacher’s expectations so that students can attend to the task at hand. Students often work with a partner, or in small groups, to complete an assignment which builds confidence through collaboration for our diverse students. Closure is used as a means of cementing and evaluating student understanding and assisting the teacher in future planning.

Two of Mesquite’s overall strengths are its special education program and Chinese Immersion Program (CIP), which are two programs that provide invaluable perspective for students to be successful in our diverse society. Mesquite embraces inclusion where all students are exposed to students with learning and physical disabilities, which further develops kindness as well as skills of acceptance, empathy, and tolerance. CIP is not only an instructional program for students within the program, but an opportunity for students to be immersed in another culture.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Math Reteach and Enrichment has been Mesquite's most influential practice; which has been implemented over the years with success. Mesquite's Math Reteach/Enrich practice is a block of time reserved for ensuring mastery of Arizona's state math K-5 standards. Each day from 12:00 - 12:30 p.m., students are either retaught or enriched on a specific standard through differentiated instruction and spiral review. Formative assessments are then administered after specific state standards have been thoroughly taught. Students performing at or above 80% are considered to be at mastery. Mastery students are placed in enrichment classes to revisit the standards using higher level thinking skills including logic and reasoning. Students not mastering skills are targeted for Reteach. Students in Reteach receive instruction specific to their needs. High student engagement activities such as Kagan structures are used to actively engage students throughout the class. After Reteach lessons, students are reassessed. If a student does not achieve mastery, that student is targeted for individualized intervention such as after school tutoring during live conference sessions.

With restrictions due to the pandemic, the Vail School District started the school year in remote learning. Mesquite continued the Reteach and Enrichment practice while the students participated in remote learning from August to September using our district's platform of Big Blue Button. To accommodate this change, kindergarten and first grade reteach students received direct and explicit instruction by the teacher in small breakout rooms. During that time, enrichment students participated in independent learning activities monitored by paraprofessionals. In second through fifth grade, the classroom teacher worked with reteach students on lessons created with varied approaches to the standard. During this time, enrichment students worked in breakout rooms with other students from their own class.

Hybrid instruction began mid-September, and adjustments were made to our Reteach/Enrich model. Direct and differentiated instruction was presented to the reteach students by the classroom teacher in person while they participated in small groups. Enrich students continued to work with classmates on teacher created activities that promoted higher level thinking, logic, and manipulative skills. Students who remain in remote learning continue the original model that was implemented in August.

Being able to continue Mesquite's Reteach and Enrichment practice has afforded our students the opportunity to show progress and success on formative assessments that they may have struggled with earlier. Additionally, their continued growth on weekly assessments allowed them to have success on their quarterly benchmark assessments.