

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

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

School Mailing Address 1340 Little Baltimore Road
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Hockessin State DE Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 19707-9733

County New Castle County

Telephone (302) 234-7200 Fax (302) 234-7212

Web site/URL https://www.redclayschools.com/Page/371 E-mail Karin.Jakubowski@redclay.k12.de.us

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

Date _____

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent* Mr. Dorrell Green E-mail dorrell.green@redclay.k12.de.us
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Red Clay Consolidated School District Tel. (302) 552-3700

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

Date _____

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board President/Chairperson Mrs. Catherine Thompson
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

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

Date _____

(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

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

**Non-public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, leave blank.*

PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION

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

1. All nominated public schools must meet the state’s performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
2. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2021 in order to meet all eligibility requirements. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
3. The school configuration must include one or more of grades K-12. Schools located on the same campus (physical location and mailing address) must apply as an entire school (i.e. K-8; 6-12; K-12 school). Two (or more) schools located on separate campuses, must apply individually even if they have the same principal. A single school located on multiple campuses with one principal must apply as an entire school.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2015 and grades participating in statewide assessments must have been part of the school for at least the three years prior to September 2019.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 or 2020.
6. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. If irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state, the U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school’s application and/or rescind a school’s award.
7. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as “persistently dangerous” within the last two years.
8. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
9. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
10. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district, as a whole, has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution’s equal protection clause.
11. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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

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

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 15 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 7 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 4 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 26 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	58	35	93
1	48	54	102
2	48	52	100
3	56	52	108
4	62	46	108
5	56	53	109
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	328	292	620

*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
 - 26 % Asian
 - 3 % Black or African American
 - 5 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 60 % White
 - 6 % Two or more races
 - 100 % Total**

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

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2019 - 2020 school year: 4%

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	13
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	10
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	23
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	653
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.04
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	4

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

Spanish, Mandarin

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 9 %
57 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 4 %

Total number students who qualify: 24

8. Students receiving special education services: 9 %

53 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>7</u> Autism | <u>4</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>8</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>8</u> Developmental Delay | <u>9</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>1</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>18</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>2</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: 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.

	Number of Staff
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	28
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	7
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	5
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	7

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

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

Required Information	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016
Daily student attendance	98%	97%	97%	97%	97%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

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

Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2020.

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

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

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

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

Our vision statement was created with the teachers and staff - North Star will be recognized as a school that inspires the love of learning. Our mission statement was also created by the teachers and staff - North Star is a caring community that helps children grow. Two years ago, we added core values as well: Respect for all and Supportive Community. Everything we do is aligned with our mission, vision, and core values.

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 school year, we were all remote for the first six weeks. Then, parents had the choice to send their child(ren) in person or remain a remote learner. Sixty percent (60%) of our students returned in person, and 40% remained remote. One teacher at each grade level was assigned to be the remote teacher for the grade. Each of those classes had between 35-42 students. Due to a staff member getting COVID and several staff required to quarantine, our school had to go completely remote for one week in early November. Then, the Governor required all schools in Delaware to go remote for one month from mid-November to mid-January. In February, we had several snow days which required the entire school to go remote. Since March, we have been in school consistently.

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

A crowd gathered for the ribbon cutting ceremony that marked the opening of a new school. Guests included the farmer who sold the land for the school to the district, the builder, local politicians who figured in funding the building, district administrators, PTA members, and future teachers and students. Everyone was touring the new school after the presentation, and a quiet hum of excitement was palpable. Since that beginning in 2005, a primary goal at North Star has been to build community. Everyone at North Star is included in this mission: teachers, custodians, cafeteria staff, administrators, secretaries, parents, bus drivers and support staff. We embrace the hard work of reflection, revision, and improvement over time, as we strive to live our school mission statement: North Star is a caring community that helps children grow.

Teachers and parents have initiated many creative learning opportunities for our students. Our entire school works collaboratively to plant, tend, harvest, and clean produce grown in our Learning Garden. The whole school then enjoys salads, stir-fries, and smoothies made with our own fresh vegetables. The garden was planned to encourage students to develop healthy eating habits and to incorporate our science curriculum. Our Outdoor Classroom was imagined and designed by a teacher, then built by parents, staff, children, and volunteers. Shielded from the sun, students gather to read and work in seating made from salvaged tree stumps. A science station near picnic tables allows for outdoor science instruction; children wander through the butterfly garden to search for insects and study beekeeping at our apiary. Most recently a music station was added, with drums and a table-top xylophone for outdoor music instruction and performances. We remember pets, family, and friends with our Memory Garden and tend to our own herb garden. With the help of our custodial staff, a walking trail was cut through tall grass and up and down steep slopes on the property. Classes and families enjoy walking the trail, getting exercise and enjoying nature. We maintain and grow this magical learning space through generous donations, grants, and volunteer teamwork.

At North Star, most students live in neighborhoods surrounding our school. Approximately 26% of our population is Asian, 5% is Latino, 3% is Black, 60% identify as White, and 2% identify as Biracial. About 6% of our students are English Language Learners, and 8% receive special education services. This diversity offers opportunities to learn first hand about commonalities and differences and heightens our understanding of world cultures, traditions, and languages. Teachers engage students in open and caring conversations about respecting diverse points of view and work to develop understanding and acceptance through literature, presentations, role-play, and discussions.

In 2018, we adopted the Second Step curriculum school-wide. Second Step explicitly teaches children life-long skills: empathy, problem-solving, and strategies to develop self-control. These lessons are taught in every classroom, every year. In selecting a specific curriculum, our hope was to use a consistent language throughout the school. In other words, we wished to develop a culture of caring, learning, respecting, and communicating effectively with members of our community. We know that students will be better citizens with these critical life skills. In conjunction with Second Step, North Star began working with a mindfulness coach. Our coach came into each classroom and taught students mindfulness – how to be present in the moment, be aware of our thoughts and feelings, and to calm ourselves in times of stress. All teachers practiced a few minutes of mindfulness every day with their students. Children and teachers alike enjoyed those few calming minutes of quiet. We were delighted to find children independently using mindfulness as a calm-down technique!

Community is a reciprocal experience. We welcome parents and other volunteers in our classrooms as readers, presenters, role models, and co-teachers. Adults share their culture, experiences, and expertise with students, expanding their worlds beyond the walls of our school. Throughout the pandemic, the North Star community worked to help our families, making sure they had internet connections, technology, food, school supplies, and clothing. Teachers visited students' homes to deliver necessities, Bitmoji Flat Teachers (in the style of Flat Stanley), signs celebrating the success of students moving up to middle school, curriculum materials, and more. Our community worked to let children know that they are loved and that, although we may be apart physically, we are all still a part of the North Star family.

Now, sixteen years after the first ribbon cutting ceremony, we hope we are worthy of another ribbon - a Blue

Ribbon. This application process has inspired us to examine our practices closely and to reevaluate our goals for the future. It has encouraged conversations where we have identified areas for growth and have discussed how to align professional development to support that growth. We are eager to continue growing as a community as a Blue Ribbon School!

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

North Star Elementary School uses an integrated and well-balanced approach to reading and writing instruction across grade levels. Using the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the Red Clay School District scope and sequence, teachers collaborate during Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to plan and refine lessons, analyze data, and create strategies to meet the needs of all students. Literary and informational texts are grouped into thought-provoking themes, allowing students to explore different angles of unifying concepts and promote in-depth understanding. These thematic units are often linked to units of instruction in science and social studies, allowing for rich discussion across the curriculum. Instruction focuses on reading, writing, speaking, and listening in response to these varied texts. Students cite evidence, developing close reading habits. Connecting reading to writing, students use texts as models and write informative, narrative, and opinion pieces. From running records, Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), and site word inventories in the early grades, to benchmark assessments, formative assessments, selection tests, and Reading Inventories in the upper grades, teachers are continuously collecting data to make instructional decisions and form flexible groups. Teachers are able to target instruction in Response to Intervention (RTI) reading groups, meeting the needs of all students using a skill-focused model of instruction.

Since transitioning to remote/hybrid instruction, teachers have utilized multiple resources to support and engage our remote and in-person learners. Teachers work collaboratively to study standards and narrow focus, prioritizing the needs of our population. Grade-wide websites were developed to keep instruction consistent for online and in-person learners. Our planning ensures that virtual instruction mirrors in-person instruction and that units of study are consistent. Small group instruction has been successful both in person and online using breakout rooms on Asynchronous Wednesdays. On Wednesdays, teachers schedule small-group, whole-group, and/or individual instruction for students who need extra support or enrichment.

The math program at North Star is based upon the philosophy that all students can learn mathematics at high levels. A rigorous pathway of college and career readiness requires mathematically proficient students to gain a deep understanding of mathematics and to apply their understanding to real-world problems. Lessons are designed to give students multiple opportunities to discuss strategies and justify thinking through Math Talks. The scope and sequence have been adjusted periodically to meet the needs of students during hybrid and remote instruction. Teachers have adapted lessons to close gaps in knowledge from the previous year. Supported by the Math Expressions program, students develop strategies to solve problems, including algorithms based on reasoning. The use of small formative assessments throughout each unit allows for flexible grouping to either challenge or reteach concepts. Summative assessments are used at the conclusion of each unit to assess mastery of concepts taught. Students in grades 2-5 also take a Math Inventory three times a year to measure student growth. Students have access to multiple online resources to support learning throughout each unit of study. Games in the online activity center develop fluency in math facts and operations. Students build concrete and pictorial relationships with digital manipulatives. Teachers assign these activities to whole or small groups of students based on mastery.

North Star's students engage in diverse, inquiry-based explorations and investigations of the natural world through science instruction. Through the Delaware Science Coalition, students receive instruction in physical science, life science, earth/space science, and engineering following both Common Core Standards and Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). Lessons are designed to challenge students to create a deep understanding of the world, the universe, and living things. Lessons are introduced with a phenomenon, leading students to make their own discoveries as they engage in various hands-on investigations. The Coalition supplies each teacher with materials for the students to make a claim, support it, and state scientific reasoning to prove accuracy. In remote instruction, teachers use demonstrations, videos, and interactive websites to mimic in-person experiments while allowing students to make their own discoveries. Students have also filmed themselves making scientific discoveries at home to share with their classmates.

district's program prepares students to become informed and active citizens who accept their responsibilities, understand their rights, and participate actively in society and in government. Effective citizens must be able to research issues, form reasoned opinions, support their positions, and engage in the political process. Recommended units, lesson plans, and guidelines for creating, evaluating, and prioritizing instructional materials are available through the Social Studies Coalition. Teachers use the materials provided along with their own to create lessons that encourage students to explore and discuss their understanding of civics, history, economics and geography. Projects are designed to allow the students to study primary sources to make their own conclusions about historical events using the evidence provided.

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:

At North Star Elementary, all students in grades K-5 attend art, music, library, and physical education weekly.

The art program is designed to encourage creative thinking and to teach students how to communicate ideas through two- and three-dimensional media. Students develop strong self-concept and confidence when encouraged to think creatively, and they mature emotionally when expressing ideas and feelings through art. They also learn to analyze art for creative components and to recognize the unique styles of particular artists.

Our music teacher guides pupils as they create, perform, and respond to a wide variety of music. Learners interpret music as a reflection of their experiences, and at the same time, expand their awareness and respect for history, culture, and points-of-view. The students grow a foundational, holistic understanding of genres of music including classical, rap, country, and jazz, through the mediums of singing, playing instruments, composing their own works, and improvising in a variety of tonalities and meters. Students learn to sing, use a variety of instruments (ukulele, keyboard, drums, etc.) and technological resources as they write and perform original lyrics and music.

A key goal for North Star students in technology/library/media is to become effective users of information and ideas. Students build new knowledge by inquiring, thinking critically, identifying problems, and developing ways to solve those problems while reading, researching, writing, and presenting information. Our library provides resources (books, magazines, databases) and enriching experiences (makerspaces, online creation tools, and authors visits) to encourage discovery and innovation.

The physical education program at North Star encourages all K-5 students to build a love of physical fitness and lifelong healthy habits. Instruction is designed for problem solving, collaboration, and teamwork while developing motor skills. Students learn to play games fairly and strategically, to follow rules, and to exhibit good character whether winning or losing. The emphasis is on lifelong movement, maintaining fitness, and healthy well-being.

The teachers in North Star's related arts team have adapted their curriculum to meet the needs of all students, whether in-person or remote. When schools were fully virtual last spring, the team created a webpage where students could easily access adapted home activities. Extensions of the arts were created to include families - the music teacher hosted a family sing-a-long featuring teachers participating in karaoke style lip syncs (an adaptation of a yearly North Star tradition). The librarian recorded read-alouds and whole families gathered together to listen. Students zoomed with the art teacher to share and discuss pieces of art. In the late spring, students and families hopped, skipped, and jumped together during virtual field day!

This fall, after we knew our learners would be remote again, the related arts teams created materials to go home to supplement their online classes. The librarian helped facilitate the technology rollout to all 700 students and acquired access to multiple online multimedia resources for our students. The team united to adapt their materials and lessons to fit their students' needs and to maintain a sense of community for all students.

3. Academic Supports:

As a school that inspires the love of learning, we support all students academically using data to provide interventions and guide day-to-day instructional practices.

All students receive access to grade level curriculum through whole group instruction in all core subject areas. Using diagnostic and benchmark assessments, students are tiered according to ability in reading and math. Tier 2 and 3 students receive Response to Intervention (RtI) support in reading and/or math three to five times a week, as required through state guidelines. This targeted instructional support is in addition to whole group standard instruction. Special education certified teachers provide RtI services to our Tier 3 students. Tier 1 and 2 students are supported by the classroom teachers. Students with disabilities may also receive RtI services, in addition to their Individual Education Program (IEP) requirements.

Support for our Talented and Gifted (TAG) students is provided by our talented and gifted certified teacher during the Rti block. This TAG program has continued throughout the pandemic with instruction on Zoom. Classroom teachers provide differentiated instruction and enrichment material to students performing above grade level, ensuring that those children continue to be challenged and to grow academically.

Our Problem Solving Team (PST) meets a minimum of twice per month. This team (consisting of the school counselor, educational diagnostician, administration, special educators, and the classroom teachers) meets to discuss students who are not responding to interventions already being implemented. During these meetings, the team discusses additional interventions and resources that may be beyond the teacher's immediate scope.

Our current hybrid model consists of three modes of instruction: in-person learning at school, remote learning led by a building-based teacher on Zoom, and a self-paced online program. Students participating in the self-paced online program receive weekly check-ins with our school counselor. Whether in the building or online, students who need additional support based on data, ELL, IEPs, or 504s receive their services from a school-based teacher. As needs for students with disabilities have increased, additional staff members have been assigned to support those students daily. An interventionist also provides additional small group instruction/supports for K-3 students.

Our English Language Learner (ELL) teacher provides services to students who qualify utilizing a push-in or pull-out model, depending upon the students' needs. The ELL teacher also provides push in-supports during whole group instruction to better bridge the gap for the ELL students.

To address the need created by school closures in March of 2020, we have instituted an Extended Learning Program at North Star. Students who were identified as Tier 2 or 3 at the close of schools were given first choice for participating in this after-school program. There is no cost to families to participate, ensuring that this program is accessible to all students in need. Diagnostic data was used to group the students and lessons were created based on each student's specific areas of need. The data will be reviewed at the end of five weeks, needs will be revisited, and another five-week program will be implemented to continue to provide support.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

During virtual learning, teachers found creative ways to keep students connected and engaged. We have built relationships with students through socially- distanced home visits, letters, and phone calls. Teachers have had a read-aloud on Zoom before bedtime and virtual Movie Nights. We have hosted Zoom "lunch bunches" so students could chat and socialize. These activities reminded students that, although we were not always together physically, we were still members of the North Star family.

At North Star, we strive to create a positive environment for students, and that positive mindset begins with the teachers. We are happy to be at North Star and we love what we do; that attitude transmits to students through our words and actions. We greet our students by name and with a smile each day. We have morning meetings where all students are heard and shown respect, creating a sense of community in each classroom. The principal does "shout outs" on the announcements for classes that display exemplary behavior or complete their assignments. Many activities and events are created just to make the students smile. For example, we all have fun with our various dress up days. To celebrate genres of music in our curriculum, the whole building recently had Disco Day and Rock n' Roll Day, where teachers, administrators, and students came dressed accordingly. Although our activities are limited this year due to safety protocols, we continue to find ways to make school a happy place.

The unpredictability of the last year has created unprecedented stress for students. We are aware of their emotional well-being and know that consistency is reassuring. We work to create a positive environment where students know they can trust and depend on the adults around them. Many teachers start the day with some form of a survey or daily check-in, allowing us to identify students in need of additional support and any issues at home. Our guidance counselor is wonderful and always available to students. She even has forms outside her office where students can independently request to speak to her. Our custodial staff is an important part of the effort as well; they voluntarily stay in the cafeteria with the children for lunch every day. They help the students open their food, get settled, and often just sit and chat. These conversations create more connections for the students, helping them feel acknowledged and valued. When the students are happy and comfortable, they are more able to focus and grow academically.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

The strategy that has been most successful in working with families and community members has been to establish personal connections through frequent and open communication. These connections with students and their families have promoted increased attendance and engagement for students learning virtually and in-person. Communication is critical for ensuring that children have what they need (emotionally and physically) and for informing families about curriculum and classroom activities. Throughout the year, teachers communicate with families via newsletters, class websites, telephone calls, and emails. Teachers have virtual office hours where parents and students can log onto Zoom to ask questions or address concerns. Our teachers held virtual Open Houses for families in the fall and individual zoom conferences in November and February. Our principal writes a weekly newsletter to families about school events and changes in school and district safety measures. Additionally, our principal is holding a book club with staff and parents via Zoom. Parents are excited to engage with teachers as they read and discuss the book "Thrivers" by Dr. Michele Borba together.

Our PTA meetings are fully virtual and attendance has increased. Our principal and PTA members work together to make meetings relevant and interesting. At one meeting, former North Star students presented. Now high school sophomores, this group of young women began a project to teach Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) lessons to elementary students. They knew that fewer girls and minorities pursue careers in STEM and their goal is to change that trend. Working with North Star teachers, they have created engaging, standards-based lessons in their mission to excite students about STEM.

Last spring, we partnered with a local non-profit, the Hockessin Food Bank. The Food Bank provided food

that teachers collected and delivered to our families with food insecurity. This inspired the creation of Polaris's Pantry this year. Each grade collects specific food items which are available to families in our community.

This fall, teachers began a series of virtual in-services led by Dr. Rachel Karchmer-Klein from the University of Delaware. The focus was supporting educators in creating online teaching platforms. Subsequently, North Star teachers read Dr. Karchmer-Klein's book and participated in additional in-service with her as they transitioned to distance learning. Teachers were able to successfully create online teaching platforms that were easy for families to access. This relationship continued when Dr. Karchmer-Klein met with teachers to discuss grading processes for online students.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

There are many reasons teachers that are happy to work at North Star, but one of the most impactful is our administration. Our principal and assistant principal truly care about us and our well-being. We are consistently thanked for our efforts and our work is acknowledged. These compliments come often in many ways. For example, our administration leaves us notes in the copy room, telling us that we are "awesome" and appreciated. We have "Feel Good Fridays" where we wear Spirit Wear and dress more comfortably. Our administration does shout-outs on the announcements and during faculty meetings, just to thank teachers for their hard work. When the pandemic hit and our stress levels were high, we were routinely encouraged to take care of ourselves and to prioritize self-care. We were reminded that we would be better and more effective teachers if we took the time to recharge and care for ourselves. Our administration consistently reminded us that we were in a together; we were a team. Knowing that we had the appreciation and support of our administration made the ever changing and challenging situation manageable. This mindset of the importance of self-care has also guided some professional development. Multiple guests have been invited and have spoken to us about managing stress and demands of teaching.

Our school's professional development approach is influenced by district requirements, but it is driven by teacher and administrative interest. The Building Leadership Team (BLT) is instrumental in setting annual goals, but all teachers are encouraged to discuss professional development opportunities with our administration. For example, teachers have expressed concern about weaknesses in decoding and reading fluency (due to missed instruction in the spring). As a result, our administration is planning to address these concerns with professional development. Some teachers began to explore and use *How to Plan Differentiated Reading Instruction* by Sharon Walpole and Michael C. McKenna. Subsequently, our principal encouraged staff to attend a webinar series called the Science of Reading to Build Foundational Skills to learn how to utilize the Walpole/McKenna model effectively. A third ripple was created when our reading specialist asked our principal to purchase *Equipped for Reading Success* by David Kirkpatrick, Ph.D. This movement to improve targeted reading instruction to our youngest students is beginning to attract a growing number of teachers at our school. Our principal has supported teachers by listening to our ideas, purchasing research-based literature, and paying for webinars.

4. School Leadership:

We are a school in which leadership is a shared responsibility. This document, for instance, is collaboratively written, including the voices of teachers, our principal, and our assistant principal.

Several building leadership teams composed of administrators, teachers, and other staff members work together to set building goals. One such committee is the Building Leadership Team (BLT) which consists of one representative per grade level, a Special Education teacher, a Related Arts teacher, a math cadre, and an ELA cadre, our principal, and assistant principal. This team meets regularly, including over the summer, to make building wide decisions and design a continuous improvement plan for the forthcoming year. The team identifies two areas of focus based on data: academic and social-emotional. Past academic goals have included demonstrated growth for our below grade level students in reading and math; social-emotional goals have included reading and discussing *Help For Billy* and related work to develop understanding and empathy for children who have experienced trauma.

Another leadership team, the Multi-Tiered Support System (MTSS), meets regularly to design and put into practice plans that support children's behavior. This group is composed of teachers, administrators, the guidance counselor, and the school nurse. The MTSS team developed a behavior matrix to guide teachers in responding to student behaviors and created Smartboard shorts to explain behavior expectations to students. Our principal reinforces these expectations on the morning announcements by setting a daily behavioral goal. The team builds a sense of belonging and pride among students through engaging assemblies and school spirit activities.

Our principal and assistant principal, school nurse, and guidance counselor worked together to develop building policies before students' return to the building in November. Many meetings and much thoughtful consideration was given to arrival and dismissal procedures, cafeteria seating, rewriting the school schedule to limit hallway transitions, classroom layout, reserved quarantine rooms, and other critical decisions designed to prevent cross-contamination and exposure to Covid-19. Prior to students' return to the building, stickers were placed every six feet in the hallways, helping students to maintain social distance. Signs were displayed throughout the building, reminding students to wear their masks properly, maintain social distance, and to wash hands. All of these changes have been planned to establish new routines that ensure safety. Familiar routines and feeling safe are pillars of student achievement. When the day is predictable and adults are reliable, children's worries diminish, and their brains are ready to learn.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

North Star staff is committed to expanding our cultural proficiency and to becoming a more culturally aware and respectful school community. We are fortunate to have a teacher trained in facilitating cultural awareness to guide us as we explore the diverse viewpoints of students, teachers and families. Our school diversity leader has led challenging, but necessary, discussions among our school staff during faculty meetings. Through careful reflection and courageous conversations, we are working to uncover our personal biases and discovering how they affect our perceptions and interactions with others. Professional development resources from LearningforJustice.org (formerly TeachingTolerance.org) offer guidance to scaffold uncomfortable topics for both adults and students. Our experiences have created a new awareness about how we may be translating our biases into our classrooms.

We are examining our curriculum, teaching materials, visual content and teaching methods through the lens of diversity. Teachers are reviewing student reading material. Do our classroom libraries reflect our student population and other populations around the world? We are examining lesson material for underlying preconceptions. We want our students to feel a sense of belonging, and to appreciate differences in others. Our goal is to have all genders, preferences, cultures, and points of view represented and accepted at North Star. Moving forward, we are thoughtfully considering our learners' backgrounds when choosing materials.

North Star strives to celebrate differences and use these differences as learning opportunities. We incorporate and increase multicultural studies. For example, we teach about holidays around the world, and welcome families to share their cultural traditions. Students feel pride in sharing their histories and stories. As their leaders, we work to demonstrate respect for all cultures and backgrounds, and to teach respectful discussions surrounding these topics.

With other important, noteworthy days that spotlight our attention on noteworthy causes and people, we celebrate Global Day of Inclusion and Rock Your Socks Day to show support for people with intellectual or developmental disabilities, and to expose our learners to possibilities. Our students with disabilities are embraced by their peers. All people have value and deserve respect, a belief that is instilled in North Star students from their first days in kindergarten through fifth grade.

At North Star, we want all students to feel included and important, and we are committed to expanding our cultural intelligence. We will continue to make changes for the growth and benefit of our students, staff, and families on this journey to ensure a culturally respectful and equitable environment.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

When our district transitioned to a fully inclusive educational model, Red Clay adopted the slogan, “We’re all in!” The slogan was a reminder that everyone in a given school was responsible for the education and well-being of every child. It is this philosophy that has helped us weather the Covid storm.

All teachers had to adapt the curriculum for distance learning last spring. We needed to quickly broaden our knowledge and mastery of technological tools. Fortunately, we have many teachers who incorporated technology into their classrooms prior to the pandemic, and those teachers were invaluable in helping those less familiar with technological resources. This collaboration served to strengthen us as a team as we continued to work together for the common good of our students.

Our faculty and staff have shown great flexibility and commitment over the past year. This school year began with remote instruction for all students. In November, some students returned to the building while others continued with remote instruction, so we realigned teaching methods to meet these shifting demands. Some teachers were reassigned to different grades or subjects. Related arts teachers began to teach in homerooms, pushing carts of materials to limit possible cross contamination. Our school nurse responded to parent concerns and guided us through safety procedures with endless patience. Our interventionist delivered school materials to families without their own transportation. Our custodial staff has gone above and beyond, keeping our building safe and clean. Our cafeteria staff now works longer days to distribute evening meals at dismissal. We will do whatever our students need to thrive. We are all in.

Throughout the year, we have tried to maintain stability by adapting North Star traditions to meet safety protocols. For instance, we normally celebrate Pi Day with an enjoyable tradition: students throw whipped cream pies at teachers and staff. What to do this Pi Day? Our principal turned Pi Day into “Pi”jama Day. North Star also traditionally has an annual carnival. This year, we are catching the carnival spirit virtually; students, families, and staff will play Kahoot! and enjoy a live magic show on Zoom. Although these events look different than they have in previous years, we have found a way to create continuity for our students.

We have persisted in the face of adversity, knowing that our example helps guide children in difficult times. Our students can count on us, we are there for them, and we are all in.