

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

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

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

Official School Name Avalon Middle School  
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 13914 Mailer Boulevard  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Orlando State FL Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 32828-4883

County Orange County

Telephone (407) 207-7839 Fax (407) 207-7872

Web site/URL https://avalonms.ocps.net/ E-mail Karen.Furno@ocps.net

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

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

Name of Superintendent\* Ms. Barbara Jenkins E-mail barbara.jenkins@ocps.net  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Orange County Public Schools Tel. (407) 317-3200

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 Ms. Teresa Jacobs  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

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

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

## **PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION**

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

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

## PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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

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

- Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
  - 136 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 38 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 28 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools

202 TOTAL

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

- 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

- 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	0	0	0
1	0	0	0
2	0	0	0
3	0	0	0
4	0	0	0
5	0	0	0
6	144	153	297
7	186	163	349
8	192	161	353
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	522	477	999

\*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):
- 0.3 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 7.7 % Asian
  - 7 % Black or African American
  - 38 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 41 % 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: 9%

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

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

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	36
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	56
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	92
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	1049
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.09
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	9

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

Spanish, French, Chinese, Portuguese, Arabic, Cantonese, Burmese

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 4 %  
43 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 26 %

Total number students who qualify: 261

8. Students receiving special education services: 8 %

79 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>10</u> Autism                 | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>1</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>10</u> Other Health Impaired                |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>55</u> Specific Learning Disability         |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>3</u> Speech or Language Impairment         |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment      | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>0</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 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.

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	3
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	57
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	4
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	2
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	8

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.

<b>Required Information</b>	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016
Daily student attendance	96%	96%	95%	96%	96%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

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

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

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

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

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

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

To lead our students to success with the support and involvement of families 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.

Our school has been doing a hybrid model of learning since the start of school. As the year has progressed, we have more students coming face-to- face, but have still continued the model. This allowed for less schedule changes and made the transition easier on both teachers and students.

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**

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Avalon Middle School is a traditional suburban middle school located on the east side of Orange County Florida that opened in 2006. We are part of the Innovation Learning Community and represented by the School Board District 2. Our school serves the suburban, planned communities of Avalon Park and Stonebrook East. While the majority of our community is middle-upper class, a little over a quarter of our students are considered economically-disadvantaged. Avalon Middle enjoys high parental involvement, which strongly assists in the performance outcomes for the school. Avalon has been identified as a School of Excellence by the State of Florida.

At Avalon Middle, our expectation is that all students can learn and achieve. We strive to meet the Orange County Public Schools (OCPS) mission and ensure student success with a strong academic program in a safe, caring environment that provides opportunities for all students. All classes emphasize academic skills as well as support skills, such as collaboration, academic discourse, and creativity. For example, we have implemented a PBL (Project-Based Learning) Academy to provide enrichment for our academically talented students. In addition to college preparation, we also emphasize career exploration through a varied elective programs. For example, we were the first OCPS middle school to join Project Lead the Way which emphasizes STEM - Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. We also have a strong fine arts program that includes art, drama, band, chorus, and orchestra with students in these electives frequently receiving district and state recognition. Our newest electives are our agriscience courses, which give students hands-on experiences with agriculture and animal husbandry. Our school addresses our students' cultural diversity in many ways. Since a third of our students are Hispanic, we have established a Latinos in Action class to provide college and career readiness and support for this population. We also celebrate all cultures through school-wide events, such as Hispanic Heritage and Black History Month. Finally, we further address students' physical and academic needs by offering enrichment through a variety of clubs and sports.

Our Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) Program has many layers to help students reach their full potential. Personalized and equitable learning opportunities are provided for all learners to develop skills and achieve content and learning priorities. Our master schedule has core courses at various levels (regular, advanced, honors - high school credit). In addition, we have co-taught classes to provide support for Exceptional Students Education (ESE) students and double-block courses to provide support for struggling learners. Our master schedule also reflects our MTSS support. We provide support to our exceptional education students and English Language Learners through our support facilitation and English for Speakers of Other Languages programs. In addition, we have a schoolwide Social Emotional Learning (SEL) program designed to address our students' social and emotional needs.

The challenges related to COVID-19 have caused many adaptations in our educational model and support systems this year, particularly in the areas of technology, student engagement, and social-emotional learning. We developed a technology team that supported teachers in transitioning from full-time face-to-face learning to a hybrid model. This included professional development on technologies to address student engagement, collaboration, and monitoring of students both at home and in the classroom. Furthermore, our team supported students and parents with tips on how to use the new systems, troubleshoot technology issues, and provided greater support with digital learning at home. The social-emotional health of our Avalon family is always important, but especially during this school year. Because of this, our SEL team frequently surveyed students and staff to determine their needs, implementing supportive activities and professional readings as a result. While this year brought challenges, Avalon Middle worked together to overcome them with our students' best interests in mind.

Even with the challenges, Avalon has continued its focus on academic excellence. We have high student achievement as measured by district and state assessments which earned us a state designation as School of Excellence. Recently, we had a district top five Finalist for the OCPS Teacher of the Year and a district top five finalist for the OCPS Assistant Principal of the Year. Not only is our core academic program strong, but our electives and extracurricular programs are also outstanding. For example, our chorus "Songbird" program received state recognition. Our athletic teams are frequent district or cluster winners, our Thespian

Club has received several district and state awards, and our new Future Farmers of America (FFA) program has received several awards at the State Fair.

Our motto is “The Power is in the Pack.” Working together, our students, faculty, and community will continue to work toward ensuring that every student finds success at our school and in life.



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

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

Our school's core curriculum consists of math, language arts, science, and social studies as outlined by the Florida State Standards. Our educators implement a curriculum that is based on high expectations and prepares learners for their next levels. Students have multiple opportunities to enroll in high school credit courses, such as Algebra 1 Honors, Geometry Honors, Earth Space Honors, and Physical Science Honors. In addition, we have co-taught classes to provide support for ESE students and double-block courses to provide support for struggling learners.

Our learners have equitable opportunities to develop skills and achieve the content and learning priorities. Our district provides a scope and sequence for content areas. The scope and sequence prioritize standards and organizes them within units of study called curriculum resource materials (CRM's). CRMs are organized by a progression of standards of focus. These materials help teachers plan to meet the needs of all learners. This resource is used to reduce barriers to the content and optimize levels of challenge and support to meet the needs of all learners, including, but not limited to, students who are English Language Learners, students with disabilities, students who are gifted, and students who lack support from home. Our teachers use and modify district curriculum resources (CRMs) to meet the needs of all learners. They implement specific actions and instructional activities to ensure learner engagement and develop creative, innovative, collaborative, and problem-solving skills.

With the learning gaps associated with the pandemic, the core curriculum adjusted instruction to address the learning gaps from the Spring of 2020. For example, in math, teachers taught their grade-level curriculum in addition to reviewing the previous grade-level standard if it occurred during distance learning the previous year. In language arts, teachers set aside days on their instructional focus calendars to offer differentiated standards based on their needs. In science, live labs had to be adjusted using demonstrations or with face-to-face students modeling labs for students attending school from home. Collaborative structures equitable for both face-to-face and at-home had to be put into place. For social studies, virtual field trips have become a welcome addition to the curriculum. Students could travel to the Great Pyramids or tour the Supreme Court using digital tools such as Nearpod.

At Avalon, teachers use a variety of instructional approaches to engage students with content. Collaborative learning, academic discourse, project-based learning, and teacher-led small group are approaches we have fine-tuned over the years. These high-yield strategies facilitate learning and achievement. In the most recent year, we have had to adjust some of these instructional approaches to fit our hybrid model of instruction. Professional development was provided on digital tools and resources to increase online student engagement and discourse. Teachers created activities that allowed for students to be interactive with each other so that all student perspectives could be heard whether they were online or face-to-face. These adaptations brought digital collaboration tools to the forefront. Students became more proficient with digital presentation tools, less of a consumer and more of a creator. When students are creating, they are able to dig deeper into the content and take pride in their learning.

Avalon Middle collects data regularly to implement research-based instructional practices designed to meet our students' needs. In addition, we also collect data to identify improvements in student learning using formative assessment tools, such as iReady diagnostics and teacher-made assessments as well as standardized and summative assessments, including teacher-made common assessments and district performance assessments. The data is analyzed and used to adjust services and to elevate the effectiveness of programs and services through data chats with professional learning communities. We provide a variety of interventions to help students master the curriculum including retakes of key assessments, MTSS supports, and tutoring. While we had to develop updated policies and procedures with online learning and assessments, there has been minimal change to assessments during this year. The biggest change was condensing the assessing knowledge base, targeting specific learning priorities within a standard. Fleshing out the nice to know and focusing on the need to know was important this year.

Our administration and resource team will continue to survey teachers, parents, and students to determine  
NBRS 2021

adjustments to our curriculum, instruction, and assessments with the goal of all of our students being college and career prepared. We are committed to revising our core curriculum, instruction, and assessment policies.

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

Avalon Middle was the first middle school in our district to join Project Lead the Way, a STEM initiative providing students with instruction and career awareness in science and tech areas, including Applied Chemistry and Physics, Computer Science for Innovators (CSI), Mechanics, Aerospace Science, Natural Resource and Energy Conservation, Drafting, 2D & 3D Design, and Sustainable Architecture. We also have the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Essentials program, through which students can earn Cape Digital Certificates by demonstrating mastery in technical skills, such as word processing, spreadsheets, presentations, cybersecurity, and coding. In addition, we offer a high school level STEM class, Intro to Engineering Design. Our program is unique in that we have two teachers for the program while most middle schools only have one. We are fully self-funded via our students' certification accreditations, and we have several alumni who are already attending engineering colleges throughout the nation.

In 2018, we added Agricultural Education to our elective course offerings. This outstanding program provides education and skills in the area of Career and Technical Education by preparing students for jobs in the Agriculture sector. Students are eligible to sit for Agriculture Education Services and Technology (AEST) industry certification exams upon completion of the 6th grade and 8th-grade courses. Those certifications are Agriculture Systems Associate, and Agriculture Associate, respectively. In addition, students enrolled in agriculture classes are eligible to join the National Future Farmers of America (FFA) Organization, a national organization of students interested in agriculture, leadership, service, and personal development. Our FFA chapter has been rated a National Quality Chapter since its inception due to our community service, leadership development, and career preparation activities.

Additionally, all our teachers integrate career and technical education into the academic courses through interdisciplinary lessons and lessons based upon student interest surveys. Science, social studies, and language arts teachers include nonfiction articles about career and technical topics in their lessons. and emphasize the real-world application of their content. Finally, by incorporating STEM + the Arts or STEAM, our art, band, drama, chorus, and orchestra classes regularly incorporate career and technical education in their curriculum.

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

**2. Other Curriculum Areas:**

Providing an appropriate education to all of our students is of utmost importance to us. Avalon Middle School students in grades six through eight benefit from an array of curricular areas that support their acquisition of essential skills and knowledge. In the spring of each school year, students complete a course selection sheet through which they can rank order their elective choices. Our curricular offerings are a direct response to our students' interests. In addition to our core curricula and our Career and Technical Education courses, we offer a rich selection of elective classes. Our electives include Physical Education, Art 2D and 3D, Band, Orchestra, Chorus, Theater, Project-Based Learning (PBL), and three levels of Spanish. In addition, our school offers monthly Social Emotional Learning (SEL) lessons that address mental health, mindfulness, and character education for all our students.

All elective classes at Avalon Middle School offer a standards-based curriculum that allows students to explore their interests outside of our four core content areas. Our visual and performing arts teachers encourage students to share their work in district and state competitions and exhibits as well as with the community at large. More recently, our advanced Chorus students have used their voice to spread cheer to the residents of our local nursing home. Our band, orchestra, and chorus students collaborate with our theater students during the fall and spring productions.

Our physical education department offers well-rounded courses that allow students to explore individual, dual, team, and extreme sports. The courses also focus on health and fitness components. In addition, we offer four competitive sports during the year, soccer, basketball, volleyball, and track. Our physical education teachers encourage our students to use the skills they have learned in class by trying out for our sports teams.

Students at Avalon Middle School can choose to take three years of Spanish starting with Beginning Spanish and then moving on to High School Spanish I and High School Spanish II. Our students are able to leave our school having completed the state's two foreign language credits required for high school graduation.

The PBL Academy was created as a response to students who needed enrichment opportunities. The PBL Academy focuses on critical thinking, problem-solving, reflection, student choice, and creativity. Our eventual goal is to become a PBL school with PBL learning embedded in all classes. Students who are part of the PBL Academy learn the course's key standards through extended projects involving real-world application and answering complex questions.

All of our students participate in monthly social-emotional, mental health, and character education lessons. SEL is defined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) as the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. All of our teachers receive regular training on SEL and provide our students with age-appropriate support in this area. Because of our strong SEL program, our students often take the initiative and create random acts of kindness moments as well as decorate the school with posters that encourage positivity and kindness.

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

Our school data indicates an achievement gap for the following student subgroups: African American, FRL (free-and-reduced-lunch), exceptional students education (ESE), and English language learner (ELL) students. We are trying to close this gap by providing additional support systems and appropriate scaffolding and remediation to our students who are not meeting grade-level standards. To support academic growth, Avalon offers double-block language arts and math courses to our students performing below grade level on their Florida Standards Assessments. We also have three ESE teachers who push into our double-block classes to provide additional support to our ESE students. Our first-year ELL students are scheduled in a double-block DELA (Developmental English Language Arts) course to support their language needs; and, we have an ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) paraprofessional on staff who pushes into our core classes to support new ELL students. In addition to our double-block intensive courses, our master schedule also includes double-block Algebra classes for students who scored a level three on their math FSA (Florida Standards Assessments). We have also developed an MTSS program to provide differentiated support for targeted students in their classrooms. We have three certified teachers who push into different core classes throughout the week to support our Level I and Level II students. Our MTSS coach identifies the students who need additional support using common assessment data and teacher recommendations and then schedules our MTSS teachers accordingly.

Avalon also offers an ICU (Instructional Care Unit) program for our students who are struggling academically. These students are pulled during their elective course by our ICU teacher and given support on their missing assignments from their core classes to improve their grades. Our guidance counselors, instructional coaches, and admin team frequently review D and F reports to identify students who need the most support and create action plans to help these students improve their grades. In addition to our ICU program, Avalon offers an after tutoring program to support students who are performing below grade level in their core classes. We have five certified

teachers currently monitoring student progress in all core classes, and we communicate regularly with our tutoring coordinator as well as the students' parents to help improve their overall performance.

To provide enrichment for our students who are above grade level, we offer numerous high school credit courses including Engineering, Algebra 1, Earth Space Honors, Physical Honors, Spanish, and Geometry. In addition, during the 2019-2020 school year, Avalon Middle School established a PBL (Project-Based Learning) Academy for select incoming 6th-grade students. This academy focuses on critical thinking, problem-solving, reflection, student choice, and creativity. The academy expanded this year to 7th grade. In addition, we have trained a group of 8th-grade teachers to prepare for the continued expansion of the academy. Our eventual goal is to become a PBL school with PBL learning embedded in all classes.

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

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

Avalon Middle School is committed to building a culture that motivates students. Every three months our faculty and staff will recognize students in each grade level for various character traits. Students are invited to attend a recognition ceremony where they receive an award, positive messages from their teachers, and breakfast provided by our Parent-Teacher-Student-Organization (PTSO). We also recognize our students academically through our Night of Excellence ceremony at the end of the school year. In addition to our recognition programs, Avalon Middle School offers a variety of service clubs, such as the National Junior Honor Society, that builds on the foundations of leadership, service, character, citizenship, and scholarship.

During distance learning, our staff supported our student's social and emotional needs by meeting with them regularly through online conferencing, guidance calls, and video messages from teachers and staff. Our staff created a music video to the Friends theme song so that students knew we were there to support them during these challenging times. Teachers also utilized a variety of digital resources to support student engagement in the classroom. These programs include Nearpod lessons, Jamboard, and SMART Learning Suite which helped students process the content.

To support our students' social and emotional growth, our leadership team meets monthly to pre-identify students who may need extra support dealing with challenges associated with social and emotional health. Students are paired with a member of our staff who best supports their needs and serves as a mentor for the student. Avalon Middle School has also developed a Social and Emotional Leadership Team to organize various school-wide activities that encouraged students to share positive messages to others on campus. Our team has provided trivia challenges, estimate jars, scavenger hunts, and even made tissue paper flowers to give away to friends and family. Students were also given three Fun Fridays to play games and socialize for 30 minutes in the gym, cafeteria, and courtyard. In addition to the social/emotional activities, our teachers facilitated five mental lessons throughout the year which included topics such as self-care, self-awareness, self-management, mindfulness, substance abuse, self-harm, and suicide. As we move through the rest of the school year we will continue to make adjustments to our academic supports to best serve our students.

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

Avalon builds positive relationships with families by providing regular communication about our school's programs and students' performance. Our parents/guardians receive weekly e-newsletters from the principal and periodic phone messages with information about our school and upcoming events. In addition, we mail a quarterly paper newsletter to all of our families. Additional methods of communication include our school marquee, our school and teacher websites, email, our Facebook account, and our Skyward grading program which parents can access at home. We also use our in-school announcements and Canvas Student Body Course to provide information to students.

Our school also builds positive relationships with families by providing multiple ways through which they can become involved in our school and their child's education. For example, in the past, we have hosted numerous community events throughout the year including our Husky 5K, Curriculum Information Night, and Parent Nights. During COVID-19, we adapted many of these activities to a virtual format so that all parents and students could participate. We also strongly encourage parent involvement through membership in our Parent-Teacher-Student Organization (PTSO) and School Advisory Council (SAC) and volunteer activities at our school through the ADDitions school volunteer program. Each year we ensure that Avalon Middle School is awarded the Five Star School Award, receiving both Silver and Golden Awards. This symbol of achievement is the highest award for community involvement presented by the Florida Commissioner of Education. A Five Star School has shown evidence of exemplary community involvement in the areas of business partnerships, family involvement, volunteers, student community services, and school advisory councils.

Our primary external stakeholders are our School Advisory Council (SAC) and the Parent-Teacher-Student-

Organization (PTSO). These groups meet monthly to discuss and address important school issues. The SAC focuses on the creation of our School Improvement Plan and evaluation of how effectively we implement the strategies within the plan. We also solicit input from additional parents and our student body via frequent surveys. Communication of our mission, vision, policies, and procedures is very important; therefore, we share our School Improvement Plan and other key information with our parents and community members via all of the forms of communication mentioned above.

We have provided additional support to our parents and students during COVID-19 with frequent guidance and teacher check-ins, parent phone calls to help support struggling students, and technology support for our LaunchEd families. Furthermore, our guidance team provides referrals for mental health support services in the community for families or students who may need this assistance.

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

Given the strong connection between teacher efficacy and student achievement, teacher support is critical. Avalon has a regular program to support and recognize teachers, including a weekly newsletter with tips, shout outs, and recognition of best practices. Teachers are also recognized for accomplishments at our monthly faculty meetings. We have intensified our teacher support system to help teachers with the transition to hybrid learning. During our digital learning period, our administrative/resource team met weekly online with each Professional Learning Community (PLC) to answer questions and check on teachers' well-being. In addition, the team delivered motivational t-shirts and care packages to every teacher. Over the course of the last year, teachers have had numerous online professional development opportunities, including how to teach with digital collaboration and engagement resources. On-campus meetings were limited to give teachers more planning time. During the first few weeks of hybrid learning, the admin team had a rotation schedule and checked in with all staff daily to ensure their needs were met. Avalon also established a team of digital curriculum technology leaders who have assisted teachers on-site with hybrid learning and who have continued to support school needs throughout the year.

To ensure a positive work environment, we have adopted a social and emotional learning focus this year with our faculty and staff. AMS has an SEL team of eight members who surveyed teachers in the fall to gauge how they were feeling during the 2020-2021 school year. Based on the results, the team came up with ideas to help support teachers and promote a positive environment. Ideas implemented have included providing a planning day for teachers to work on lesson plans and assessments and multiple "Fun Fridays" this year for students and teachers. For example, in December teachers and students had 15-minute rotations completing holiday-related activities, such as making snowflakes and answering holiday music trivia. We also began including SEL suggestions in our weekly principal newsletter to staff. Some examples shared have been breathing strategies and a "roses and thorns" activity to share the positives and negatives of the day. The SEL team has also been incorporating monthly activities which include an on-campus scavenger hunt in November; and, in February, teachers wrote positive messages on hearts for each other and hung them on their classroom doors. The team will continue working to make sure that our teachers know how much they are valued.

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

Avalon's philosophy aligns with guidelines provided by the OCPS School Board and Superintendent. Our leadership team, which includes administrators, deans, and resource personnel, is committed to continuous improvement using evidence-based practices to help all students succeed. The group meets weekly to review safety plans and collect and analyze a range of data about school programs to implement effective strategies and make revisions as needed.

Our leadership team is also committed to shared leadership; therefore, Avalon continually provides opportunities for internal and external stakeholders to contribute to our school's operation. Internally, our grade level Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) meet weekly to plan instruction based on student data. During monthly faculty meetings, our leadership team presents information for discussion and gathers faculty input. Our team also solicits feedback through informal groups. For example, several years ago the team met with teacher leaders to establish school-wide policies and procedures. Each summer, the team

revises these policies based on student and program needs. The leadership team also utilizes surveys to gather faculty and staff input. For example, this year our Social and Emotional Leadership Team surveyed teachers about school climate and analyzed the data to make adjustments to support learning and the social and emotional health of our staff and students. As further evidence of Avalon's commitment to shared leadership, we provide experiences that cultivate and improve leadership effectiveness. Capacity for internal leadership is built through ongoing modeling, coaching, and other leadership experiences. We also encourage our teachers to become mentors for new teachers.

While ongoing support is always a priority for our leadership team, it has been an even bigger focus during the last year as the team had to adjust our policies and procedures for the digital learning and then hybrid learning models. For example, the team met during the summer to update our school practices in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. All of our procedures had to be examined, and in many cases revised, from arrival and departure to school procedures, to lunchroom procedures, to student collaboration practices. The team provided teachers with in-depth plans for both face-to-face and at-home learning policies and procedures. In addition, the team devised COVID safety protocols and a plan to communicate these protocols with all stakeholders. Updates have been provided to our community as needed through our school's website, weekly electronic principal newsletters, and school Facebook page.

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

Avalon Middle addresses the diverse needs and backgrounds of students, families, and staff in a variety of ways. This year, our entire staff participated in professional development on Culturally Responsive Standards-Based Teaching. The activities included collaborations and discussions on microaggressions, levels of culture, and multicultural education. Our Social Studies PLC takes the lead in addressing current events and social movements that impact our students and community. Additionally, we have a variety of school-wide events to make students aware of diverse cultures and important events and issues in our society.

Our school-wide "Bully Prevention/Kindness is Courageous" lessons are shared with students at the beginning of each school year. Following the lessons, students will recognize strengths, positive qualities, and character traits in themselves or others. This ability to do so will contribute to the creation of a safe and respectful classroom and school environment.

Students understand the OCPS Code of Student Conduct and Avalon Middle School expectations. Throughout the school year, students are reinforced for positive behavior on campus with student incentives, Husky Hero recognition, and recognition in our publications. We focus each year on decreasing disrespect and bully behavior at Avalon Middle School. We work continuously to increase kind, compassionate behavior.

Restorative Justice Circles occur regularly at Avalon Middle School. The purposes of the circle is to provide opportunities for students to gain an understanding of the perspectives of others, discuss the intended and unintended consequences that transpired during an incident, and discuss how the incident impacted others. Once the students in the circle understand how the incident impacted others, they problem-solve on how the harm can be repaired, how the harm can be avoided in the future, and how the person(s), who did the harm, can give back to the person(s) harmed. Circles have reduced suspensions, detentions, disruptive behavior, conflicts, and bully behavior.

Inclusion, acceptance, empathy, and kindness are the fundamentals of who we are at Avalon Middle School. We challenged students to "Start with Hello" to everyone they see. Students created videos on this initiative, handed out random acts of kindness, and reached out to students who needed support. We want students and staff to build lasting relationships with others and to pledge to help others feel accepted and included.





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

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There are many practices that Avalon Middle School implements to successfully educate and support students. However, one practice that has been instrumental in student success since school closures is the emphasis on addressing the social-emotional needs of all stakeholders to support the academic engagement and success of students as well as the professional growth of our faculty and staff. When our school shut down in the Spring of 2020 and transitioned to digital learning, we faced a lot of unexpected challenges. We had to set precedents by establishing new policies, procedures, processes, and learning expectations. With our students in mind, we rose to the challenge by keeping in mind during our leadership meetings that attitudes and feelings were just as important as how we address academic success and professional growth.

In the fall, a social-emotional learning team was created consisting of eight members from various content and leadership capacities. The social-emotional learning team attended multiple sessions addressing the core SEL competency areas. Our school has focused on developing and improving relationship skills. We created an implementation plan that we monitored and adjusted throughout the year. Our focus was on the ability to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups.

As part of the implementation plan, we surveyed teachers and students on their social and emotional health. Using the data from the survey, we implemented programs, such as monthly SEL activities like “Shower with Flowers,” where students created tissue flowers to give away to friends or family. Teachers participated in a grass-roots effort, paying it forward by passing out flowers to colleagues to brighten their day. We also provided weekly social-emotional strategies in the teacher and community newsletters such as conversation starters to hone in on social-emotional health.

By monitoring our implementation plan and follow-up survey we made adjustments to address student and staff needs. Creating a positive climate has a direct effect on our teachers’ efficacy and our students’ success. Despite the turmoil of this past year, our teachers have been able to work together to help our students continue growing and achieving.