

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

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

School Mailing Address 100 Dragon Drive
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Jefferson State GA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 30549-9033

County Jackson County

Telephone (706) 367-2882 Fax (706) 367-5207

Web site/URL
<https://www.jeffcityschools.org/jefferson-middle-school/home> E-mail adria.whitworth@jeffcityschools.org

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

Date _____

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent* Dr. Donna McMullan E-mail donna.mcmullan@jeffcityschools.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Jefferson City School District Tel. (706) 367-2880

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

Date _____

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board
President/Chairperson Mr. Ronnie Hopkins
(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):
- 2 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 1 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 4 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	0	0	0
1	0	0	0
2	0	0	0
3	0	0	0
4	0	0	0
5	0	0	0
6	180	160	340
7	149	163	312
8	163	135	298
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	492	458	950

*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):
- 0.5 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 2.7 % Asian
 - 8.6 % Black or African American
 - 7.6 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 76.4 % White
 - 4.2 % Two or more races
 - 100 % Total**

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

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

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	21
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	24
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	45
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	921
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.05
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	5

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

Spanish, Vietnamese, Haitian Creole, Hmong

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 3 %
24 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 22 %

Total number students who qualify: 207

8. Students receiving special education services: 11 %

109 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>0</u> Deafness	<u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment
<u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness	<u>27</u> Other Health Impaired
<u>0</u> Developmental Delay	<u>49</u> Specific Learning Disability
<u>5</u> Emotional Disturbance	<u>7</u> Speech or Language Impairment
<u>2</u> Hearing Impairment	<u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury
<u>8</u> Intellectual Disability	<u>1</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	3
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	36
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	22
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	10
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	2

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 26:1

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

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

The mission of Jefferson City Schools and Jefferson Middle School (JMS) is to graduate fully functioning adults. Now, more than ever, education is the foundation for prosperity. Only through an adequate education can one acquire the skills and abilities demanded by an increasingly sophisticated job market. We hold ourselves accountable for preparing students to function in an environment characterized by global competition, diversity, abruptly changing job demands, and an absolute requirement for technical skills and abilities.

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.

JMS opened on July 31, 2020, for traditional face-to-face instruction. Our school district offered a virtual option to students with documented medical issues; however, a very small portion of students exercised this option. We started school with 899 students face-to-face and 48 virtual. After our December Winter Break, 29 students returned to face-to-face instruction with only 19 remaining enrolled in virtual school second semester. We are very proud to have sustained face-to-face instruction this entire school year.

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

Jefferson Middle School (JMS) is located in Jefferson, GA, a small town in northeast Georgia along the I-85 corridor. Jefferson is 60 miles north of Atlanta and 30 miles northwest of Athens, where the University of Georgia is located. JMS has an enrollment of 950 students across grades 6-8. Many of our students come from generations of Jefferson graduates. Our student population is stable, and most of our students started school in kindergarten and have been together throughout their academic career.

There is a strong tradition of public education in our town which dates back to the creation of the Martin Institute in 1818. Formed in 1975, JMS originally shared a building with Jefferson High School (JHS). In January 2002, JMS, the only middle school in the district, moved to its current location.

JCS offers students the opportunity to explore our nation's national parks in a program spanning grades 5-10. The program includes trips to Washington, D.C. in 5th grade, Yosemite National Park in 8th grade, and Grand Teton and Yellowstone National Park in 9th and 10th grades. On the 8th grade trip, JMS students spend a week of the summer visiting the San Francisco Bay Area, rafting the Merced river, and exploring Yosemite. Unfortunately, this program has been suspended due to COVID-19.

JCS' motto is "Exposure to Excellence Promotes Excellence." Implementing this in a real and practical sense requires a focus on student engagement in learning. To ensure student engagement, administrators and teachers must partner with parents and community members for total wrap-around student support. Students engage in the classroom when they feel they are part of a larger community of learners. We consistently seek ways to engage students intellectually, emotionally, socially, and behaviorally.

To engage students intellectually, we task them with exploring new concepts. The answer to a problem is not always categorical. Allowing students to become uncomfortable in the inquiry process is something we impress upon our teachers. Students build confidence when they have persevered through a task and begin to believe in their own ability to succeed.

Engaging students emotionally on many different fronts is a top priority. Students are offered opportunities to choose projects centered around a common concept, so that they are passionate about their research and can relate it to their goals as a learner. In addition, we have weekly social and emotional learning lessons that support the students' overall character development and build confidence in their own abilities as learners and young adults.

At JMS, students are engaged socially when they work in pairs or teams in class, when they participate in extracurricular activities, have friends at school, and feel a sense of loyalty and belonging to the school. We offer every sport at the middle school level that is offered at the high school level for both boys and girls. Students take pride that K-12, we are all Dragons. Our Fine Arts program is exceptional and hosts an annual Fine Arts Night. Our Drama Club, Outdoor Classroom Club, FBLA, and FFA are extremely active as well. Our school pride centers around a common goal to achieve excellence in all we do – on and off the field, stage, greenhouse, court, and classroom.

JMS expects students to exhibit appropriate behavior, arrive to class prepared, and actively participate in the lessons. Students often seek assistance when needed and choose to take challenging classes. We have an energetic staff that is passionate about their subject areas and their mission to educate middle school learners. Students know that our teachers want to be at school and care about their future. The confidence in knowing they are wanted, loved, and cared for helps students continue to engage behaviorally in class because they not only care about their future goals but also their relationships with their teachers.

Our COVID-19 response has been targeted towards limited points of contact within our school building while continuing to provide the quality instruction our community expects. We changed our arrival and dismissal procedures because these were two additional points of contact we could remove entirely. Student desks were also arranged by administration and the school nurse in a way that limits student exposure within classrooms thus lowering the number of students quarantined from a close contact to a positive COVID-19

case. We strongly feel that these mitigation strategies, along with consistently encouraging students to wear masks and taking additional cleaning measures, have contributed to our success in maintaining face-to-face instruction all year long.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

JMS was well positioned to transition to virtual learning in March of 2020. Our students had access to school-issued Chromebooks, and our teachers had participated in professional learning related to classroom technology. Through the establishment of Google classrooms in the spring of 2020, teachers were able to develop a way to promote safe and effective digital learning habits that continued into the 2020-2021 school year. Teachers continue to utilize Google classrooms as a way to seamlessly provide digital instruction to students who are quarantined in an effort to keep them caught up with face-to-face instruction.

Each department engages in detailed discussion and carefully examines each of the state’s standards. Each content area interprets and implements standards by utilizing the resources provided by the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE): curriculum maps, comprehensive course guides, and curriculum frameworks.

While each grade level uses the documents provided by the GaDOE, in mathematics, we utilize several resources designed by the Utah Middle School Math Project. This enterprise provides not only student material but also teacher and parent guides. The elaborate initiative also includes companion resources prepared exclusively for teachers. These “mathematics foundations” provide educators with in-depth study as to the reasons behind the structure of each chapter as well as specific suggestions for presenting the material to students. Further, the foundations offer insightful connections to both prior and future mathematics knowledge, thus increasing the probability of achievement within our classrooms. The Utah curriculum was developed in conjunction with the Common Core Mathematics Standards. As a result, we’ve made modifications to the program to ensure each Georgia Standard of Excellence (GSE) is addressed in its entirety.

The ELA, Science, and Social Studies Departments follow the GSE which are aligned to Common Core. Science and social studies utilize USATestprep for common assessments. This allows teachers to use data to drive instruction, remediation, and acceleration. In ELA, we partner with The Graide Network to provide additional feedback on student writing to improve our interrater reliability among ELA teachers when they grade student writing samples throughout the year. In high school credit Physical Science, we work with other districts that teach this curriculum to middle school students to discuss appropriate pacing and curriculum maps.

We believe that all students can learn and achieve at high levels. We do not believe in failure and set high expectations for our students which we communicate to our students and their parents. We support students who struggle in a variety of ways: reteaching, tutoring, offering opportunities to redo assignments, and offering extra help and time. Students admittedly learn at varying speeds, but we focus on the achievement once they master the learning goal, not the speed at which they master. Our students will begrudgingly admit that we do not let them get by without doing the work. When students struggle, we have a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) process in place to identify students who need learning assistance beyond tier 1 instructional strategies. We partner with the parents to implement tier 2 strategies and interventions to support struggling students while letting students know that they are expected to continue working hard towards their learning goals.

Teachers use a student-centered and data-driven approach to ensure the success of every student through the MTSS process. Many of these students are placed in math or ELA literacy as a connections course. The literacy teachers work closely with the content teachers to address students’ specific learning gaps. We believe that the time we have is precious and strive to make the most out of every instructional minute in order to maximize student success and achievement.

Teachers regularly engage students in higher order thinking and solicit a variety of student responses during instruction. For example, in mathematics students complete a short, online assessment each day that includes questions related to previously taught standards. Teachers are then able to meter the degree of retention and adjust future lessons accordingly. Finally, students complete a brief assessment at the

beginning of each unit that helps the teacher determine if the prior knowledge required to be successful is present. If deficiencies are observed, lessons are adjusted to ensure previous standards are not only represented more often but also revisited alongside current standards.

Common unit assessments, created jointly by content teachers, are administered regularly. Item analyses are conducted, and deficiencies are identified. JMS administers the STAR reading and math (Renaissance) assessments twice annually. Deep data dives are our top priority after testing. Multiple reports are generated and carefully scrutinized to determine not only strengths and weaknesses per domain but also which individual standards need greater attention. Teachers also reconcile results with what standards have been taught with respect to the testing dates. Identified gaps in required knowledge are corrected in multiple ways including altering future lessons to place greater emphasis on deficient standards, before and after school tutoring, online self-study, and small group remediation.

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

The Career, Technical, and Agriculture Education (CTAE) staff and administration at JMS work with JHS and a variety of partners to ensure it creates a seamless path for students to transition into postsecondary opportunities. CTAE instructors conduct interviews with alumni in their respective programs to determine which skills are most beneficial and refine instructional practices related to the specific skills outlined in each course. All CTAE staff recruits industry partners that help define industry standards that need to be taught at the secondary level to ensure students are ready for post-secondary careers and education. This advisory committee has been involved in our program for many years and utilizes data from YouScience, enrollment, and industry to develop recommendations for the CTAE department. The addition of the engineering, information technology, and audio-video communication pathways at JMS and JHS were propelled by the advisory committee members. The CTAE Department provides information regarding staff needs, program updates, and pathways at the Jefferson City Board of Education Fall and Spring Retreats.

In JCS, 58% of students earn credentials of value. Currently, we have several programs that offer credentials of value: healthcare science, audio-video, information technology, business, and STEM clusters. In addition, approximately 10% of the school's population is in meaningful work-based learning settings that are directly linked to the student's post-secondary plans. The students in work-based learning represent ten pathways and five clusters.

The schools and board of education have put forth great effort to be sure that the CTAE programs at JMS and JHS align. With the addition of the programs mentioned above, all programs will have representation at the JMS and JHS except for one that does not currently have a middle school curriculum available.

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

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

JMS offers over ten connections courses in a variety of subject areas. In 6th grade, our exploratory model allows students to experience up to eight different connections courses in 36 weeks: Art, Band, Chorus, Music Appreciation, Drama, Health, Physical Education, Weight Training, Emerging Technologies,

Agriculture, Problem Solving, and Business and Technology. Each spring seventh and eighth grade students are provided the opportunity to select their four connection courses. We offer five year-long connections courses: Art, Band, Chorus, Intro to Business Education, and Basic Agriculture.

In our visual arts classes, students view, discuss, and analyze artwork by Vincent Van Gogh, Georgia O’Keeffe, Andy Warhol, Fridah Kahlo, Cindy Sherman, and many others. Students recognize and appreciate that brainstorming, research, planning, revision, and final product are all components of the creative process. By applying these actions and methods, our students create original and meaningful works of art. Students learn to use contemporary art tools PixlrE and Photopea to create artwork. Photo-editing also prepares students for future careers such as graphic design and marketing. JMS shares all student artwork with teachers, parents, and community members via Artsonia, the world’s largest online collection of student artwork.

In response to the increased emission of aerosols in Band and Chorus classes, JMS operates four air purifiers that are proven to collect 99.7% of airborne particles. Students are highly encouraged to wear masks while singing, and our chorus teacher wears a mask and face shield during singing instruction. We also invested in a sound amplifier to allow our performing arts students to effectively hear instruction. To help ensure social distancing and safety, Chorus classes utilize our Outdoor Classroom for lessons and rehearsals. Band students place stockings over the ends of instruments to help mitigate the spread of aerosols while playing. Our band room has been arranged in a socially distanced checkerboard instead of the traditional concert arch. Both programs used technology to host virtual concerts this year. Our Band Director also hosted our first outdoor Concert Under the Lights to allow for a more safe, socially distanced environment.

Our PE, Health, and Weight Training courses focus on the mental, physical, and nutritional well-being of students. Mitigation strategies are utilized in the gym and weight room to reduce points of contact. To avoid touching weights and other equipment, plyometric workouts were used for much of the year. We offered students use of an oversized storage closet and an unused locker room to limit the number of students using the traditional locker rooms.

Our engineering and robotics classes consistently employ the scientific method and ensure lessons reflect project-based, student-centered learning. This year, supply kits were used to help reduce the need to share materials. We asked our parents and community members to donate consumable items. Students often worked in the same groups or teams to reduce points of contact in these courses.

3. Academic Supports:

JMS utilizes a systematic problem-solving process that includes an MTSS approach to address the needs of every student. Data is used throughout the year to drive instruction, intervention, and acceleration. The core of MTSS at JMS uses a model to ensure practices, programs, and policies are aligned on classroom, school and district levels. A system predicated on universal screening and progress monitoring data, communication, and collaboration between general education and special education has been developed to address tier 1 to specialized instruction. Defined parameters for how students in need of support have been identified and shared with staff as well as a preset progress monitoring calendar with detailed definitions of interventions and progress monitoring tools. WIDA Can Do descriptors and individual ACCESS scores are used to drive instruction and intervention for students served through ESOL.

The school master schedule is created using multiple data pieces, and administrators take time to place students in learning environments where their specific needs will be met. Teachers are provided shared planning time where they create shared assessments which are differentiated to meet the needs of diverse learners. Social studies and science teachers utilize Lexile scores to provide differentiated materials to students. Teachers use results of formative and summative assessments to drive instruction. General education teachers plan with special education teachers to modify assessments and instruction. Tier 1 support throughout the school is provided to teachers

through instructionally driven professional learning and the use of research based curriculum and strategies. Walk throughs and observations with timely feedback is provided to all teachers. Administration focuses on establishing equitable practices between special education teachers and their general education co-teachers. Gifted certified teachers serve students in their academic and connection classes. Ninety-two percent of our core academic teachers are gifted certified.

Research based user friendly interventions selected using the National Center on Intensive Intervention for behavior, academics, and speech are provided during the school day. Progress monitoring tools tied to interventions and instructional strategies are utilized for students receiving services through ESOL, special education, and tiered interventions. At JMS, almost all academic interventions are provided in a math or ELA Literacy class. Using the MTSS process, students are placed in these classes according to their specific needs. Our students served through ESOL work with an ESOL certified teacher during this time. Students who require progress monitored tier 2 and tier 3 academic interventions receive interventions during this time as well. Students are progress monitored according to their level of intervention and their literacy teacher is part of the JMS MTSS data team who meets quarterly to review progress monitoring data, interventions, and grade level data. Students who may not fall in the bottom 25th percentile of academic concerns but still need an intervention receive support with their hallway teacher. Repeated Reading and Guided Reading are two examples of interventions used with students who need practice with fluency, comprehension, and speaking. We also use Read 180 and through vertical alignment with the elementary school have been able to see growth in student Lexile scores thus eliminating the need for System 44 seats in grades 6-8.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

JMS provides students with unparalleled support in an environment that consistently centers on inspiration, motivation, and social/emotional growth. During remote learning in the spring of 2020, all students continued to engage in morning lessons that emphasized the importance of exceptional integrity, distinguished character, and honorable service to our local community. Each grade-level develops daily lessons that specifically targets student and family needs.

A major contributor to our recent success has been providing teachers with the support necessary to successfully offer remote instruction and ensure students are engaged, master the state standards, and feel a sense of success. We provide our students numerous teacher-created instruction videos, formative assessments using a wide variety of interactive applications, and modified summative assessments to ensure continued mastery.

In the spring of 2020, we utilized a schedule whereby each student had the opportunity to engage with all content and connection teachers each day via a school issued Chromebook in Google Classroom. Our teachers offered daily encouragement to students by being both honest and transparent. Our students understood that although our current situation may not be ideal, the adults at JMS were ready and willing to help in any way possible. Administration regularly visited teachers' online forums to offer support and encouragement. Our ELA department thoughtfully created handwritten postcards that were sent to each student: messages of inspiration, encouragement, and appreciation reminded our students that not even a global pandemic can impede Jefferson's expectation of instructional excellence and distinguished achievement. Teachers encouraged students to invite their parents to engage with us online. We made sure parents were aware that while their child was at home, our unmatched expectations and willingness to go above and beyond to ensure their child received the best educational experience did not change.

We also provided local hotspots to students and families who did not have access to the internet. In doing so, every enrolled student had the opportunity to learn. Further, as a result of daily communication, we identified students who were at risk of falling behind. Through a shared document, teachers provided daily updates on students who were not submitting work or submitting work that reflected negligible effort. If communication proved ineffective, administrators and counselors made home visits to our families. During these visits, we acknowledged the hardships that may exist, and we offered detailed plans of action that would likely result in the student achieving success during this challenging time. Finally, our staff provided students in need with food and water to help ensure they were alert and ready to learn.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

JMS engages with our community members on a consistent basis for student success and school improvement. The community is tightly connected, and there is always someone willing to contribute when there is a need. For instance, a parent in the community donates "Dragon Snacks" each month for the counselors and nurse to give to students as needed. At the beginning of the school year, another parent heard that JMS needed bottled waters to keep students from drinking out of the water fountains and provided 48 cases so that each classroom could have water on hand for students. JMS also partners with Food 2 Kids/Food Bank of Northeast Georgia who provide "backpack bags" to take home on weekends for students who are food insecure. During the holiday season, Jackson County Family Connection gives families, businesses, churches, and organizations the opportunity to sponsor a JMS family for holiday assistance. This ensures that families in need at JMS are supported during the holiday season and it brings the community together. Partners in Education, comprised of local businesses, have been supportive by providing hand warmers, bottled water, and hand sanitizers for the 2021 school year.

JMS participates in the Legacy Youth Mentoring program which pairs positive role models with students who need additional support. Trained mentors that are members of our community meet with the student once a week during lunch. The mentor begins meeting with the student during their primary years and

follows them throughout high school.

The JMS CARE Team consists of administrators, counselors, and a school social worker. Meetings take place once a month to discuss students who may need further assistance academically, socially, or emotionally. The purpose of the meeting is to make an action plan to support those students and families.

JMS continues to engage parents in participation through communication. Parent conferences are conducted virtually through Google Meet and if virtual meetings are not possible, meeting in-person requires a mask and socially distancing. Parents are always willing to help when needed whether it is being involved by volunteering to substitute teach, donating items, or simply asking, “What can I do to help?” Stakeholder involvement is an essential component of our success as a school.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

A focus in our school is to make sure that teachers know we are listening to their concerns and making changes that will help them and our students. For example, a teacher came to the assistant principal with a suggestion to help traffic in the morning. The assistant principal told her we would try it the next morning to see if it would help. It did help, and the change has been in place ever since. Each grade level hosts weekly grade level meetings where teachers check in on each other and administrators attend to hear concerns and celebrate wins. Validating teachers' expertise is very important in our school.

Teachers in our school love wearing jeans with spirit wear on Fridays. It's something they look forward to each week. JMS administration has given more additional “jeans” days this year at times when they sensed an increase in staff stress levels. Teachers voiced concerns about how the video announcements took up too much time and asked the principal to do the announcements over the intercom. The principal listened and now does a song of the day, names birthdays, the lunch menu and the “National Day of _____”. It has become something the students and teachers look forward to listening to each day.

Professional learning (PL) in years past was delivered on Mondays during common planning periods. An example of PL sessions included data digs into SLDS, Georgia's statewide student information system, which empowered teachers to know and understand their students from a historical perspective. Professional learning this year has been virtual and focused on ways to support teaching through Google Classroom. Virtual PL has been an efficient way to protect teachers' planning while providing time to respond to communication from absent students.

JMS gives additional support to teachers by providing instruction to our yearlong virtual students through a third party online platform, Edgenuity. One teacher serves as the liaison between virtual students and Edgenuity teachers. Even though the number of students enrolled in virtual school has been small, this has helped teachers maintain focus on face-to-face instruction.

4. School Leadership:

The administrative team consists of the principal, a full time assistant principal, a halftime assistant principal, and two school counselors. The school leadership team includes veteran teachers from each grade-level and content area. Administrative roles have also changed to extend beyond traditional duties and responsibilities. The lens through which all decisions are made is, “What is best for students?” This year has presented non-traditional instructional challenges that administrators and school leaders have had to address through this lens to guide what is essential.

Administrators and school leaders reflected on instructional practices and assessments. They decided to eliminate an end of the year data point because the data was not being used to inform instruction. Administrators and school leaders decided to move a progress monitoring assessment from the end of the year to early February. This allowed teachers plenty of time to dig into the data in their data teams and make instructional adjustments before the end of the year.

Teachers recognized some students were reading below grade level in 6th grade and asked for more licenses

in a research based reading program. Following their best practice for students approach, school administrators secured additional funding for the licenses. The principal tasked the assistant principal with implementing a way to reduce points of contact during arrival and dismissal times. The principal's goal was to keep students in their regular schedules designed to meet their academic needs while following CDC guidelines and ultimately keeping the staff and students safe.

The assistant principal worked with the digital learning specialist to create a new dismissal program using a cell phone application and QR codes. In addition, our administration changed morning arrival to have students report directly to homeroom instead of the gym like in previous years. This required communicating with our parents and moving our arrival time back 20 minutes.

When JMS began quarantining more students, school administrators looked at specific classroom desk arrangements and seating charts as another mitigation strategy. The question was, "How can we spread out desks as much as possible to eliminate unnecessary quarantines?" The assistant principal and school nurse went to every classroom and arranged every desk in a manner that would eliminate unnecessary close contacts. CDC guidelines were followed to the extent possible at all times. Teachers were asked to move bookshelves and eliminate any soft seating taking up space.

Through the lens of what is best for students, school leaders never lost focus this year on keeping our school operating as close to normal as possible while ensuring our school was clean and safe.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

Master schedules are created each year by a collaborative team of administrators, teachers, and counselors. During this process each class is leveled to balance gender, ethnicity and learning abilities to ensure equity in each classroom.

In 2018-2019, our board of education saw a need for additional support and training regarding social and emotional (SEL) awareness competencies to address needs within our schools. As a result, JMS started using the Rachel's Challenge SEL program. These lessons are taught during homeroom and focus on teaching kindness to all and compassion towards others by building empathy. Students are tasked with applying what they have learned. For example, students were challenged to leave kind words on a sticky note to someone they didn't know well or to pick up five pieces of trash found throughout the day. In the last three years we have used Seven Mindsets and Second Steps to supplement our SEL lessons, and students have become more aware and empathetic towards others.

The school counselors play a large part in our SEL program implementation, and in response to a school enrollment of 950 and to meet the diverse needs, JMS hired a second counselor in 2019-2020. School counselors act as mediators between students going through difficult situations. The counselors introduce themselves to each class at the beginning of the year, and students have learned to trust the cultivated relationships. The counselors act as a liaison between outside agencies and families in need of support.

Our ESOL coordinator facilitates training throughout the year to help staff understand the unique learning obstacles that English as a second language learners face. During this training, scholarly journal articles are provided to address the needs of ESOL learners. Staff is given strategies to scaffold instruction and grading predicated on the WIDA Can Do Standards.

Our social studies teachers take time to show CNN Student News. This 10 minute current event show covers national and world news. Classes are asked to journal their thoughts about the news stories and the class then discusses the stories with facilitation from the teacher.

The library media specialist is working with Follett book distributors to implement a diversity analysis tool to analyze the media center collection. A diverse collection is important to reach readers of all backgrounds and to ensure cultural awareness. The principal has placed an emphasis on providing student access to a diverse range of authors like: Ibi Zoboi, Celia Perez, Veera Hiranandani, Franklin Macon.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

This year has been rife with challenges across our nation. The state of Georgia closed schools on March 16, 2020 for the remainder of the school year. All school systems were forced to pivot overnight to remote/virtual learning. JCS provided a Chromebook for all students in grades K-12 and also provided weekly learning packets to grades K-2. We were well positioned to make this transition because of the foresight of our Board of Education to ensure we had enough devices for each student. In addition, the vast majority of our staff received extensive Google apps for education training during the FY 19 school year.

In June of 2020, JCS polled stakeholders about the level of comfort felt regarding a face-to-face learning environment vs. a virtual/hybrid learning environment. The overwhelming majority wanted our students to engage in face-to-face learning. While stakeholders were appreciative of the work done by teachers during remote learning in the spring of 2020, most felt students would be more successful in a face-to-face environment.

We believe that our single best instructional practice is providing face-to-face instruction through harnessing the expertise of our teachers. Having reflected on instructional practices during remote learning, our teachers reported that they were proud of their lessons as well as their students' achievement and engagement; however, remote learning did not and could not replace the quality of face-to-face instruction. JMS teachers base their instructional practices on the nuances that happen within a face-to-face instructional environment. Teachers reported multiple roadblocks related to how a virtual environment hindered academic achievement and reduced meaningful collaboration. Their belief was that they were unable to: read the tone and mood of the classroom, briefly chat with a colleague between classes, offer a quick formative assessment, differentiate to a variety of students, adjust course at any given time, and immediately group students to accomplish a vital learning objective.

Participation in a face-to-face environment is where many children learn the norms, habits, customs, and values necessary for participation in our society. In a face-to-face learning environment students receive immediate feedback and are able to utilize each other's academic strengths to bolster their understanding of concepts. Teachers have leveraged technology in ways to increase engagement and achievement without relying solely on technology to deliver content. Teachers have found the right balance within our face-to-face classrooms to maximize class time and empower students to become self-directed learners.