

***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. Brenda Vierra-Chun  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name Major Sheldon Wheeler Middle School  
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 2 Wheeler Army Airfield  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Wahiawa State HI Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 96786-4199

County Honolulu County

Telephone (808) 622-6525 Fax (808) 622-6529

Web site/URL http://www.wheelm.k12.hi.us/ E-mail Brenda.Vierra-Chun@k12.hi.us

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

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

Name of Superintendent\* Keith Hayashi E-mail Keith.Hayashi@k12.hi.us  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Hawaii Department Of Education Tel. (808) 784-6200

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 Catherine Payne  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

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

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

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

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

## **PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION**

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

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

## PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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

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

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 30 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 7 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 6 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 43 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	118	104	222
7	126	130	256
8	116	111	227
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	360	345	705

\*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):
- 1 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 4 % Asian
  - 17 % Black or African American
  - 28 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 6 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 33 % White
  - 11 % 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: 28%

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

WMS has a high student transiency rate due to short-term military duty assignments. Only 30% of students that start in the 6th grade will complete their 8th grade year at WMS. Additionally, over 200 students enroll or exit WMS after the school year has begun.

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	73
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	149
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	222
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	780
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.28
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	28

6. Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):  
Japanese, Marshallese, Samoan, Spanish, Tagalog, Taiwanese

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 42 %  
 Total number students who qualify: 295

8. Students receiving special education services: 10 %  
70 Total number of students served

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional conditions. All students receiving special education services should be reflected in the table below. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <u>12</u> Autism                 | <u>1</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>16</u> Other Health Impaired                |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>27</u> Specific Learning Disability         |
| <u>5</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>8</u> Speech or Language Impairment         |
| <u>1</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: 18
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	4
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	40
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	6
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	5
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	3

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 14:1

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	95%	95%	95%	95%	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.

Our mission is to ensure success for every student. We empower young citizens to be resilient, respectful, and prepared contributors of a global 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.

The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 presented numerous challenges for our Wheeler Middle School (WMS) community but our students and teachers found ways to thrive. WMS’s well-established systems of support continued uninterrupted and even flourished during both distance and virtual learning environments. Within two weeks of our community’s complete shutdown in March 2020, WMS was a fully operational distance learning school. Our teachers were teaching virtually and our students were adhering to their routine bell schedules. Vulnerable students were accounted for and supported appropriately. Our teachers maintained their weekly data team and student support meetings to ensure every student continued to receive rigorous academic instruction as well as social and emotional support. Teachers designed and delivered professional development opportunities on effective virtual teaching and learning strategies for their colleagues. Additionally, our data tracking systems allowed WMS to quickly and systematically operationalize a face-to-face summer school program for vulnerable students. With the start of the 2020-2021 school year, WMS designed a hybrid schedule with synchronous and asynchronous components and a blend of small group virtual and in-person learning options. Our school created three separate bell schedules, one for each grade level, to maximize instruction time. Within each grade level, our teams developed individual student learning plans. Although COVID-19 required WMS to pivot many times, our systems of support remained responsive resulting in our students continued growth and achievement.

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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Situated near the piko (center) of Oahu between the Wai‘anae and Ko‘olau mountain ranges, Wheeler Middle School (WMS) is located in the town of Wahiawa on Wheeler Army Airfield. Wheeler Army Airfield comprises 1,389 acres of land adjacent to Schofield Barracks and is home to the Hawaii Air National Guard, the Hawaii Army National Guard, and the Army's 25th Infantry Divisions' Combat Aviation Brigade. WMS is proud of its military legacy and cultural heritage. The place of Wahiawa is deeply connected to the ali‘i of the island; it is the sacred place where ancient Hawaiian rulers were birthed and raised. Today, WMS continues the legacy of cultivating leadership, serving as a place of learning for our students who are preparing to become the next generation of global and community leaders.

Each day we hold fast to our mission at WMS to ensure success for every student. A cornerstone of our students' success is the belief our school functions as an organic and living system. Our staff and support systems at WMS are dynamic, adaptive, and constantly evolving to best leverage the strengths of our school and meet the developing needs of our students. WMS strives to close achievement gaps by continuously searching for effective tools and resources that allow teachers to easily identify gaps in student learning and develop strategies to address individual student needs. Our school believes we have the responsibility and power to make a difference in the lives of all students and that we can successfully support learners of all abilities, experiences, and backgrounds.

At WMS, we believe the enduring excellence and success of our students is the result of the ongoing learning of our instructional leaders, our teachers. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are the wheelhouse of collaborative teacher inquiry, organizational learning, and innovation. Our school schedule is structured so teachers meet twice a week with their grade-level content area colleagues to engage in discussions around curriculum, instruction, and assessment planning, constantly evaluating their impact on student learning and achievement. Student performance and growth is tracked meticulously via multiple data sources and the intentional design of our schedule gives our faculty and staff the time to respond immediately to the changing needs of our students. Our teachers participate in transparent data conversations and reflections, holding themselves and each other accountable for every student's academic journey. Academic coaches facilitate data team meetings leading teachers and staff through the process of analyzing student work and assessment data to identify performance trends and develop timely and appropriate interventions. Our curricula and support resources are constantly evolving signifying we are never complacent and we are committed to providing every student an individualized and responsive learning experience. WMS teachers regularly model the culture of collaborative inquiry, lifelong learning, and excellence that they seek to inspire each day in their students.

As a military-impacted school, a hallmark of WMS is the resilience and growth mindset of our entire school community. Our students, families, and teachers at WMS are highly transient. Each year, over 200 students enroll in or exit WMS and only 30% of our students will remain all three years at WMS. Teacher vacancies continue to increase at WMS, as teacher shortages in Hawaii are now commonplace. Refusing to be defeated by these circumstances, WMS faces challenges with an asset-based mindset and constantly seeks creative ways to adapt. For close to a decade, WMS has partnered with Teach for America and military spouse groups to recruit highly effective teachers in order to fill its teaching vacancies. Although our teachers are highly transient and novel to the teacher profession, WMS has designed systems of support to consistently ensure high quality teaching and learning.

Because the majority of our students come from different corners of the world and experience constant transitions and military deployment, our students are often compared to the seeds of the dandelion, which are easily scattered with the wind, blown from place to place, but able to grow where ever they land. Knowing this about our students and families, WMS puts structures in place that prioritize the social-emotional well-being of our students to create an environment where all students can not just belong, but thrive. To foster strong relationships between students and our teachers, every student is placed in a smaller learning community led by a two-teacher team for core subject areas. The two-teacher teams promote high levels of teacher accountability and investment in individual student learning outcomes. Additionally, the small number of students in each team means every classroom can operate like a family, or in Hawaii we



say, “ohana.” This feeling of being a part of an ohana translates into our students feeling connected to their teachers, peers, and school community.

WMS also supports the social and emotional needs of our student population through weekly CARE meetings. Each of our students is connected to a multi-level student support team, which ensures our students have many champions to cheer them on and hold them accountable. Grade level administrators, student support advisors, and two-man teacher teams meet weekly to collaborate around individual students’ social, emotional, and behavioral needs. These student support teams generate individual action plans to increase students’ social and emotional competencies and link students to counseling and support groups on campus. Each student support team monitors the effectiveness of the interventions and adjusts supports regularly.

WMS’s faculty and staff are dedicated to meeting the diverse needs of adolescent learners through the implementation of a rigorous standards-based curriculum, high quality instruction, and a deliberate focus on supporting and growing the whole child. WMS is student centered at its core and this is evident in the way we organize our personnel, time, and resources. The faculty and staff design student experiences that support the attainment of academic goals, develop social emotional skills, and foster a strengthened sense of belonging to their school community. Though our school’s student and teacher population is transient, WMS students consistently yield above-average growth scores and our math, science, and language arts proficiency scores are higher than the state average. Our students leave WMS prepared for high school, college, and career pathways.

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

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

To ensure all of our students are prepared for success in the 21st century, Wheeler Middle School’s core curriculum is intentionally crafted to balance rigor, inquiry, and innovation. Each year, the curriculum changes in a continuous improvement cycle based on student learning results and evolves based on evidence-based resources, research, and teacher expertise. Our staff is passionate about their own learning and collaborating around best practices to meet the unique needs of every student. In addition to using frequent assessment and data cycles to ensure all students develop core skills and concepts, teachers regularly refresh the curriculum by incorporating current and relevant issues, problems, and phenomena to enhance student ownership of learning and prepare students to be global contributors.

WMS mobilized quickly to be fully operational for distance learning within the first two weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown. Teachers rapidly formatted curricula for digital platforms—such as Google Classroom, Nearpod, Go Formative, and Inner Orbit—and students were able to attend their virtual classes on a daily basis. Teachers continued to collaborate throughout the summer revising units of study to ensure our students would continue to receive quality instruction within a new hybrid-learning approach created for the upcoming school year. Our staff’s response to the shutdown demonstrates that WMS is a community of learners that exemplifies a growth mindset at all levels. Despite the evolving demands placed on schools during this pandemic, WMS continues to prioritize our students’ academic growth and wellbeing.

Wheeler Middle School’s language arts curriculum acknowledges the vital role foundational literacy skills play in students’ success, particularly for vulnerable learners. Emphasizing a different theme each quarter, teachers design interdisciplinary units of study that develop core literacy skills using resources such as Engage NY, iReady, CommonLit, and NewsELA. All units of study involve close reading strategies for complex texts and place an emphasis on developing the ability to listen, read, and communicate clearly and effectively. With the award of a federal literacy grant in 2020, teachers began revising their curricula and instructional practices to incorporate explicit instruction principles. Using evidence-based approaches, our curriculum is constantly being refined with the aim of narrowing the achievement gap and ensuring all of our students have the literary foundation and confidence to succeed in an increasingly global and information-rich world.

WMS’s mathematics curriculum emphasizes growth mindsets, mastery and fluency, and the application of mathematics to real-world scenarios. Teachers design units of study using a variety of resources—Engage NY, iReady, Mathalicious, Maneuvering the Middle, and YouCubed. In the classroom, teachers vary their instruction approach to provide students multiple entry points to learning. For example, students engage in mathematical discourse to build conceptual understanding and connect mathematical learning to the real world. With the aim of fostering mathematical proficiency and resilience, teachers consistently ask high-order questions, implement daily checks for understanding, monitor student growth—via iReady diagnostics and unit assessments—and discuss interventions weekly in their PLCs. WMS also offers a variety of levels of mathematics courses in order to best meet the needs of all students: Math 6-8, Pre-Algebra, Algebra I, and Geometry. In the last five school years, over 50% of students exit WMS with at least one high school math credit.

Consistent with the framework of the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), WMS’s science curriculum recognizes students learn best by investigating the natural world through experiences that reflect the authentic practices of science. At WMS, every grade level explores a mixture of content from all three domains: physical, life, and earth science. Using resources such as OpenSciEd, Discovery Ed, and SCALE, teachers prepare science units and lessons beginning with an anchoring phenomenon of real-life context focused on a driving question or a problem that requires a solution. Students are guided through hands-on activities that encourage inquiry and discovery through the three dimensions of science. Teachers continue to innovate this year by integrating science and social studies content into a COVID-19 Pandemic unit, incorporating local place-based phenomena, and piloting the Inner Orbit assessment program to ensure their curriculum and instruction are well-aligned to the rigor of statewide assessments.

In social studies, WMS has embraced the philosophy of the C3 Framework, which emphasizes meaningful inquiry-based learning experiences and complements our vision at WMS to empower young citizens to contribute to a global community. Lessons have moved away from copying notes, listening to lectures, and answering recall comprehension questions to emphasizing inquiry and deep understanding about social, historical, economical, and contemporary civic issues. Units initiate new learning with essential questions to evoke curiosity and lead to further questioning. After grappling with the supporting and compelling questions, studying disciplinary concepts, and evaluating a variety of sources, students participate in civic engagement projects—such as walk-a-thons to raise money and awareness for water issues in African nations and beach clean ups—to purposefully apply their learning in innovative ways to make a positive impact on their community, locally and globally.

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

In addition to a rigorous and relevant core curricula, Wheeler Middle School students have the opportunity to participate in a number of courses designed to prepare them for high school, college, and/or future careers. WMS offers dual middle and high school math credits in algebra and geometry as well as high school credit for foreign languages. Many of our students choose to participate in our Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) class, which focuses on preparing students to be successful with the rigor of college coursework. Our student government team leads community service efforts, manages our school’s social media accounts, and represents student voices on our monthly school community board meetings. All students at WMS are provided multiple opportunities to explore careers through college and career fairs, field trips, activities with our military partners, and guest speaker events.

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

**2. Other Curriculum Areas:**

Wheeler Middle School offers a multitude of exploratory elective and wheel courses. These courses provide students with the opportunity to engage in real world application of skills and knowledge. Our goal is to expose our students to as many exploratory opportunities as possible; therefore, every student at WMS enrolls in two semester long elective courses and four quarter long wheel courses per year. Courses such as family and consumer science, technology, leadership, physical education, band, AVID, robotics, industrial arts, visual arts, media class, video production, newswriting, and animation are designed to introduce students to college/career pathways. The intent and design of many of our elective/wheel courses is to align with the taking informed action of the C3 Framework and the inquiry and investigation pieces of the NGSS.

Each year, approximately half the student population participates in after school enrichment and/or tutoring classes. WMS has secured a number of grants to ensure these after-school programs have the necessary supplies and resources to run throughout the school year and provides students with free, nutritious snacks. Our students participate in sports such as volleyball, basketball, soccer, and track and field. We also have a cheerleading club that supports all sports teams. Teachers host student interest groups such as theater, Dungeons and Dragons, dance, hula, and ukulele. During after-school tutoring, some students receive academic support because their teachers have identified skill gaps, while other students simply choose to complete their homework in a quiet space with teachers available to provide assistance.

In addition to offering a variety of courses that prepare our students for college and career pathways, WMS also focuses on developing the whole child. Visible throughout WMS’s academic and financial plan is the understanding that students’ wellbeing and health increase their readiness to learn. Three years ago, WMS stakeholders began collaborating around a theory of action to improve students’ social and emotional skills. The theory of action included the adoption of a social emotional learning (SEL) curriculum. Second Step was selected and piloted as the school’s SEL curriculum and Panorama SEL student surveys were administered three times a year. In forthcoming years, WMS teachers have branched beyond using just one SEL curriculum and have started to use a collection of evidence based SEL curricula and resources provided by Panorama to address our students’ social and emotional well being.

The Panorama student SEL surveys have provided insight into the strengths and challenges our school faces in supporting our students' social and emotional well being. In the same way we approach academic data, our student support teams analyze SEL data to inform both school level practices and create individual action plans for struggling students. A consistent strength revealed by the Panorama surveys is the positive perception our students have on their relationships with their teachers. Within three years, this metric has increased by 14% with 95% of our students reporting respectful and caring relationships with their teachers. Conversely, our students consistently score themselves low in the areas of emotional regulation and sense of belonging. This data is shared with all stakeholders in our school community members so we can collaborate on creating systems of support to increase our students' perceptions around safety and overall school climate. The efforts of the WMS community have yielded results. The school's schoolwide RESPECT campaign was created in response to this data. WMS's efforts to clearly identify behavior expectations and build in the concept of RESPECT into every aspect of campus life have resulted in dramatic increases in our students' perceptions of school safety and climate. Over three years, WMS's school safety metric has risen 26% with 76% of our students report feeling safe and respected at school. Student perceptions are supported by quantitative data as well as evidenced by the sharp decline in suspensions and disciplinary incidents over the last three school years.

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

Wheeler Middle School is relentless about creating individualized and responsive support plans based on concrete student evidence. WMS utilizes iReady, a Common Core aligned platform, to assist with the implementation of diagnostic assessments and identifying student readiness. These diagnostic assessments are administered to students three times a year as part of the school's comprehensive assessment system. WMS also has schoolwide data trackers to house both short and long term student data. Teachers convene twice a week to analyze data trends to better understand their students' abilities, the content students did and did not successfully engage with, and how to best teach content and skills. Collaborative data analysis is executed across all core subjects and has resulted in greater transparency between teachers and greater efficiency in processing decisions that impact student learning. Teaching teams revisit their teaching strategies and plan corrective instruction, interventions, and revise current and future units of study. By analyzing data at multiple levels - individual student, classroom, grade level, and schoolwide - our team has an accurate pulse on student achievement at all times allowing us to adjust our systems of support as needed.

Students performing below grade level are enrolled in our response to intervention (RTI) program. This RTI program is fluid and responsive with students entering and exiting the support program one quarter at a time. A student is able to receive math and/or language arts support while enrolled in the RTI program and the team of RTI teachers work directly with the student's core teachers to design interventions to target skill deficits. Majority of the resources used in our RTI program come from the iReady teacher toolkit as these resources are easily modified and heavily scaffold.

Students with individualized education plans benefit from the same range of multi-tiered supports as all other WMS students. Majority of WMS's special education population receive instruction in an inclusion setting where they learn alongside their general education peers for the entire school day. Our teachers execute a co-teaching model with no distinction between general education and special education teachers, lead teacher or support teacher. All teachers support all students. We believe supports are provided based on individual need and skill by skill. Therefore, our special education students are also enrolled into our RTI program based on identified skill deficits but only remain in the program for as long as they require the targeted skills support.

WMS employs an English Language Learner (ELL) coordinator who is responsible for tracking and monitoring the progress of our ELL students. The ELL coordinator ensures all ELLs

performing below grade level are enrolled in our RTI program. The ELL coordinator delivers intervention support to all ELLs enrolled in RTI math and language arts classes. The ELL coordinator also meets regularly with core teachers to ensure appropriate interventions and strategies are being implemented across all classes and settings.

WMS's data tracking systems allow teachers to timely and precisely identify the areas in which students excel and the areas in which students struggle. For students who demonstrate mastery of grade level content standards, teachers meet with students and families to design extension activities and enrichment opportunities. Teachers collaborate with one another during their PLC meetings to design appropriate learning experiences for students who are excelling.

Approximately 97% of WMS students come from military impacted families. Our students move every two to three years and these frequent transitions pose unique challenges for our military families. WMS has worked tirelessly with our military partners to design behavioral, social, and emotional supports for our students and their families. The Tripler Army Medical Center houses a full team of psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers on our campus to provide mental health services to our students and their families. The Adolescent Substance Abuse Counselor (ASAC) provides counseling support services and helps to identify, prevent, and/or treat students who have alcohol and/or drug use challenges. The ASAC also provides group counseling, leads informational sessions for both parents and students, and conducts peer awareness programs throughout the year. WMS also has a full time Military and Family Life Consultant (MFLC). Our MFLC provides short-term, non-clinical counseling support for a range of issues including: relationships, crisis intervention, stress management, grief, occupational, and other individual and family challenges.

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

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

We believe that motivating our students, fostering their sense of belonging, and providing them with a fun and safe environment is essential to their success. Wheeler Middle School prioritizes middle school components like two-teacher teams to foster relationships and connections between teachers, students, and families. Additionally, every student belongs to an ohana of administrators, teachers, and counselors who monitor their academic growth and social and emotional health. Our advisory program serves as a home base for students where they connect with their teachers and peers on topics unrelated to academics. During advisory time, teachers and students dialogue about adolescent challenges. Teachers utilize resources from evidence based SEL curricula to ensure these conversations are facilitated with empathy and respect.

Paramount to keeping students engaged and motivated, is our school’s shared belief that respectful relationships and collaboration are at the core of our daily work. Our students’ voices matter and our teachers design routines and instruction based on student input and feedback. Our staff celebrates our students’ unique and diverse military backgrounds and this is evident in the lessons teachers create. A common goal at WMS is to be able to create both rigorous and relevant units of study which will push our students to apply what they have learned to situations beyond school. At the conclusion of each unit, our teachers survey students to obtain feedback on what aspects of the unit resonated with them and which aspects of the unit were either too difficult or where they struggled to find relevance. Teachers actively seeking our students’ feedback and using that feedback to craft future units of study demonstrates our teachers' belief that the learning process is a partnership. WMS’s success with student engagement is the result of a combination of strategies aimed at fostering respectful relationships, increasing our students' sense of belonging, and empowering them to be active collaborators in their learning journeys.

The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting distance learning scenarios challenged our efforts at maintaining high levels of student engagement. During school closures, teachers’ data trackers revealed a new subgroup of students who were not engaged in their learning. This subgroup of students performed at or above grade level prior to the pandemic but despite many efforts to engage with these students and their families, they did not demonstrate expected targets for academic growth. Our school employed a number of strategies to increase these students’ levels of engagement. We provided a number of interventions that included offering individual and/or group counseling, campus beautification and community service projects led by these students, and they also were invited to come to school to support their peers academically. All of these efforts resulted in this identified subgroup of students demonstrating increased levels of engagement and academic growth in the subsequent school year.

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

Wheeler Middle School’s vision is to empower young citizens to be resilient, respectful and prepared contributors of a global community. This work cannot be realized without intentional efforts to engage our families and community partners. Multiple forms of communication, partnerships with military and community members, and school sponsored events connected to literacy guarantee our students and families are connected to appropriate resources.

Teachers work diligently to build strong partnerships between home and school by utilizing varied methods of communication. Distance learning during the pandemic increased the need for effective and efficient communication. By leveraging many different types of digital communication strategies, we were able to create student support plans accounting for each family’s strengths and challenges during the pandemic. School, teacher, and parent websites and social media accounts provided our families with timely and relevant information. Social media, virtual meetings, and interactive curricula platforms, ensured both students and families were connected to necessary resources and support during the pandemic. Most of the strategies WMS used to connect with families during the pandemic are still being utilized as they have increased our ability to communicate effectively with our stakeholders.

WMS's literacy grant has also been an effective way to increase family and community engagement by creating opportunities for parents to become more involved in their child's education. The goal of the literacy grant is to promote the importance of reading via ongoing, school sponsored, parent and child literacy nights. The pandemic forced our school to create smaller literacy events, however, our parents have responded favorably citing they appreciate the creativity of each event. Our school hosted multiple virtual paint nights in which local artists read aloud stories about Hawaiian culture and then led the participants to create their own renditions of the stories through painting. Similar to a drive in movie experience, WMS also held drive in book readings. Families were able to read excerpts from multiple books and then select one they liked best to read together as a family. The school provided reading strategies and snacks to enhance the family reading experience.

Although WMS has long prioritized school and community partnerships, the COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the importance of working together during challenging times. Our Parent Community Networking Center (PCNC) was crucial in connecting families to a range of academic, social, and emotional supports offered by the school and the military community. The school's Parent Teacher Student Organization (PTSO) continued to support our school with fundraising events and social events aimed at bringing together families to support the school. WMS partners with multiple military units to complete numerous site improvement projects, provide valuable supports for school events, and mentoring opportunities. Timely and effective communication, school sponsored events to promote fun learning opportunities, and collaborative partnerships have resulted in strong connections between WMS and its families and community.

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

A responsive and intentionally designed professional development program is a cornerstone of Wheeler Middle School's continued success. We acknowledge the most influential factor on student learning is a caring and competent teacher. Similar to the school's approach to creating curriculum, instruction, and assessments, we design professional development opportunities in-house based on the school's current teaching and learning needs. WMS knows its teachers are generally young and transient but view these characteristics as assets. We focus on supporting a growth mindset in our teachers in the same way we cultivate this in our students. We celebrate the willing spirit of our teachers to take risks and try new approaches as this ensures we never become outdated in the pursuit of ensuring student growth and achievement.

The COVID-19 pandemic pushed our creativity around professional development. Distance learning presented many challenges for our teachers and we needed to design a system that would encourage teachers to experiment and then share effective instructional strategies with each other. We knew our teachers were attempting new teaching strategies and utilizing various digital learning platforms at rapid pace. By obtaining monies from several grants, WMS created an incentive based professional learning program called SpartanEDU. Teachers earned stipend credits for completing the following activities: observing a colleague teach a new strategy, hosting a 30 minute professional development session using a new digital learning strategy or platform, or sharing data and reflections based on student work produced as a result of implementing a new digital learning strategy or platform. Teams of teachers engaged in friendly competitions on who could earn the most credits from SpartanEDU. This innovative approach to professional development was a successful example of our school being innovative in unprecedented times.

Wheeler Middle School's professional development program is successful at ensuring student growth and success because it is intentionally designed, responsive, continuously evolving, and embedded daily into our teacher's workday. Student growth and achievement data is regularly analyzed to determine the effectiveness of our professional development strategies. Our professional development program also celebrates the skills, talents, and passions of our teachers. The collective efficacy of our staff is strong because our teachers enthusiastically support each other in taking risks, innovating, and working hard to guarantee their students' success.

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

Wheeler Middle School's leadership team is successful at recruiting competent, passionate, and hard working individuals to join our team. The most important work we do as an administration team is to hire teachers who share the belief that all students can and will succeed at WMS. Hiring highly effective and passionate people means we are able to focus majority of our energy on leading rather than managing. Because our team members are aligned with our school's student centered mission and vision, they require minimal management and are intrinsically motivated to do great work for students. We intentionally build each team member's capacity around their individual strengths and design systems rooted in shared leadership and collaboration. This type of leadership encourages commitment, inspires creativity, and creates a culture in which educators hold each other accountable and feel empowered to contribute authentically. By building the capacity of all team members, leadership opportunities exist at every level of the organization. This leadership approach has resulted in continuous student success as well as sustained leadership development. Over the last decade, WMS students have consistently outperformed their peers at both the district and state levels and yield above average growth in both language arts and math. Under the leadership of the school's current principal, two principals, eight vice principals, and three state education specialists began their careers at Wheeler Middle School.

An important role of school leadership is to ensure the school's academic and financial plan is executed with fidelity. The Academic Review Team (ART) is composed of administrators, academic coaches, student support advisors, a registrar, and a technology coordinator. The ART meets monthly and its primary mission is to ensure that the school's programs and operations outlined in the academic and financial plan are aligned to the Hawaii Board of Education policies and the Hawaii Department of Education strategic plan. Each member of the ART is responsible for presenting data around enabling activities in the academic plan. The ART reviews schoolwide data in order to analyze the degree of effectiveness of each enabling activity and when necessary, execute necessary changes or modifications.

Wheeler Middle School administrators worked collaboratively to keep the school safe and functioning during the COVID 19 pandemic. We remained student centered with every decision we made, policy we created, and system of support we established. While some schools were burdened by restrictive health and safety protocols and were exhausted by the number of times they pivoted plans, WMS embraced the opportunity to design learning environments where students were not just surviving, but thriving. While most schools adhered to A/B bell schedules that drastically reduced student instruction time, WMS designed a hybrid schedule with synchronous and asynchronous components, as well as a blend of small group virtual and in-person learning options. Our school ended up creating three separate bell schedules, one for each grade level. Within each grade level, each team developed individual student learning plans. We crafted these learning plans to ensure they reflected each student's academic ability, family circumstances, and readiness level to participate effectively in virtual learning environments. The vision of the school leadership team throughout the pandemic was to remove barriers to teaching and learning. We were steadfast in ensuring that each time we were asked to revise plans, the resulting policies, protocols, and systems were still focused on our students.

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

Wheeler Middle School is home to a diverse group of students and families. Given the transient nature of their parents' military careers, our students develop perseverance and resilience early in their lives but often struggle to connect to their community because they are there for just a short time. At WMS, we are driven to create programs and opportunities to strengthen our students' sense of belonging and connection to the culture of Hawaii. Our schoolwide focus on respect is the starting point for all cultural awareness conversations and we ensure equity by selecting curricula that honors and celebrates diversity.

Na Hopena A'o is the framework of outcomes that reflect the Hawaii Department of Education's values and beliefs in action. The Na Hopena A'o framework guides WMS's work to create learning environments rooted in Hawaiian values, language, culture, and history that support the development of the whole child. Our faculty and staff have attended multiple Hawaii place-based



field trips and engaged in traditional food preparation activities to deepen their connection to Hawaii and the aloha spirit. Our students lead WMS's Aloha Ambassador program, learn Hawaiian language phrases, practice total well being skills during health and advisory classes, and participate in advisory activities designed to increase their sense of aloha and strengthen their sense of belonging. Beginning this school year, WMS utilized funds from its literacy grant to host cultural literacy events aimed at connecting our military students and their families to Hawaiian culture through the literary analysis of Hawaiian myths and legends. These events were successful at advancing literacy skills, providing multi-language opportunities, and empowering families to participate in their child's education.

WMS recognizes we are supporting the growth and development of young adolescents in a world experiencing polarizing events and divisive philosophies. Our faculty and staff create opportunities for our students to explore controversial topics and current events with the tenets of respect and empathy framing these learning experiences. The current C3 Social Studies Framework provides our teachers with a guide on how to approach challenging subject matter. Our students utilize discussion protocols when exploring content that is emotionally charged and are taught how to research topics from diverse perspectives. Most importantly, our students learn what taking informed action looks and sounds like in the real world and have multiple opportunities to choose how they will demonstrate their acquired understanding and application of these topics. Additionally, our teachers communicate with families prior to the start of culturally sensitive lessons and units. Our teachers present learning targets and provide a synopsis of each lesson along with corresponding resources and materials so parents can engage meaningfully with their child. The selection of curricula, design of instruction, and the way we build our students' and families' capacity to participate authentically in challenging and controversial topics reflects our commitment to respect and celebrating diverse cultures and perspectives.

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

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Wheeler Middle School recognizes that education in an increasingly global society is constantly evolving with new research, practices, policies, and leaders. Our school's vision - empower young citizens to be resilient, respectful, and prepared contributors of a global community - illustrates that WMS embraces this reality and believes we have the collective capacity to ensure our students attain this vision. While school closures required substantial shifts in education practices, our staff wasted little time in working together to envision opportunity amidst unprecedented challenges. At WMS, we know our primary strategy for successfully educating and supporting our students has and will continue to be remaining focused on our core values, most notably, empowering the voices of our teachers and students.

Wheeler Middle School is home of the Spartans and the Spartan spirit is one of courage. We welcome and embrace change. A culture of collaboration, commitment, and growth mindset are the foundation for ongoing school improvement. Our decisions at WMS are the result of systems thinking; we acknowledge our school and its people are a dynamic, living system capable of unlimited growth. Our mission and vision serve as a guiding compass and enable us to select new directions intentionally. Just as the Hokulea was guided by a set of fixed constellations, our school's trajectory is guided by an unshakeable focus on instruction, the wellbeing of our students, a spirit of inquiry, and a growth mindset. Ultimately, our culture balances transformation and accountability driving us to continuously improve and thrive.

A key source of WMS's culture and climate is the idea of distributed leadership and teacher collaboration. We operate with positive presuppositions for every member of our team, believing individuals come to work wanting to do their best and we selected them because their talents and passions will advance our school's vision. We collaborate at every level of our organization and our stakeholders feel their voices and contributions are valued no matter the number of years they have served our community. This approach empowers staff and creates a school culture in which people are not afraid to take risks, fail, and progress with new learning resulting in years of sustained success.

Our students' continuous growth and achievement has been cultivated, monitored, and advanced by the hands of all stakeholders. Our students are empowered to make positive changes and their voices drive school improvement efforts. Even amidst a global health crisis, pervasive positivity persists amongst our faculty and the commitment to put our students first in all of our decisions is stronger than ever. At WMS, our words and actions are rooted in respect, love, and aloha for all of our students. Our students' learning, growth, and wellbeing are our constant inspiration.