

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

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

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

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

School Mailing Address 10330 East Prospect Street
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Indianapolis State IN Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 46239-9692

County Marion County

Telephone (317) 532-3100 Fax (317) 532-3140

Web site/URL https://grassycreek.warren.k12.in.us/ E-mail cmerchan@warren.k12.in.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* Dr. Timothy Hanson E-mail thanson@warren.k12.in.us
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name MSD Warren Township School District Tel. (317) 869-4300

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

Date _____

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board President/Chairperson Mrs. Rachel Burke
(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):
- 9 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 3 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 1 High schools
 - 1 K-12 schools
- 14 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	48	41	89
1	53	48	101
2	38	41	79
3	47	40	87
4	43	45	88
5	0	0	0
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	229	215	444

*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):
- 0.2 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 1.1 % Asian
 - 55 % Black or African American
 - 11.4 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 19.6 % White
 - 12.7 % 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: 18%

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

Grassy Creek Elementary serves many students living in poverty. Many of our transient families move frequently to avoid eviction and homelessness. Our mobility rate shows this point. We have many students that live with extended family and unenroll when housing is available for their single family only to move back after a brief period and return to Grassy Creek. This is also present in our mobility rate calculations below.

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

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	35
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	44
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	79
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	431
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.18
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	18

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

Spanish, Creole (Patois), French, Arabic, Hindi, Wolof

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 10 %
43 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 54 %

Total number students who qualify: 239

8. Students receiving special education services: 12 %
52 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>1</u> Autism | <u>19</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>1</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>3</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>10</u> Developmental Delay | <u>4</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>43</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>1</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 4
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to the nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below. If your current staffing structure has shifted due to COVID-19 impacts and you are uncertain or unable to determine FTEs, provide an estimate.

	Number of Staff
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	19
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	7
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	7
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	5

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 23:1

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	96%	96%	96%	96%	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.

Grassy Creek Elementary School staff, parents, and community empower children to be lifelong learners and productive citizens in our diverse 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.

Grassy Creek Elementary opened on time in August of 2020 with a full time in-person or full time virtual learning option for all students. We have remained consistent with this model throughout the school year, allowing families to change options according to their needs at quarter breaks. In response to increase COVID-19 infection rates, our county was closed schools from Thanksgiving to mid-January. We moved to a fully virtual learning option for all students with daily online lessons and live video classes via Zoom. Our students continued on pace with the curriculum and we able to transition easily back to in-person when the county reopened. Our virtual students did not adjust during this time and have maintained the same format for the entire year. All staff report to school daily regardless of teaching in-person or online.

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

Grassy Creek Elementary School is an urban fringe school located on the eastside of Indianapolis, IN. The school is located in a neighborhood which consists of mostly single family dwellings, apartment complexes, and some open farmland. Built in 1961, Grassy Creek has become a staple in the community as a safe place for learning as well as family events.

Our students come from diverse family structures. We have single parents, multi-generational families, and foster families in our school community. We appreciate the perspectives and honor the journey of each student and their supporters from home. It is important for our families to feel a sense of belonging to our school just as much as the individual student.

Our school implements tier I as well as tier II of our Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) framework, aligned with our district vision of Civility, Order, Respect, and Excellence (CORE) for everyone. The building team has developed a plan of systems, data and practices that support decision making, student behavior, staff behavior, social competence, and academic achievement. A few components included in our PBIS plan are a matrix of expected behaviors, definition of classroom and office managed behaviors, a system for response when students struggle, a system of acknowledgement for students and staff, improved data collection and reporting, and specific lessons and plans to teach expected behavior. This plan prioritizes prevention as well as develops ways to clarify, teach and reinforce expectations for students and staff. In addition, while developing these first two tiers, a cultural lens is used to ensure the outcome is meaningful and has value with all students in our building. Teachers have created their classroom behavior plans based on ideals of PBIS and restorative practices. We have found, at Grassy Creek Elementary, when students have defined expectations and supports in place, learning happens more readily and achievement comes naturally.

In the fall of 2019, Grassy Creek implemented a social-emotional learning curriculum in all classrooms. Daily, students spend time learning about regulating emotions, responding to different situations, decision-making strategies, and inclusion practice. We incorporate the SEL curriculum with our PBIS expectations to build connections across the building. This common language builds consistency and supports student success. Grassy Creek families are invited to build PBIS plans for home using the SEL and PBIS strategies learned at school. This has proven very helpful for students who thrive with set boundaries. Some of our local businesses have added PBIS expectations to their shops and restaurants as part of our school community focus.

The Grassy Creek Elementary School community is dedicated to the intellectual and emotional growth of all students. Our focus is on educating all students to obtain mastery on the Indiana Academic Standards. The curriculum in the MSD Warren Township School District is aligned with Indiana Academic Standards (IAS). The district curriculum for reading, writing, math, and social-emotional learning has been mapped into units and placed into a scope and sequence for the entire school year. District teachers and administrators developed the curriculum mapping, scope and sequence as well as formative and summative assessments.

Grassy Creek Elementary offers both in-person and virtual learning options for students as a response to the pandemic. Prior to our school closure in March 2020, our staff was not aware of the need for a virtual learning academy and just how beneficial it would be for some of our families. We are finding it very successful for many students and will continue this as a learning option moving forward for our families.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

The ELA curriculum is aligned with the Indiana Academic Standards and is supported by the McGraw-Hill Reading Wonders series. Students receive 90 minutes of tier I reading instruction each day. In addition, students may receive 30-60 minutes of tier II and/or tier III instruction. During the ninety-minute reading block, teachers follow a systematic curriculum guide for tier I instruction, using the Wonders basal series (this program supports whole group and guided reading instruction). An additional thirty minutes of instructional time is scheduled for reading intervention using research based programs. Additional resources that may be used during the ninety-minute reading block or the additional thirty minutes of instruction include Fountas and Pinnell’s Leveled Literacy Intervention, Scholastic’s Phonetic Connections, and Reading Wonders. Similar materials are available for students who require tier III instruction. McGraw-Hill materials are used to support spelling and grammar instruction.

Students participate in a daily 45-60 minute block of writing instruction. The Units of Study for Teaching Writing provides an in-depth writing curriculum in all grade levels, kindergarten through 6th grade. This curriculum centers around writing instruction of opinion/argument, information, and narrative writing. The units of study develop across the grade levels and foster writing strategies to develop independent writers. Each unit supports the rigorous demands of the standards within the grade level, as well as providing teachers with teaching opportunities, resources and tools to meet students' writing needs.

Students receive a minimum of sixty minutes of math instruction daily. This includes time for daily problem solving, computation activities, and the use of hands-on manipulatives to support instruction. Teachers use the Eureka Math series along with Zearn, STMath, and TenMarks to enhance math lessons. The daily schedule has been adjusted so that science, technology, engineering and math can be integrated together during our STEM block. The math and science curriculum is aligned with the Indiana Academic Standards.

Additionally, the social studies curriculum is integrated into the school day during reading, writing and math instruction. Time is also allocated in the daily schedule for social skills instruction. The social studies curriculum is aligned with the Indiana Academic Standards and is supported by the Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Indiana Social Studies series. The social studies curriculum is taught and assessed in quarterly units.

Teachers refer to a Depth of Knowledge scale to provide opportunities for students to work at higher levels of thinking in all subject matters.

Students at Grassy Creek Elementary participate in various standardized assessments. ILEARN is a state mandated assessment that measures the academic performance of students in english language arts, math, and science (Grades 3 and 4 only). The Indiana Reading Evaluation and Determination (IREAD-3) assessment is to measure foundational reading standards through grade three. Based on the Indiana Academic Standards, IREAD-3 is a summative assessment that was developed in accordance to Public Law 109 which “requires the evaluation of reading skills for students who are in grade three to ensure that all students can read proficiently before moving on to grade four”. The WIDA assessment is to determine a student’s level of English proficiency. The placement test, administered upon student’s arrival in the United States, is used to determine which English Learners (EL) services are appropriate for the student. The annual assessment is used to determine the student’s current level of English proficiency.

Grassy Creek Elementary staff also incorporate benchmark assessments in reading and math. Measures of Academic Progress® (MAP®) are adaptive reading, language, and math computerized tests through NWEA. Administered in September and March, the assessments are designed to target a student’s academic performance according to his/her current achievement level. Teachers track progress and growth over time in both content areas. The Next Steps in Guided Reading Assessment is a four-component assessment tool which ascertains each student's proficiency level as a reader. Students are assessed in word knowledge, phonics, spelling, fluency, and comprehension. Students demonstrate their reading behaviors and proficiency level through whole-group and individual reading assessments. The results of the reading

NBRS 2021
21IN109PU
Page 8 of 16

assessment provide an instructional entry point and drive the targeted instruction students require to continue to develop reading behaviors and become increasingly proficient readers.

During the 2020-2021 school year, Grassy Creek Elementary students and families had the option to choose fully in-person instruction or fully virtual instruction. Both learning options followed the same curriculum maps and assessment guidelines to provide a similar instructional experience for all students. Classes started on time in August, however, due to community COVID-19 infection rates, all schools were closed from Thanksgiving to mid-January. All students transitioned to a fully virtual learning environment for that time period, again, maintaining the pacing of the curriculum while focusing on student engagement and social-emotional learning. Looking forward to the 2021-2022 school year, both in-person and virtual learning options will be available for students with limited seats in virtual learning.

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

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

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

The music, art, and physical education (PE) curriculum are aligned with the Indiana Academic Standards and is supported by: K-6 Music – MacMillan McGraw Hill – Spotlight on Music; K-6 Art – MacMillan McGraw Hill and Quaver –SRA Art Connections; K-4 Health – Houghton Mifflin. We offer library and media resources through our media center, as well as social justice and anti-bias lessons through literature based on the elementary standards from Learning for Justice.

Students in all grade levels, kindergarten through fourth grade, participate in these special area classes on a weekly rotation. This allows each student to engage in music for a week, then art, then PE, and finally media. Students engage daily for 40 minutes in these classes based on their weekly rotation.

This year, with the constraints of the pandemic, our special area classes have made adjustments to allow students to fully participate while remaining safe. We spaced out the schedule to allow more time for cleaning equipment and learning spaces in-between classes, moved PE outside whenever possible for open air activities, provided students with individual supplies rather than shared materials, and adjusted units to incorporate more technology-aligned activities. Our virtual students have special area lessons each week, pre-recorded by teachers across our district and aligned with content standards similar to their peers in-person. While we haven't had as many schoolwide events (i.e. music programs, art shows, basketball games, book fairs, etc.) we have worked diligently to provide high quality learning experiences in our special areas to keep students engaged. For example, each teacher has a YouTube channel for students to engage in new content outside of the curriculum, designed to for the child and family to conduct at home together using normal items around the house. Students have the opportunity to submit their own videos to be the demo of the week. These types of activities would likely have escaped us had we not thought outside of the box during COVID-19.

Originally, Grassy Creek Elementary was set to add a STEM class to our special area rotation for the 2020-2021 school year. In light of the pandemic, we opted to pause this new class and will add it to our student courses in 2021-2022. The STEM class will be taught by a highly qualified teacher trained through Project Lead the Way standards and instructional strategies.

3. Academic Supports:

Teachers identify students and plan before and after-school curriculum to accelerate the learning of our struggling students in grades 2, 3 and 4. These after-school activities include remediation of the academic standards using best practices, hands-on materials and technology to reinforce reading,

writing and math skills in a small group setting. For the 2021-2022 school year, students in younger grades will have the opportunity to also participate. Grassy Creek Elementary students have the opportunity to participate in summer school in June of 2021 as part of our response to opportunity loss due to COVID-19. Students will engage in remedial activities in reading and math as well as enrichment activities in STEM and social-emotional learning in a small group setting with a highly qualified teacher.

In 2019-2020, Grassy Creek Elementary School added a full-time school counselor to work with students and support family needs. The school counselor works with students in large class lesson settings, small group interventions, and one-on-one counseling based on the specific needs of each child. Included in the counseling services, all students also participate in anti-bullying education multiple times a year, college and career readiness activities, social-emotion wellness lessons, and diversity, equity, and inclusion lessons.

A collaborative partnership with Community Hospital was established in 2003 to help improve the academic achievement of students in need by providing cost-effective, convenient school-based mental health services. This program provides year-round services in school, in the students' homes, or other mutually agreed upon places to help provide effective mental health services for Grassy Creek students and their families.

Special Education services are provided to students who qualify as a student with a disability in one of the 13 eligibility areas in Article 7. Some students may also receive related service support such as speech language therapy, occupational therapy and/or physical therapy. Grassy Creek Elementary has a continuum of services to meet the varied needs of students we serve. If the program that best meets the student's needs is not offered in our school, those students then attend a building in the district that has the programming to meet their needs as determined by the case conference committee. These special programs include Developmental Kindergarten (DK), Intensive Mental Health Program (IMHP), Functional Academics (FA) and Learning Independence through a Functional Education (LIFE).

Resource teacher(s) and instructional assistant(s) provide support for students who primarily receive instruction in the general education classroom. They provide push in and pull out support depending on the student needs. Similarly, a teacher for English Language Learners supports students based on their language levels identified via annual WIDA testing. Our EL teacher focuses on reading foundations, vocabulary, and conversational skills with students in small groups and one-on-one. Our EL teacher assists with communication with families when family language is not English and helps connect families to additional resources outside of the school.

Multi-Tiered Systems for Support (MTSS) is designed to assist students who have failed to make adequate progress in the typical support structure within a school. The goal of MTSS is to formally assist students in making progress at an accelerated rate. The typical support structure includes both universal interventions and evidence-based interventions assigned through data and learning log meetings. MTSS is the highest support system available for students and requires formal goal setting with frequent monitoring for progress. MTSS is a general education progress that should support around 5-8% of your school's population. Tier II and tier III ELA interventions can be both universal and evidence-based depending on the specific intervention. When a student in general education has not been making progress, either academically or behaviorally, and the general education teacher has exhausted all strategies and interventions at the classroom level, s/he may refer that student for MTSS for additional support.

Grassy Creek Elementary demonstrates strong student achievement, however, for our special

populations such as special education and students of color, our intentional focus on foundational skills has proven impactful. We are focused on providing a strong base for all students regardless of their prior experiences to joining our school. It is our belief that as a school, we must provide experiences for our students that create equitable learning opportunities for all. This will look different based on student needs and this is part of our success in closing the gap.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

Students at Grassy Creek Elementary have various opportunities to engage in learning during the school day. This could include choral responses, call backs, kinesthetic activities, brain breaks, partner or small group learning, digital and paper forms, etc. Teachers work to learn student preferences for engagement and tailor activities to meet these preferences.

Our students know CORE (Civility, Order, Respect, and excellence) and we celebrate positive choices and behavior daily. Students can earn CORE coins as part of our schoolwide PBIS program, spend them at our biweekly CORE store for items such as school supplies, extra snacks, etc., and purchase extra privileges during our quarterly Golden Celebration day. At Golden Celebration, students choose different stations to attend such as a dance party, craft room, bucket drumming, and gym games. Our PTA often supports our VIP students on Golden Celebration day with additional activities including a game truck, snow cones, and even a skating party. Students qualify for VIP if they have no absences or tardies, no missing assignments, and no office interactions. Each week, two students from each class are acknowledged as CORE students of the week and are highlighted on the announcements before receiving a prize. Monthly, teachers also nominate students for office shout-outs to be shared via social media. Both the principal and dean have special CORE coins worth 5 points that are given to students for showing excellence in academics, improvement in attendance, and turn around in behavior. Our students love CORE and meet the explicit expectations outlined in our PBIS plan because we praise and highlight their efforts. This increases student engagement in class as well as positive choices on the school bus, playground, cafeteria, etc.

At Grassy Creek, students have the opportunity to participate in many extracurricular activities. These include spelling and math academic teams, science olympiad, intramural sports, choir, art club, running club, robotics club, and student council. While many of our ECAs cater to older students, the student council, science olympiad, and running clubs are opportunities for all students in any grade level. This builds student engagement in our youngest students and enhances their school experience.

Outside of the school setting but still connected to our district, students can participate in youth sports such as football, basketball, baseball, softball, and cheerleading. We also have many fine arts programs through the high school including theater and show choir camps, art lessons and events, and musical groups. We encourage our students to engage in community activities to connect to our school family in different ways outside of the classroom. Many of our staff members coach, lead, mentor, and attend these events to support specific students. This supports our focus on strong relationships to encourage student engagement.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Recognizing and respecting the diversity of family structure, we believe that all parents and families have an indispensable role in the education of their sons and daughters. Grassy Creek Elementary School is committed to forging partnerships for the purpose of establishing positive working relationships with parents and families to improve student outcomes, strengthen school learning environments, and promote positive community relations.

Monthly activities are scheduled to encourage parental involvement (ie. Muffins with Moms, Donuts with Dads, Literacy Night, STEM Night, Fall Festival, Community skating parties, and content specific informational meetings). Parents are invited to attend meetings (parent-teacher conference, MTSS meetings, Case Conferences) to discuss their child's progress at school. When weaknesses have been identified, we share resources for parents to use at home. These materials are available to all parents and provided in multiple languages to remove barriers.

Grassy Creek Elementary communicates with parents in multiple ways. The school's website, weekly School Messenger emails and phone calls along with social media (Facebook and Twitter) keep parents informed about activities at the school. The school and certified teachers also publish a weekly newsletter.

At the beginning of the year, Grassy Creek Elementary School sends home a School/Family Compact, which is a written agreement of what the school, parents and students will do to ensure student success. A school handbook shares specific information pertinent to parents and guardians such as arrival and dismissal procedures, school dress code, attendance expectations, and celebrations.

Our school has a growing Parent-Teacher Association (PTA). During PTA meetings and family engagement group meetings, parents have opportunities for decision-making related to the education of their children.

Grassy Creek Elementary School invites all parents to a “Meet the Teacher Night/Ice Cream Social” the week before school begins. At these meetings, the requirements and rights of the parents to be involved will be shared. Additionally, teachers provide information specific to their classrooms’ instruction and procedures. Parents/guardians are encouraged to maintain active communication with the classroom teacher and administration by reading the school and classroom weekly newsletters and reviewing the work that is sent home regularly. They are also encouraged to review daily information such as student folders and planners and then contacting the school if they should have questions and/or concerns.

Due to the pandemic, Grassy Creek has postponed all evening events until the 2021-2022 school year aside from the quarterly skating parties held off-site. Instead, we encourage our families to participate in district-wide and community events, sharing information weekly in our newsletter and phone calls. Our PTA and school staff are already preparing events and activities for families for the 2021-2022 school year as we return to more typical procedures.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

At Grassy Creek, we work hard to celebrate our teachers and recognize their efforts and achievements. Whether it's casual dress days, surprise treats in their mailboxes, staff recognition of each other in our team communication weekly, or quick notes on a desk we want our team members to feel valued and appreciated. During the COVID-19 pandemic this has become even more important. We've increased our staff check-ins, built specific times for virtual teachers to connect with in-person teaching partners for collaboration, and started a weekly self-care activity for educators.

Grassy Creek Elementary has had a full-time instructional specialist for many years. The instructional specialist’s role is to assist teachers in increasing student choice in mastering learning objectives. Approximately 80 percent of time is spent in direct contact with teachers providing support. The specialist works closely with the principal and district’s professional learning coordinator to plan, develop, and facilitate relevant and rigorous professional learning opportunities for teachers. Specialists monitor the effectiveness of learning communities with the use of data from classroom observations (non-evaluative) and feedback. Due to the ever-changing staffing needs during the pandemic, the instructional specialist has moved to support multiple buildings, primarily focusing on new teachers and those working towards improvement based on evaluations.

At Grassy Creek Elementary, new teachers are provided a mentor with which they meet monthly as a group and then biweekly individually. This mentor instructs the new teacher on how to use district tools (i.e. student management system, online grade book, etc.), where to access instructional tools, how to manage parent meetings, communication techniques, and classroom management strategies. The mentor teacher often becomes the go-to person for the new teacher, giving them a connection and bond to the staff quickly. The instructional specialist also meets weekly with the new teacher to support classroom management and instruction, model lessons, and provide feedback. This allows for quick adjustments outside of the evaluation process conducted by administration and is perceived as less threatening to new staff. Administration meets monthly with new teachers to share expectations, answer questions, and prepare teachers for what to expect in the next month of the school year as a way to prepare and act proactively, leading to greater teacher success.

Grassy Creek Teachers participate in both district sponsored and school sponsored staff development activities. The focus is in the area of tier 1 instruction, digital content, personalized learning, growth mindset, data-driven decisions, becoming culturally responsive, social justice, and PBIS.

Professional development is provided for our instructional assistants by the instructional specialist or administrator. Topics include tier II instructional strategies and interventions, special education law, and NCI training for special education instructional assistants as deemed necessary.

Administrators receive professional development to enhance effectiveness. Some of the areas of focus are blended learning (Personalized Learning), utilizing data to support student learning, assessment best practices, curricular design, and foundational instructional best practices. Starting the summer of 2021, all deans and counselors will be trained in restorative practices. The counselor at Grassy Creek was previously trained and will lead a small group as part of this new process in the district.

4. School Leadership:

The administrative team at Grassy Creek Elementary includes a principal and dean of students. Together, they support the instructional and operational needs of the school. More simply, the principal focuses on decisions regarding adult needs, behaviors, and impact while the dean focuses on the same but for students. Both have experience teaching in the elementary classroom and supporting teachers as instructional specialists prior to stepping into administrative roles. It is the belief of the administrative team that all decisions must be made in the best interest of the child, whether individually or collectively, and the greatest influence on a child's success inside the classroom is the teacher. While the principal and dean work independently of one another in many ways, they collaborate often and use the talents of each to best support the area of need.

At Grassy Creek Elementary, team leaders play a valuable role in decision-making and leadership. Each grade level along with the special area team has a team leader that meets monthly with the administrative team. Team leaders take information back to their teams and collect feedback when needed. They also act as note-taker for weekly team meetings and data collectors for data meetings. The team leaders are part of the school improvement planning process and often share responsibility with the curriculum mapping and assessment teams in the township.

Grassy Creek has a leadership team consisting of the principal, dean, counselor, and instructional specialist. The leadership team meets monthly to discuss various student and staff needs, identifying those for additional support or celebration. At times, this team identifies students for tutoring or remedial services outside of school. The leadership team also designs professional development for the staff around diversity, equity, and inclusion practices.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the school leadership worked diligently to keep students connected to the school. Just as teachers had daily virtual check-ins, both the principal and dean offered online sessions daily for students and families. Phone calls, emails, virtual meetings, and home visits were conducted regularly to keep students and families engaged. If a child could not come to school to pick up learning materials or textbooks, the administration delivered materials to their front door. If a student's device needed repaired, an administrator would go to their home and pick up the device and return it in working condition. Food has been delivered, holiday assistance arranged, and family support provided throughout the pandemic by our administration. Our goal is keep every child connected regularly while we are apart and continue their sense of belonging to the school family. This makes Grassy Creek unique in our district as well as our state.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

During registration, parents/guardians complete a Home Language Survey. This is used to identify English Language Learners. Parents/guardians also complete an enrollment form that includes race and ethnicity. Families are encouraged to complete the free-reduced lunch and textbook rental assistance form. This helps us identify families that do not automatically qualify otherwise. Students in race/ethnicity or free-reduced lunch sub-groups are monitored via classroom assessments and academic supports are placed through the MTSS process.

Our staff has been working to learn more about implicit bias and how to build stronger relationships rooted in understanding of differences. Many of our staff were unaware of racial histories of various sub-groups for students we serve. We continue to grow and learn together. We must adjust our instruction to better meet the learning styles and needs of our culturally diverse students. Our Equity Team reviews articles and videos to share weekly with staff to increase our understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion practices that best support our students. We also discuss media bias and encourage staff to research and learn on their own through podcasts, online subscriptions, newsletters, and authors of color.

Our reading and math curriculums are rooted in foundational instruction. This is a culturally responsive technique supported by years of research. Our curriculum also includes racially diverse characters, as well as our classroom libraries. It is important to the students of Grassy Creek Elementary to see themselves in their stories and studies, not as the villains or victims but as the heroes and conquerors. At Grassy Creek we teach Black History daily on the morning announcements and also incorporate Hispanic and Native Peoples history throughout the year. We want our students to learn about the impact of their ancestors, not just that which comes in a standard textbook. We celebrate our differences and see the rainbow that makes our school unique.

In 2019-2020, Grassy Creek Elementary added a specific goal to the school improvement plan to address inequitable discipline of students of color. The goal statement reads, “by the end of the school year, Grassy Creek Elementary will align office interaction data to within 5% of student demographics.” More specifically, we wanted to address the disproportionate discipline of African-American and multi-racial students. Office interactions are marked anytime an administrator engages with a student for behavior or discipline needs. We will continue this goal until we reach it consistently each month of the school year.

Starting in the 2021-2022 school year, Grassy Creek Elementary will host an African-American Parents Team (AAPT). The AAPT will focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion specific to our students of color, identifying needs for our staff development to better support our children, and feedback directly connected to DEI. Based on past surveys and parent feedback, black and brown voices are often not included, therefore, AAPT is designed to bring in the voices that best represent our student population.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Over the last three years, Grassy Creek Elementary has shifted the focus from solely academic achievement as a gauge of success to student and family engagement. This has many faces but the greatest desire is for our students to feel seen, celebrated, and valued. This marries with our focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion training with our staff and our new AAPT starting in the fall of 2021. This shift did not happen overnight but has grown over time with intentional practice. Rather than focusing on a specific student behavior or academic need only, we prioritize engagement as the root of success. Having a strong sense of connection has built an internal desire to perform at higher levels as part of the school family, both as children and adults. This is evident in our academic performance and growth from 2017 to 2019.

During the COVID-19 school closure in the spring of 2020, our staff focused solely on engagement with students, tapping into the need to connect to one another. The expectation for each student to engage with their teacher or other staff member daily was built on our previous three years' work. Throughout the spring, we had connection with every child and family on a regular basis, meeting additional needs outside of the typical school curriculum. For example, daily food deliveries, sidewalk material drops, virtual meetings and phone calls were all used to by teachers, administration, and support staff. Administration left door knockers with personal phone numbers to contact and additional resources for financial support when families were unable to be reached. Our efforts as a school staff then transferred into the 2020-2021 school year when quarantining and forced virtual learning pulled staff and students apart again. Our school community again worked to stay engaged and connected, this time increasing academic expectations and keeping on pace with instruction. Our Grassy Creek students will continue to rebound from the opportunities lost during the pandemic because of our commitment to relationships and connections.