

***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 Ms. Tammi S. Graff  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

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

School Mailing Address 110 East 3rd Street  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Ellsworth State KS Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 67439-3308

County Ellsworth County

Telephone (785) 472-5554 Fax (785) 472-8118

Web site/URL https://www.usd327.org/page/ees-information E-mail TGraff@usd327.org

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

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

Name of Superintendent\* Mr. Josh Lanning E-mail jlanning@usd327.org  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Ellsworth Unified School District 327 Tel. (785) 472-5561

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. Cynthia Edgerle  
(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):
- 1 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 2 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 1 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 4 TOTAL

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

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located. If unsure, refer to NCES database for correct category: <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/> (Find your school and check “Locale”)

- Urban (city or town)
- Suburban
- Rural

3. Number of students as of October 1, 2020 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent at the school. Include all students enrolled, in-person, participating in a hybrid model, or online only. If online schooling or other COVID-19 school issues make this difficult to obtain, provide the most accurate and up-to-date information available:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	20	21	41
1	14	22	36
2	28	18	46
3	21	26	47
4	25	26	51
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
<b>Total Students</b>	108	113	221

\*Schools that house PreK programs should count preschool students **only** if the school administration is responsible for the program.

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 0 % Asian
  - 0.5 % Black or African American
  - 7.2 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 89.6 % White
  - 2.7 % 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: 6%

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

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

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	7
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	7
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	14
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	251
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.06
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	6

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

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 0 %  
0 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 28 %

Total number students who qualify: 62

8. Students receiving special education services: 10 %  
23 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>0</u> Autism                  | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>1</u> Other Health Impaired                 |
| <u>11</u> Developmental Delay    | <u>3</u> Specific Learning Disability          |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>14</u> Speech or Language Impairment        |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment      | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>0</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 1
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	1
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	15
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.	11
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 15:1

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	98%	97%	97%	97%	97%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

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

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

<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. 2008

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

Ellsworth Elementary student performance will meet the curriculum outcomes of the State of Kansas, and ensure an environment that promotes responsible behavior and good character.

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.

Ellsworth Elementary started out face-to-face for the 2020-21 school year, and by following district, county, and state COVID protocols, has been able to stay face-to-face all year. Ellsworth Elementary underwent construction two years ago, adding on a school cafeteria/multi-use area, which allowed more flexibility in spreading out/spacing as needed. A few examples of safety protocols that the school has followed: no gathering in the gym before school, students remain with classmates from their homeroom throughout the day (including PE/Music, lunch, etc.), wearing of masks, temperature checks within the classrooms 1-2 times per day, extra hand-washing, extra sanitizing of classrooms and common areas, maintaining 6-foot distancing as much as possible, lunchroom arranged so that all students are facing the same direction with two empty seats between students. A lot of signage was used around the building as reminders for 6-foot distancing, mask wearing, hand washing, signs and symptoms, etc. The library and individual classrooms had “book jails” for quarantining books as well.

When individual students were quarantined, the classroom teacher (and specialists) worked out a schedule with the parents to enable students to Zoom with their class at different points throughout the day. In this way, students still received the classroom instruction. To further facilitate this, technology was checked out to students as needed during quarantine for them to continue their at-home learning and participation for both academics and emotional well-being. We also put into practice "modified quarantines" when a student from a class tests positive. The positive student

would quarantine at home while the rest of the students who were close contacts still attended school on a modified schedule. Students and staff who were affected remained in their classroom throughout the day with mask breaks built in and extra sanitizing taking place.

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**

---

USD 327 Ellsworth/Kanopolis/Geneseo is located in Central Kansas and provides a common link to three towns in or near Ellsworth County: Ellsworth, Kanopolis, and Geneseo. Our county is in large part, rural, and agricultural. We also count international manufacturing and a correctional facility as economic forces in our area. The approximate population in 2019 was 3,096 residents. In 2021, Ellsworth will celebrate 154 proud years as a Cowtown.

The mission of the Unified School District 327 is to provide an educational environment in which all children can learn to the maximum of their capabilities. The educational environment in this district will demonstrate our belief that it is essential to develop positive personal character and challenge every learner through programs that demand excellence. It is through combined efforts of patrons, faculty, administrators, and staff that we lead our students into responsible citizenship in the 21st century.

Open since 1952, Ellsworth Elementary comprises full-day kindergarten through fourth grade. Current enrollment for Ellsworth Elementary is around 230 students compared to 251, pre-pandemic. We have three sections for each grade, and it has been noted that the district commitment to keeping class sizes small is notable in terms of both student success and staff retention.

The staff work tirelessly to provide a solid foundation on which students can build success. We have a strong relationship with Central Kansas Cooperative in Education which assists us in providing individualized services for students with exceptionalities. During this pandemic, staff have risen to face every challenge we have encountered, and we have remained face-to-face since the beginning of the 2020-21 school year. District wide board approval granted staff a three week delay at the start of the academic year allowing for planning and preparation directly responsible for a safe return to in-person school.

A point of pride for Ellsworth Elementary is the development of a research-based, cohesive, and consistent curriculum across the primary grades, extending to the upper-elementary grades. Components include Pathways to Reading combined with Literacy by Design, Math Expressions, Tiered MTSS groups, and Mystery Science or Mystery Doug. Social Studies in the primary grades is addressed through weekly Scholastic News instruction. We have been fortunate to have monthly Agriculture Awareness lessons conducted by Ellsworth Junior/Senior High School FFA members. We have many presentations throughout the year, across the grades, which take advantage of information resources available in our community. These include local authors, members of the Ellsworth County Historical Society, local law enforcement, and our volunteer firefighters. Ellsworth Elementary maintains close ties to some community organizations such as the Ellsworth Food Bank, and the Good Samaritan retirement community. Our school has also reached out with global efforts toward relief, especially after natural disasters both in the United States, and abroad. A program we have offered, Bearcub BEST, to increase student success has been suspended for the time being, but will resume after state and local authorities deem the activity safe, once again. Another program is a data-driven after school Homework Club that has provided much needed support for students facing a variety of struggles.

In keeping with the district mission statement concerning positive personal character development, the 2019-2020 school year saw the addition of the PATHS Social-Emotional Curriculum. This was a direct response to the ever increasing need for trauma-informed schools. While our small community is relatively insulated from some of the issues facing urban schools, and districts, we are not immune to the problems the larger world is facing in these uncertain and troubled times. Students benefit from learning how to recognize a variety of simple as well as complex emotions. The curriculum also teaches students strategies which help them begin to learn to manage, and later, self-regulate their emotions.

In recent years Ellsworth Elementary has liaised with our High School Student Council to conduct a Bearcat Student Leadership Academy. Students practice their academic skills through our BEST jobs program for which students must apply and interview for positions around the school. It has been very successful, and motivating for students to be part of the process.



Student growth and success is our daily focus at EES, and we are always cognizant of living up to our status as a previous Blue Ribbon School. In fact, being awarded this honor has been a draw for people who are considering making Ellsworth home. In summary, not only is Ellsworth Elementary School in the physical heart of the town of Ellsworth, it is a treasured reminder for many residents of a main reason they have chosen to continue to make this community home.

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

---

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

At Ellsworth Elementary, curriculum and instruction are heavily focused on data, both Benchmark Testing, and weekly progress monitoring scores for Tier 3 students who show a need for additional support, and/or interventions. Curriculum is researched based with careful consideration as to how Kansas State Standards will be covered. Staff have worked together in and out of the district to study and observe different programs that were under consideration for possible adoption.

Three years ago, Ellsworth Elementary adopted Pathways to Reading as part of core reading instruction. The training and professional development have been targeted, and intense. We were also provided follow up support from a trained Pathways instructor. Pathways is a comprehensive phonics instruction program providing K-2 students with phonemic awareness, phonics, spelling, and decoding skills. It includes assessment tools, allowing for tiered instruction and specific goal setting for MTSS reading groups. Formal assessments occur quarterly, but our dedicated staff ensures that MTSS groups remain fluid throughout the academic year using informal assessments and communication between teachers. Evidence shows much success for students since Pathways to Reading was implemented several years ago. In addition to Pathways to Reading, Core Literacy Instruction includes many elements from Literacy by Design and Storyworks, Jr. These include vocabulary, grammar, text analysis, synthesizing information, literal and inferential comprehension, beginning writing, and more phonics are present in the curriculum. The detailed scope and sequence of the program allows for support and differentiation amongst a class of learners with differing levels of knowledge. Teaching aligns with our Kansas College and Career Standards and is moving to completely address the needs of a structured literacy experience for all learners K-12. The high-interest fiction and non-fiction reading selections provide students with rich materials, and teachers with support necessary to effectively instruct students.

One of the most exciting developments to come from the push to common core curriculum has been the adoption of Math Expressions. For the better part of the 20th century, students were instructed to solve math problems via a series of steps. If one follows the steps, the problem will be solved. With virtually no attention given to the relationship between numbers and operations, it was difficult for students to provide proof for a correct solution, or understand and remedy an incorrect answer. Math Expressions provides a solid foundation for the concept of how numbers work together. It extends to students recognizing the relationships that exist between various operations of numbers in a base-10 system. It also presents math in a real-world context which greatly enhances student engagement. After evaluating two programs and presenting evidence of standards alignment, third grade teachers chose Engage New York Math curriculum. Learning to communicate, build strategies of their own and fluency create a challenging math experience at this grade level. Additionally, teachers use the Zearn.org math program to review concepts and provide opportunities for students and families outside of school hours.

In the primary grades, Mystery Science and Mystery Doug are widely used to provide basic and beginning knowledge of science, and the scientific process. With our world's focus on STEM, Ellsworth Elementary has integrated Mystery Science activities into instruction at the 3rd and 4th grade levels. Using these easy to access and understand resources, teachers find the curriculum easy and engaging to implement. Students cheer for science interactions which focus on questioning, experimentation, and hands-on experiences. Throughout the units of instruction, students are encouraged to pose questions and be curious about our world. Teachers encourage brainstorming and posing questions, and provide materials for engineering and other explorations. Discussion and teamwork are necessary parts of this type of learning and have high value for students and teachers.

Social studies texts and experiences are used as a resource in teaching civic learning and standards set forth by our state. A self-created curriculum is used at each grade level to promote state required learning while making it local and accessible. Social Studies is mainly addressed through Scholastic News Weekly at the primary level. Students explore a variety of topics, including current events, and are exposed to diverse cultures and traditions that may not be represented in our small community. Many social studies activities take root in reading, science, math or social/emotional related learning. Interaction and celebration of our

community takes place throughout the grade levels. Numerous service projects for school and community occur across all grade levels. For example, our third grade is responsible for interacting with and maintaining a relationship with our local library and Senior Center through cards, visits, book reading, art, and interaction. To link social studies standards with literature our second and third grade learners take a variety of walking field trips that showcase people making our community great. Fourth grade has a proud tradition of interaction with our local senior living facility through bingo, Christmas gifts, and visits.

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

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

**2. Other Curriculum Areas:**

At Ellsworth Elementary, we provide a standards-based curriculum in our library, music, physical education, and technology classes. Our instructors are highly-qualified in their subject areas and regularly integrate their curricular areas with that of the regular and special education classroom teachers. By providing a solid foundation in the arts, literature, kinesthetic, and technological arenas, we are able to enhance the instructional process for our students. Our students receive at least 75 minutes a week in each area. Essential skills are infused in all lessons daily. Special projects are encouraged and vary based on need.

Our specials instructors have seamlessly woven the skills taught in a pre-COVID year into their adapted schedules. In some cases, more creativity and ingenuity have been demonstrated but the content has remained intact. Individual classrooms attend specials this year, rather than combining classrooms in music and physical education. There has been a great amount of diligence demonstrated by our students and staff in the areas of social-distancing, mask-wearing, and hand washing prior to each class. Sanitizing of equipment happens between each class. Individual kits have been utilized in classes to allow student participation without sharing materials.

In our music classes, we focus on the essential skills of phonemic awareness, critical thinking, focused listening skills, and poetry usage in lyric writing. Students study math division skills and make comparisons to note and rest values in music theory. We emphasize content literacy and vocabulary within the musical text of songs. With our fifteen station piano keyboard lab, our students learn basic piano skills while gaining necessary tracking skills that transfer from reading. At this critical age, students also gain brain development through the process of playing the keyboard. This occurs from the firing of dendrites in the brain during playing.

Physical Education is taught daily based on grade level standards and skills. As for essential skills, PE works with social skills and goal setting. The overall goals are to meet the needs of all students, keep students active for most of physical education class time, teach self-management skills, emphasize knowledge and skills for a lifetime of physical activity; and make PE an enjoyable experience for all students.

Problem-solving, creative thinking, communication, collaboration, design and coding are all essential skills that are taught while integrating technology into the classroom. Currently, classes have a formal 50 minute technology lesson once a week. Our technology specialist is available as an additional resource as time allows. At EES, a growth mindset has been key as teachers continue to step up and grow in their tech skills this year. The use of Smart Technologies, Seesaw, Zoom, Chromebooks, and iPads can be seen daily within classrooms.

Our library goals are to provide books and tools to support academic and recreational learning, to teach information literacy and digital citizenship skills, and to provide enrichment activities and programs to encourage lifelong learning, collaboration, and problem solving. Annual circulation tops 25,000 checkouts. Our collection features high-quality, engaging books that are aligned to all curriculum areas. Each week

students have a library skills lesson and a story time session. All students have multiple opportunities to check out books throughout the week. The library curriculum includes topics such as: library use, digital citizenship, research skills, and genre types.

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

Ellsworth Elementary has a variety of academic supports for our students, with decisions being based on what will best nurture the individual needs of the student. Every student is unique; therefore the staff often has to think outside the box to differentiate ways that reach every student. Before a student can be successful academically, we need to ensure that they have food to eat and have caring adults they feel safe with, as proposed by Abraham Maslow in his 1943 paper, "A Theory of Human Motivation". Once these needs are met, the staff can focus on academic supports that will benefit the student, through both intervention and enrichment, whichever the student needs.

The Social-Emotional curriculum Ellsworth Elementary uses is PATHS (Pathways to Alternative Thinking Strategies). Building wide, we created a block first thing in the morning during which PATHS lessons are taught. We chose to begin each day with a soft start and PATHS lessons in order for the Social/Emotional lessons to be carried over throughout the day. This aids in self-regulation strategies, without which, academics, and all other goals are more difficult.

Ellsworth Elementary is a Target Assist Title I school, with our qualifier for the program being based on AIMSweb Plus scores. Students that score in the bottom 20% qualify to receive Title support in reading and/or math. These groups are all five or less students with a Title Teacher and/or Title Aide. Instruction is focused on student needs determined by AIMSweb and/or classroom assessment results.

Our school also has a SIT (Student Intervention Team) that meets monthly. Teachers bring their student concerns to the team. This can include students needing additional intervention to bring them to grade level, or students consistently scoring above grade level that need enrichment. All decisions made are data-driven. Goals are set for each student that is brought to SIT so data can continue to be gathered for the specific needs of each student. The goal of the SIT team is to come up with a plan to help students be successful, with general education interventions. Parents are invited and encouraged to attend these meetings. The process provides the documentation to assist the following year's teacher know what interventions worked, or did not work, for specific students that may be struggling. The interventions are tried for 1-2 months, then revisited to see if student needs are being met. If the student is making gains toward his/her goal, the interventions or strategies are continued. If the student is not making adequate gains, the team brainstorms new interventions or strategies to try.

MTSS (Multi-Tier System of Supports) is another academic support for all students at Ellsworth Elementary. Classroom teachers, Title I staff, building aides, and special education staff all provide support through our MTSS program. This is another small-group opportunity for students to get additional individualized instruction based on their specific needs. Some students receive intervention services during this time, while the students that already have a deeper understanding of the concepts receive enrichment during their MTSS group.

Ellsworth Elementary is able to evaluate every student's individual needs through targeting their learning styles and identifying their strengths and weaknesses. Data guides our determination for students receiving Title I, special education, MTSS, SIT, and Social-Emotional needs of our students.



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

---

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

The motto for Ellsworth Elementary in 2020 was from Walt Disney - "Whatever you do, do it well." At EES the atmosphere is student centered and nurtures the whole child. We strive to make strong connections at the beginning of our day for each student. Prior to COVID restrictions, community members and students greeted people as they entered the building on a regular basis. With restrictions, our principal strived to greet and challenge students daily through a morning message.

Each day is a new chance to find joy, share love, grow our minds, and notice others. We take this seriously at EES by setting aside the first 40 minutes of each school day as Social Emotional Learning time. During this time teachers focus on meeting students where they are. Teachers interact with and assess students as they begin their day. Students are encouraged to participate in high-interest activities like games, arts and STEM projects. Socialization and regulation are emphasized. Teachers are able to teach and observe social skills and needs of their students. Additionally, the implementation of the PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies) curriculum has helped students identify emotions, problem solve, goal set and work as a team. It has also provided a common language of communication for staff and students. Literature is a foundational part of many PATHS lessons which allows students and teachers to increase literacy skills while also creating a touchstone for family, personal and social experiences.

We are fortunate to have great role models and experiences built into our school community. High school programs like FFA, Spanish, Student Aides and Student Council provide numerous interactions which build leadership capacity and form relationships throughout our district. EES also works to build its own leaders through the Bearcub BEST (Be An Excellent Student Team) program. Students apply and interview for leadership positions in our building ranging from assistant principal to technology assistant to morning greeter and more. Many students took advantage of and learned from these opportunities to share themselves and mentor others.

The year 2020 brought shock, grief and adaptation as our school building closed and learning shifted. Self-care and time to adjust were highlighted as key things to focus on for staff as well as their students. Calling trees and safely-distanced supply drops were established to check in on every family and child. All staff members were involved in contacting families. Our role as teacher often shifted to become counselor to parent, a touchstone to children, and a welcome sense of normalcy for families. Communication tools like Seesaw and Google Voice were established to facilitate surveys, learning and parent information. Tutorials and personal assistance was available to any struggling learner whether it be administrator, teacher, student or family member.

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

One of the most recent engagement developments at EES and in USD 327 has been our use of electronic communication and student portfolios. Our district narrowed communication to app based communication which was then linked to our website. As the COVID-19 transition occurred, Ellsworth Elementary School implemented Seesaw as a unifying platform for instruction and communication. During this transition, teachers also used personal communication devices to ensure students and families were stable, informed, and safe.

As a rural community, we must be resourceful in accessing opportunities for our students. Parents, business leaders and community members come to discuss their jobs, knowledge of history, and share life advice. Community volunteers greet and read with students. Partnerships with our local library, banks, and agricultural businesses are integrated into learning as well. Students are also welcomed into businesses and town locations to learn more about their community. Knowing our greatest treasure lies within our students, we engage students through a partnership with our award-winning FFA program which allows for poster contests, agriculture lessons, and leadership role models. In addition, our high school student council promotes civic life skills during a yearly Bearcub Youth Leadership Academy. Each year, BYLA, is hosted

by our high school Student Council. During this day, teams of elementary students and high school students use teamwork to complete tasks centered on leadership. Cross-grade level groups are formed and guided through teamwork and leadership opportunities.

Staff at EES feel supported by our community in a variety of ways. Our PTO provides mini-grants to teachers for supplies in their classrooms in addition to refreshments throughout the year. Our grocery store donates coupons as an incentive for increased reading at home. The local Kiwanis Club donates gift cards to the local pizza eatery to use as reading incentives. Local entities like our volunteer fire department, bank and Sonic supply our school with bottled water during COVID modifications and many other events. Our PTO also has a great impact on the reading culture of our school by donating books to each classroom library during our school book fairs. Our local newspaper donates newspapers to promote learning and engagement with local events and businesses.

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

Recognition of the learning curve 2020 presented us was given by our professional community. School leaders worked closely with district administration to seek out knowledge for our teachers. At the same time, teachers were encouraged to consider that "less is more." While nearly unheard of prior to 2020, focusing less on academic gain and more on relationships and self-care was promoted at all levels. Our school board also showed support for teacher development when they delayed the start of the school year for students. More professional development was a requirement for teachers to complete work in an ever-evolving COVID pandemic environment. School board, administration, and co-workers rallied to provide time, problem solving, and support to brainstorm and implement student-centered, clear expectations moving forward. Itinerant staff members were available throughout the first semester as administration and faculty navigated the needs of a COVID-19 world.

Formal professional development days occur regularly, including sessions related to the district level, with other subjects determined by individual school needs. At the district level, a task force compiles a list of topics by priority. Representatives from all buildings are present on this taskforce. Much of our professional development has prioritized evaluating, planning and learning about the Kansas Education Systems Accreditation (KESA). We analyzed our student needs in relationship to the 5 R's: relationships, relevance, responsive culture, rigor and results. USD 327 has identified relationships and relevance to be our necessary focus skills. To this end, classroom schedules reflect time for Social Emotional Learning. Our school social worker is a presence in our classroom and professional development planning. An additional staff development day was added to allow staff to adequately collaborate. A Technology and Curriculum Coordinator has been hired to help coordinate and focus teacher collaboration and learning. Research and implementation of structured literacy has begun through district-wide professional development.

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

Shared accountability and leadership are at the heart of our school. Clear communication has led to many successes here at EES. Our principal believes we have the right people in the right position with the right resources to do their jobs. Time is recognized as a valuable commodity. She communicates her expectations in a timely and clear manner while encouraging dialogue for questions or concerns. Communication remains essential during ongoing COVID-19 modifications for faculty, parents and students. Our principal facilitates teams that gather data, monitor student progress and create professional learning communities. EES utilizes two team leaders to facilitate communication and decision making. Our administration cultivates teacher leaders through listening to input, building trusting relationships, and allowing staff to take an active role in decision making.

Academically and socially, our students benefit from the expertise provided by SIT (Student Improvement Team). This is an interdisciplinary team of staff who meet to evaluate the academic, social, and emotional progress of students. Data is gathered by classroom teachers. This group meets and discusses research-based intervention strategies that can be implemented in the general education classroom or by other staff members. Additionally assistance may be provided in Tier II and III intervention settings if the student's data indicates more assistance is needed.

Curriculum adoptions and suggestions are teacher and student centered. Recent changes to our curriculum in math, reading, and science were suggested, piloted, and endorsed by teachers within our district. Our staff was also encouraged to gather information from other districts and visit locations where curriculum was implemented to better evaluate our needs and plans for successful implementation.

Our leadership and community inspire us to be leaders outside the classroom as well. Over 65% of our staff hold leadership positions within our community through church, civic, athletic, and musical opportunities and organizations. Working together both inside and outside of our classrooms strengthens the relationships with each other and the role models we can be for our students.

Goal setting and support for teachers is a necessary part of improvement. We use the McRel (Mid-continental Regional Education Laboratory) teacher evaluation tool. Smoky Hill Educational Service Center also provides our new and mentoring teachers with resources to help support them as we grow in our profession.

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

Norms, beliefs and behaviors of our students which have been passed down from generation to generation are carefully considered perspectives at EES. While we are lucky to often have a generational perspective of some families due to their long-standing presence within our communities, our staff recognizes now more than ever how socio-economic status, racism, family dynamics and achievement vary wildly from family to family and year to year while dramatically affecting the student-teacher dynamic within our classrooms. Students sometimes struggle to relate lesson content to their own backgrounds and experiences. Our administration has refocused expectations on relationships and even encouraged a relaxing of academic strictures to meet the needs of students and families who have been or will be in modified learning environments.

Our school has received relevant training and support to implement the PATHS (Pathways to Alternative Thinking Strategies) curriculum. This curriculum builds from kindergarten to 4th grade and focuses on skills necessary for nurturing the whole child. It also focuses greatly on building relationships with caregivers, staff and classmates. Feeling identification, self-control, empathy, goal-setting and problem solving are tenants of this program. This curriculum has allowed us to assess our student body and focus resources and learning of social emotional skills more effectively. This increase in emotional regulation has also resulted in our maintenance or increase in academic scores.

The challenge of awareness of diversity is being embraced by our staff, especially through literature. Our school librarian and other staff members have cultivated school and classroom libraries which show a broader and deeper cultural awareness than can be gained in person through interactions in our small rural community. Curriculum resources like PATHS, Scholastic News and Storyworks Jr. engage children through literature while also bringing to light timely issues and culturally responsive concerns.



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

---

Ellsworth Elementary has many strategies in place that help make it a successful educational model for both students and staff. Although there are many positive facets to our building that make it run smoothly on a daily basis, communication is the one piece that plays the most important role.

When Ellsworth Elementary closed its doors in March 2020, staff had to plan and act quickly to adapt to online learning to best meet the needs of both students and their families. This required hours of communication between teachers and families to determine what student's home learning environments looked like, what was needed to help students be successful, and how to provide social and emotional support to families.

Internally, teachers had to communicate and collaborate with colleagues on a daily basis. Communication was key for developing innovative ideas for teaching at a distance. Staff gathered regularly for virtual collaboration meetings to create lesson plans, provide support, and share resources with each other.

It was during these meetings that Ellsworth Elementary decided that a universal platform for communicating with families and students would be beneficial. With information and news changing almost daily, keeping families connected and informed became the biggest goal. The staff chose to implement Seesaw as our communication tool. With every classroom using the same platform, families with multiple students were able to stay up to date on information all through one portal. Teachers can easily send out messages, assignments, and information to families with the click of a button.