

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

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

School Mailing Address 320 West Main Street
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Gamaliel State KY Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 42140-8905

County Monroe

Telephone (270) 457-2341 Fax (270) 457-2702

Web site/URL https://www.monroe.kyschools.us/3/home E-mail jessica.mcpherson@monroe.kyschools.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* Mrs. Amy Thompson E-mail amy.thompson@monroe.kyschools.us
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Monroe County School District Tel. (270) 487-5456

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 Dr. William Michael Carter
(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):
- 3 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 1 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 5 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	10	12	22
K	20	30	50
1	24	18	42
2	24	19	43
3	22	10	32
4	22	20	42
5	19	20	39
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	141	129	270

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

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 1 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 0 % Asian
 - 0 % Black or African American
 - 11 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 87 % White
 - 1 % 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: 19%

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

Gamaliel Elementary School students are largely transient. Our student's families move often due to the inability to pay rent or as a result of their parent's changing jobs. Being located on the Tennessee line and close to many schools in surrounding counties, our school constantly has students moving from one school to another and then often times returning back to our school. As a means to combat this barrier, we assess students as soon as they arrive at our school so that we are able to address their needs quickly in small groups or one-on-one interventions.

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	24
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	28
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	52
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	267
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.19
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	19

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

Spanish

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 6 %
15 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 80 %

Total number students who qualify: 216

8. Students receiving special education services: 21 %

57 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>4</u> Autism | <u>1</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>4</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>8</u> Developmental Delay | <u>3</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>32</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>1</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>4</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: 3

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.	14
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.	7
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	2

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 19:1

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	94%	95%	95%	95%	95%
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. 2011

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

We recite our mission statement every morning during announcements. It is, "We will strive to do our best and achieve at the highest possible level."

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.

During the 2020-2021 school year, we have utilized multiple learning modes due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of a high viral incidence rate in our county, we began the school year in August offering only online instruction. As we moved into September, we prepared to begin offering in-person instruction. Parents were given the option to send their children for in-person instruction or for them to participate in virtual learning only. We were able to continue with this structure through October before our high viral incidence rate forced us to move all students back to virtual learning through December. After winter break, we were able to transition back to an in-person learning option. At the moment, we are still offering an in-person option for our students and we currently have 88% of our students attending school.

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

Surrounded by Kentucky's and Tennessee's rolling hills, Gamaliel Elementary is centered in Monroe County's southernmost section. Composed of 270 students, preschool-fifth grade, the school's accomplishments include collaboration with our community and parents to ensure that the educational, social, physical, emotional, cultural, and overall developmental needs of each student are met daily, in a safe, fair environment. Gamaliel Elementary is where "Tigers Roar, and Students Soar!" We desire the time every student spends in our building to be the very best part of their day. Every morning, pupils recite our mission to focus their minds as they begin each day: "We will strive to do our best and achieve at the highest possible level." The recitation serves as a reminder to our educators' commitment to help them reach their goals and push them to forever reach higher.

Since consolidation in 1985, GES has been the heart of the small, rural town of Gamaliel. 323 residents reside in this poverty-stricken town. Community members constantly rally around the school to support its future and guarantee the students are given every possible opportunity to be successful. Our school is thriving, and the community is proud and elated. In 2011 when we were named a Blue Ribbon School, the town held a parade to celebrate our great honor and participated in the school's Blue Ribbon Ceremony. Local newspapers, as well as WBKO News covered the event. For the last ten years, our school has striven to continue to be the Blue Ribbon School we were named in 2011.

Gamaliel Elementary prides itself on our culture. When walking through the doors, you immediately feel welcoming and warmth and are surrounded by an inviting familial atmosphere. Our staff members not only feel like family but also unite to work as a family unit. This team approach allows us to target every single student and pool resources to help them master content.

GES's student population predominately consists of lower socio-economic white students. 80% of Gamaliel Elementary's students qualify for free/reduced lunch. Currently, all students receive free lunch, due to the Community Eligibility Provision that was awarded to our district, because of the high percentage of students (district-wide) that are economically disadvantaged. However, GES does not see our students' poverty as a barrier; instead, we see this as an opportunity to assure that they move to high academic and overall development levels, regardless of external factors. In order to meet our students' academic needs, we must first meet their other needs. Our Family Resource Office, located inside our school, serves students and their families, well over 1,000 times annually. This office has been especially utilized during the pandemic. The Family Resource Coordinator has perpetually reached out to families to offer assistance with clothing, heat, food, school supplies, as well as holidays, such as Christmas and Thanksgiving.

GES offers a rigorous and relevant curriculum that exceeds Kentucky's Academic Standards. In addition to core classes of reading, math, writing, science, and social studies, students attend classes that focus on library media, engineering, computer technology, and art. We offer a variety of extracurriculars such as Junior Beta, Academic team, and the Student Technology Leadership Program. Our after-school program offers a myriad of activities, and serves one-third of our students, providing them with small group instruction, intervention, homework help, and social/emotional support. Program electives include a variety of different enrichment activities, consisting of STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art and math) projects, nutrition, art, physical activities, etcetera.

The faculty and staff of Gamaliel Elementary School employ a variety of research-based best practices in teaching and assessing students. We meet regularly in PLCs to analyze data, discuss student progress, review lesson plans, and learn new instructional strategies. In addition to our school PLCs, we meet in district-level grade teams to share best practices, adjust district pacing guides, and revise mastery exams. Content mastery assessments are given quarterly, to measure individual progress. While administering these assessments through the pandemic has been challenging, teachers have utilized various technological tools to assess and adjust their instruction based on student performance.

Classrooms are equipped with Promethean Boards, document cameras, and microphones. Each student has a Chromebook they keep with them throughout the day and goes home with them during virtual learning.

During virtual learning, teachers post videos and instructional activities on Google Classrooms. Teachers also schedule regular Google Meets with students to maintain relationships, discuss progress, and provide feedback about completed work.

High expectations are at the heart and foundation of every GES faculty member. Gamaliel Elementary earned the highest recognition of five stars in 2019 on the state's assessment system. In 2018, we were named an ESEA Distinguished School based on significantly closing the achievement gap between student groups. Achieving Blue Ribbon status in 2011 only served to accelerate our school's desire to become and remain a high-performing school.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

In March 2020, weekly packets were created for students to complete and return for distance learning. The content provided students' packets that reviewed skills they had already been taught. At this point, online learning was not an option as we lacked enough computers. Before the 2021 school year, Chromebooks were purchased for each student. Teachers participated in professional learning concerning effective use of Google Classroom and other online tools to enhance and assess student learning. Gamaliel Elementary is located in a rural area where internet service is often unreliable/unavailable. This removed the option for live classes. It was decided our best option was for teachers to post daily instructional videos and learning activities. Teachers also communicated with students daily through Google Meets, Google Hangouts, or phone to provide support and intervention. Students struggling with new content were scheduled visits to school for an intervention. Students were assessed weekly on content through Google Forms. Based on data, teachers determined moving to a new concept or if more time was needed to master current content. Pupils without internet access picked up a flash drive each week with instructional videos and lessons. These were returned weekly for review and teachers provided feedback to students via telephone. Since moving to distance learning in March 2020, we have learned more effective ways to present and assess new content.

We offer a rigorous curriculum, which is congruent with the Kentucky Academic Standards. Core instruction revolves around reading, math, writing, social studies, and science. During special area time, students also receive instruction in art, music, library media, engineering, and computer technology. Teachers use specific content documents to pace instruction at all levels. We have worked relentlessly to ensure our curriculum is aligned both vertically and horizontally. Staff members routinely examine our curriculum to ensure rigorous instruction continues.

GES focuses on offering students various content in a diversity of ways based on personal learning style. Our goal is to make every lesson memorable and meaningful. GES incorporates small group instruction into classrooms, where students are grouped according to skill and assessments. Groups are fluid and students can change based on individual needs.

At Gamaliel Elementary, we believe that reading is the fundamental key to success. We strive to embed reading across all curriculum areas. Literacy instruction mandates emphasis on phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, word recognition, comprehension, and fluency. Students in kindergarten, first, and second grades participate in daily literacy blocks that group them based on assessment data. Students are presented with texts that are equivalent to their individual reading level. The goal of small group setting is to have all students reading on level by the end of second grade. In all grade levels, staff supplements instruction using resources such as Saxon Phonics, leveled readers, internet resources, and reading recovery. Lexia and Reading Plus are online, differentiated programs used for students to receive reading practice on specific skills they have not mastered.

In math, the emphasis is on the standard progression outlined in the Kentucky Academic Standards. This focuses on students establishing number sense, number/operations, algebraic thinking, measurement/data, and geometry. Yearly, we participate in professional development opportunities to learn effective ways to teach our students conceptual math. A variety of teaching methods and strategies are used to ensure we are meeting the needs and learning styles of each student. Classes utilize manipulatives, songs, models, and technology. Skills and concepts are applied through independent practice and whole/small group instruction. In our intermediate grade levels, Study Island helps enhance curriculum and student engagement. In primary grade levels, students participate in math block daily which allows small groups for practice and intervention based on formative assessment results.

Students also receive daily instruction in science and social studies. Science lab is attended twice weekly during special area classes by all students, in addition to the science instruction received daily in their classroom. All Science instruction is aligned to the Next Generation Science Standards which utilize the eight science and engineering practices to present science concepts to students. These concepts include

asking questions and defining problems, developing and using models, planning and carrying out investigations, analyzing and interpreting data, using math and computational thinking, constructing an explanation and designing a solution, engaging in an argument stemming from evidence, and obtaining, evaluating, and communicating information. A variety of scientific inquiry methods, hands-on experiences, real-world applications, and experiments are also utilized in these classrooms

In social studies, teachers use the Kentucky Academic Standards for Social Studies to plan their lessons. These standards focus on the inquiry practices of questioning, investigating, using evidence and communicating conclusions about topics in the areas of civics, economics, geography and history. Students engage in authentic learning activities that allow them to make real world connections and apply what they have learned for for each curriculum strand listed above. Some of these authentic activities include role play, self-directed inquiry, and open-ended tasks.

Formative assessments are embedded into our classes daily. Teachers utilize data from assessments to guide and adjust instruction. In addition to daily formative assessments, students complete weekly formative assessments to determine mastery of weekly standards. This helps teachers determine the direction for the following week. At the end of each unit, students complete a summative Content Mastery Assessment created by the grade level teachers in the district. This assessment determines how students are performing on the unit skills providing data on standards that need to be retaught. We also complete the benchmark assessment, MAP (Measure Academic Progress), three times yearly to determine student achievement and growth in the areas of math and reading.

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

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

The preschool program at Gamaliel Elementary School utilizes Scholastic's Big Day curriculum for pre-kindergarten. This research-based program prepares students for kindergarten through hands-on experience, purposeful play, and teacher-led instruction in the areas of literacy, math, science, social studies, social and emotional wellbeing, and physical health. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we have continued to offer instruction for our preschool students through an online platform. During distance learning, teachers posted an instructional video and activity for students to complete four days weekly with their parents. Once our district returned to in-person instruction, our preschool students also had the option to return for in-person learning. The curriculum presented in the Big Day program is fully aligned with kindergarten readiness standards. These lessons are preplanned to include differentiated lessons for gifted students and students who are struggling to master skills. According to the Brigance assessment for the 2020 school year, 63% of kindergarten students were considered to be kindergarten ready. At GES, we strive to impact as many students as possible through our early childhood program. By targeting them before they enter Kindergarten, we believe we are setting them up for a successful educational experience throughout their primary years.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

In addition to our core content areas, students participate in special area classes to provide students the opportunity to be exposed to a variety of other content areas and become well-rounded individuals who will be college or career-ready. We have two staff members who provide instruction in the areas of visual and performing arts, as well as technology, library, music, and engineering to all grade levels on a daily basis. These teachers plan lessons that align to one of these areas each day of the week. In these classes, teachers work diligently to provide students with hands-on activities that are related to real-world experiences. Activities align with the curriculum currently being taught in their core classes.

Students receive physical education daily for at least twenty-five minutes. During this time, students participate in organized games and activities planned by their teachers. The activities include football, basketball, softball, volleyball, relay games, kickball, team building activities, and free play on a fully

furnished playground. When the weather does not permit outdoor recess, classes have access to a full-size gym and a plethora of physical education equipment. At GES, we also receive a fruit grant that encourages healthy eating habits and exposes students to new, nutritional snacks. Students receive a different fruit each afternoon and look forward to the opportunity to try new and different fruits. Once a month, a community partner visits our school to involve students in learning to create new and healthy snacks. Some of the more creative recipes include trail mix, mango salsa, and granola. We believe that educating our students about healthy eating and exercise habits is essential.

Our learning doesn't stop when the school day ends, because our students have the opportunity to stay after school and continue their learning. During our afterschool program, students have the choice to participate in a myriad of activities. These activities perpetually change throughout the year and include curriculum programs such as social and emotional character building, as well as, career and life skills, robotics, drama, art, music, STEAM activities, health and nutrition, homework assistance, tutoring, and physical activities. All students are eligible to participate in the afterschool program at no cost.

During the current pandemic, these same activities have been offered to students via a virtual platform. Special area teachers created lessons and activities for students that were posted in their Google Classrooms and on the school's social media pages. The afterschool program created a Google Classroom in which students could log-on to receive assistance with their virtual assignments and also included daily enrichment activities. Special area teachers organized book clubs and posted activities that aligned with the school's curriculum and would enhance student learning.

3. Academic Supports:

High expectations are at the core of our school's belief system, regardless of a child's socioeconomic status, race, gender, or background. Our emphasis on identifying and addressing individual learning needs and using a variety of researched-based, best teaching practices has enabled our school to achieve at high levels. By providing a rigorous and relevant curriculum, we utilize a vast array of instructional methods to meet the academic, emotional, and social needs of all of our students.

Classroom teachers use surveys, assessments, learning style inventories, interest inventories, and daily formative assessments to determine students' abilities and needs. Our instruction is driven by the use of data to develop lessons and incorporate strategies on a daily basis. By providing data-driven instruction, students are regularly placed in small groups depending on their needs. Our focus on data analysis permits staff to deliver prescriptive instruction while utilizing a plethora of instructional strategies.

Differentiated instruction is delivered in all content areas to all students through the use of small group instruction, task rotations, and learning center activities. Teachers also create content "menus" at the end of units to allow students choice. Students must complete several activities on the menu, but they have flexibility during the culminating event. These types of activities allow us to not only target students who are low achieving but also enrich instruction for students who are high achievers. Seeing student growth, regardless of ability level, is a top priority for the staff members at GES. While it has been a challenge to continue these practices while following social distancing guidelines, our teachers have modified these strategies to be utilized in a virtual platform while still being effective and engaging to students.

Students are also targeted for one-on-one instruction in all grade levels through our Response to Intervention pyramid system that classifies students into tiers based on their content or skill mastery level. Homeroom teachers meet with identified students daily and special area teachers meet with them twice weekly. This intense instruction is personalized to the RTI student.

Special education teachers are streamlined into the classrooms and often co-teach while meeting the needs of identified students. This practice allows students to be mainstreamed into the regular education classroom while still receiving support from a special educator.

Students who are English Language Learners are also mainstreamed very much like special education students. Support is provided to the students by their classroom teachers and an ELL specialist to help them achieve English proficiency. Currently, we have 15 English language learners who continue to make progress each year on the ACCESS (Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State to State) test.

On our most recent test data, the only gap that had 10 or more percentage points between the test scores of all students and the test scores of a subgroup was males, in reading, in only one grade level. To close this gap, we have planned numerous reading initiatives to encourage reading and purchased books that will be of interest to the subgroup. These students are also being targeted in our daily interventions.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

One of our most important goals at Gamaliel Elementary School is to design learning experiences and events for students which encourage a positive learning environment and support their academic and social needs, as well as emotional growth. Various activities are organized each year to encourage and motivate students to meet goals and achieve academic success while increasing their social and emotional health and security with their teachers and classmates. Teachers begin working on relationships with students on the first day of school in order to gain their trust. We know that student-teacher relationships make all the difference when encouraging students to listen, watch and learn in their classroom, and to accomplish the ultimate goal of high academic achievement.

Faculty and staff at Gamaliel Elementary strive to plan engaging classroom and school-wide educational events to promote the retention of important information and skills. One of our best examples is the Amazing Race, which is an annual end of the year event that challenges and reviews our students in math and reading. We also plan monthly Lexia and Reading Plus rewards for students who accomplish their reading goals. These rewards include swimming, slime making, pancake breakfasts, and ice cream sundaes.

Numerous details and adaptations have been used to maintain student engagement during remote learning. During this time, teachers scheduled weekly individual Google Meets with students to provide engaging, fun, and hands-on class lessons and activities. In addition to these weekly individual meets, teachers hosted whole class meets so that students could stay connected with their classmates. These meets include activities such as show and tell, joke time, scavenger hunts, and competitions. The social and emotional well-being of our students depends upon teachers striving to build and maintain relationships, and ours do just that.

During remote learning, we continued to set goals and reward students for achieving them. One example of this is the drive-through hot chocolate and cookies reward that students earned when they met their reading goal. This reward allowed parents to drive their child through the school parking lot where they received their reward from the principal and assistant principal who were dressed as elves. Staff members also delivered and mailed prizes to students who completed their work each week to encourage continued completion and participation in distance learning activities.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Community and family support has been a vital component in helping our school reach its goals. We depend upon their support to aid our school in accomplishing tasks that we could not achieve without their backing. Seldom does the school have to ask the community for help, because they are quick to offer aid before assistance is even requested. This is due to the fact that we regularly communicate with our community partners and constantly keep them informed about things taking place in our school.

Some examples of community assistance are donations of bicycles every semester by the Masonic Lodge. These bikes are given away with the intention to promote good attendance and greater participation in distance learning. Local businesses also donate a plethora of quality items and baked goods for our school's auction during our Fall Festival each year. As a result of their generosity, this is our biggest yearly fundraiser. Snacks are donated monthly by a local church for students and a special monthly treat is also delivered for staff members. Community organizations also donate school supplies at the beginning of the year to ensure our students start the year with everything they need to be successful.

To engage families, we host a Family Literacy Night each year. This is a culminating activity for our One Book, One School initiative where the entire school reads the same book at the same time. Families learn about literacy strategies and different learning styles at several stations, then complete learning activities with their child which relate to the book the school has just completed.

The school has continued to engage parent participation and communication during COVID-19. We have accomplished this by engaging parents in daily conversations about their child's progress and accomplishments via social media, phone conversations, text messaging, and in-person conferences. Through conversations with parents, staff members also informed them of services that were available for their families throughout the pandemic. The school's Family Resource Center has provided food, clothing, personal hygiene supplies, and various other family and student needs throughout this difficult time. Our community partners have continued to offer services to our students throughout the pandemic by providing online video enrichment activities.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

Our school creates an environment where our teachers feel valued and supported using several methods. Each month administrators plan a surprise treat for staff members such as hot chocolate, lemonade, lava cakes, ice cream sundaes, special lunches, ink pens, notepads, and holiday treats. The administration also provides extra planning time for teachers during stressful portions of the school year. Prior to the pandemic, staff outings were part of our culture. As a result of our family-like atmosphere, our staff members enjoy spending time together outside of the school setting. Administrators made home visits to faculty and staff members during the pandemic to deliver treats such as pizzas and yard signs. One of the most important elements that ensure our teachers feel valued and supported is purchasing classroom wants and needs. In our school, administrators are acutely aware of the benefits of teachers feeling appreciated and respected.

During the transition to distance learning, additional support was provided to teachers. Each week a Monday Memo was sent that provided remote learning strategies that could be implemented in online classrooms. Teachers also studied the Distance Learning Playbook by Douglas B. Fisher, John Hattie, and Nancy Frey. Throughout this study, teachers gained an understanding of what works best with distance learning by educating teachers on best practices. These included teacher-student relationships, instructional design, assessments, and grading.

When we transitioned to a hybrid model of learning, a concerted effort was made to protect teacher planning time. Teachers always value planning time, but during the pandemic, it became especially important. This time allowed teachers to create videos and online instructional activities for virtual learners. During this time, they were also able to grade virtual students' work and provide them with feedback.

4. School Leadership:

At Gamaliel Elementary School, our leadership focuses on creating a collaborative environment where all stakeholders are empowered to focus on student achievement. This collaborative approach to the decision-making process fosters personal responsibility for all stakeholders. Our governing body is the School-Based Decision-Making Council, which includes three staff members, two parent representatives, and the principal. The council members are elected annually. The council meets monthly to review assessment data, which drives the decision-making process in regards to the allocation of staff, scheduling, curriculum, and resources.

The administration is also structured collaboratively with the principal and assistant principal. Both take on the roles of instructional leaders and building managers. They meet regularly with staff members to discuss instructional and managerial issues and elicit differing opinions and ideas. They also meet with grade-level teams to disseminate student data, analyze student work samples, instructional strategies, and work collaboratively on various school initiatives. Leadership teams are organized to plan and coordinate annual school events and programs. Both administrators' energetic approach and knowledge of instructional practices foster a passion for learning in both teachers and students.

Communication is integral to effective leadership. Both written and verbal communication is organized by the administration via emails, newsletters, staff meetings, community events, school website, and social media.

The collaborative atmosphere at Gamaliel Elementary School solidifies and transforms our school into a

family. This cultural aspect in our school building is one that the entire staff holds near and dear to our hearts. It also gives us the determination and ability to work collaboratively to help all students reach their highest possible level.

Administrators have worked together to keep the school safe and functioning during the pandemic, by adhering to the Healthy at School guidelines that were provided by the Kentucky Department of Education. These guidelines were outlined and clearly communicated with all staff members before we returned to school for in-person instruction. During the pandemic, administrator roles have somewhat shifted from instructional leaders to managing people and procedures. However, instructional leadership remains at the heart of every decision that impacts student learning.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

At Gamaliel Elementary, we understand meeting the diverse backgrounds of students, families, and staff should be a priority of great magnitude. Intentional efforts are made by everyone to ensure equity, cultural awareness and respect are present throughout our entire school. All students are taught from day one that they are equally important and loved, regardless of background. Teachers ensure that literacy materials throughout the building represent many different cultures, even those that are not represented in our school. With reference to current events, students are exposed to the weekly “News Quiz for Kids” which provides them with information about current events happening in the world around them.

To help students become aware of other cultures, we host an “Around the World” event to educate them on customs and traditions of other nationalities. Students learn about food, holiday traditions, daily life, beliefs, and practices from a variety of countries. During this event, staff and families of students from diverse backgrounds are invited to share their cultures and expound upon their heritage.

GES has a significant number of Hispanic students who often enter our school speaking little English. To support these pupils, our district employs a staff member that intervenes as they strive to become proficient in English. Many of these students move to our school district because there is an abundance of agricultural opportunities for their parents. Upon arriving, school district Migrant Services and Family Resource Services interview families to determine and assist them in acquiring their immediate needs. These often include but are not limited to, housing, furniture, food, clothing, and medical services.

The governing body of our school is our School-Based Decision Making Council. This council is composed of the principal, three staff members, and two-parent representatives. To ensure minority representation on this council, one minority parent and one minority staff member are elected to serve. It is expected that these minority members help the council make decisions based on the needs of all students, including minorities. To assist faculty and staff in creating a more culturally responsive classroom, a team of staff members participated in Implicit Bias Training to help them become aware of any biases or stereotypes that they may have subconsciously developed. This team presented information gained to the entire staff. At GES, our goal is to guarantee all students, families, and staff members are supported and culturally well rounded.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

The practice that has been most, extremely instrumental to Gamaliel Elementary's continued success to educate and support students during the pandemic school closures, is the very intentional maintenance of strong relationships with students and their families. Whether it be parents, grandparents, foster parents, or legal guardians, we have targeted every family to strengthen our communication and rapport. Nothing fosters learning relationships like open, constant communication between the school and its families.

When first transitioning to remote learning, we knew that communication and maintaining relationships with our families would be the KEY to success. Staff members made multiple contacts each week with parents via phone calls, text messages, and social media. Due to the lack of student access to technology, paper packets were prepared and distributed each week. During this time, regularly communicating with parents was the only avenue to stay in contact with our students, to determine if they needed assistance or support.

Moving into the 2020-21 school year, students were all provided with a school computer. In addition to continuing our contacts with parents, this allowed us to have direct interactions with our students. Teachers began using Google Hangouts to directly communicate and provide feedback to students as they were completing and submitting assignments. In addition to Google Hangouts, parents could schedule weekly individual Google Meets for their child to receive one-on-one instruction from their teacher on specific skills and standards. These measures resulted in teachers gathering more reliable data on what students knew and were able to do. Students who still did not have access to the internet were provided with weekly flash drives and teachers communicated with them on a weekly basis to provide feedback to parents and students about the work submitted.

At the very core of everything we do at Gamaliel Elementary, is relationships between all stakeholders, as well as a love for all the children that attend our school. Without strong relationships with parents, especially during the pandemic, student engagement would not be possible. We strive to connect, even during non-pandemic times with our students and parents, therefore it was obvious that this was the route to take during the COVID-19 epidemic, in order to maintain successful learning. Not only do students benefit from these relationships, but teachers also benefit. But most importantly, the relationships between faculty members and parents form a collaborative effort to ensure students succeed academically, socially, and emotionally, regardless of their circumstances.