

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

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

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

Official School Name Gretna No. 2 Academy for Advanced Studies
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 701 Amelia Street
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Gretna State LA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 70053-5411

County Jefferson

Telephone (504) 366-3582 Fax (504) 364-1268

Web site/URL https://www.jpschools.org/gretna2 E-mail Sandra.Newsham@jpschools.org

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

Date _____

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent* Dr. James Gray E-mail james.gray@jpschools.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Jefferson School District Tel. (504) 349-7600

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

Date _____

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board President/Chairperson Mr. Chad Nugent
(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.)

- Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
 - 53 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 10 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 14 High schools
 - 3 K-12 schools

80 TOTAL

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

- 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

- 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	13	26	39
K	24	28	52
1	30	22	52
2	17	35	52
3	25	26	51
4	33	26	59
5	24	34	58
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	166	197	363

*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):
- 0.8 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 19.5 % Asian
 - 34 % Black or African American
 - 4.7 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 41 % White
 - 0 % 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: 3%

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

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

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	5
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	6
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	11
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	361
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.03
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	3

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

Vietnamese, Spanish, Chinese, Arabic

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 1 %
2 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 100 %

Total number students who qualify: 363

8. Students receiving special education services: 7 %

27 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>3</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>2</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>2</u> Developmental Delay | <u>0</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>20</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.

	Number of Staff
Administrators	1
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.	8
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	3
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	2

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

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

Required Information	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016
Daily student attendance	98%	97%	97%	98%	98%
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. 2012

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

Gretna No. 2 Academy, with family and community, will explore, develop, and enhance individual gifts, talents, and strengths of our students through engaging and challenging activities so they can become life-long learners with character and integrity.

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, Gretna No. 2 Academy has offered traditional and virtual learning concurrently. Our virtual students log in every morning via Google Meet, and classes begin at 7:20 am. During the day, teaching and learning occur synchronously and asynchronously, depending on the grade level and activity. Virtual learners have been allowed to return to the campus at the end of each quarter, and in-person learners have been allowed to join our virtual program at any time during the year.

17. **For public schools only**, if the school is a magnet, charter, or choice school, explain how students are chosen to attend.

The Advanced Study Academies are designed to expose the most highly capable students to a challenging, rigorous, and accelerated curriculum. An application must be submitted to the district office. Next, the students are admitted into the screening phase where previous report cards and test scores are analyzed. If the students meet the screening phase criteria, they advance to the testing phase. Then, students take a standardized test, and scores are ranked in descending order from the 99th percentile. Students scoring at or above the 85th percentile are invited to attend in ranked order, depending on the number of available seats. Once all seats have been filled in each grade level, all remaining eligible students are placed on a waiting list in rank order.

PART III - SUMMARY

Gretna No. 2 Academy for Advanced Studies is a small, family-oriented pre-K through 5th-grade school for high achieving students on the westbank of Jefferson Parish. Our students must meet the rigorous requirements for admission established by the Jefferson Parish Schools Compliance Department, and the majority of our students remain in the Advanced Academy Program through high school.

Located in the heart of Gretna, Louisiana, our diverse population reflects the community and consists of students from a variety of cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. In addition, we have students that have been identified to receive a variety of individualized educational services, including gifted and talented, art, theater, other health impairments, and speech. We also have students with autism who spend the day in the regular education setting and have far surpassed their educational goals.

One of our greatest strengths is the nurturing environment that exists at Gretna No. 2. We have a high degree of parental involvement, which is evident in every facet of our school. The combined efforts of our Dads' Club and parent teacher organization provide opportunities and enrichment for our students that they might not otherwise have. Funds derived from our major events -- Gretna Jubilee, City Park Night, and Run for the Arts -- are dedicated to the advancement of technology, professional development, and cultural events at our school.

Since 2010, we have maintained an "A" rating from the Louisiana Department of Education, which assigns a letter grade annually to all schools based on student performance on the Louisiana Education Assessment Program 2025 (LEAP 2025), the state's standardized assessment. Due to the impact of COVID-19, LEAP 2025 testing was canceled in the 2019-2020 school year; however, we still proudly hold our "A" status.

We employ a plethora of strategies to meet the diverse needs of our student population. In an effort to educate the whole child, we provide programs and initiatives that focus on students' academic, emotional, physical, social, and cultural growth. For example, we provide a broad range of advanced-level enrichment experiences for first through fifth-grade students that focus on student interests. Also, our students serve on a Gator Student Council in which representatives focus on community service projects that help build character and develop a sense of citizenship. Our physical education teachers use the Coordinated Approach to Child Health (CATCH) Program to develop students' academic, physical, nutritional, and emotional well-being. Our counselor meets with students monthly to help them develop interpersonal skills, respect for self and others, and resolve conflicts. We also celebrate the various cultures represented in our school by using an inclusive approach when choosing materials and activities and recognizing major cultural events.

At Gretna No. 2, we use student work to drive our instruction. Our teachers employ a variety of summative and formative assessments to identify student achievement levels and determine areas in need of extension or remediation. Throughout the year, our teachers meet with the principal to analyze test data, identify trends in student performance, and develop actionable next steps. If students display deficiencies, they are assigned to "Data Gator Groups" that provide small group interventions that focus on previously taught skills. Students are able to move in and out of these groups based on their weekly performance. We are particularly proud of this process as it has allowed us to closely monitor student performance and take actions necessary to close achievement gaps.

With the onset of COVID-19 in 2020, our teachers were expected to become technological aficionados almost overnight. Since then, they have risen to the challenge by working collaboratively to learn new programs, troubleshoot problems, and provide engaging lessons to both in-person and virtual students. Our parents are also learning new technological skills in order to better assist their children at home. We have a 1:1 computer student ratio, and all of our students use technology daily. This requires a growth mindset on the part of all stakeholders, and we are fortunate that this has been the norm at Gretna No. 2.

Gretna No. 2 was honored as a National Blue Ribbon Schools Program School of Excellence in 2012. Our current nomination shows the dedication of our stakeholders to maintain the highest level of academic excellence. Since receiving the National Blue Ribbon Award, we have been able to attract more highly

qualified teachers from a variety of backgrounds with minimal teacher and staff turnover. This enables us to foster a family-type atmosphere where every teacher knows every student by name. Last year, our student mobility rate was 3%, and most students remain with us from pre-K through fifth grade.

Gretna No. 2 is ranked among the state's highest performing schools. With our stellar faculty, all-star students, supportive parents, and dedicated principal, we have been able to explore, develop, and enhance individual gifts, talents, and strengths of our students through engaging and challenging activities so they can become life-long learners with character and integrity.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

At Gretna No. 2, in-person and virtual students in pre-K through fifth grade receive instruction simultaneously through Google Meet, and they utilize Google Classroom as a hub for all class materials and assignments. These virtual classrooms are organized to provide our families with a consistent format across all grade levels and subject areas while allowing teachers the flexibility to incorporate additional instructional materials and activities, as needed. Our teachers use a variety of online tools to engage our students such as Nearpod, PearDeck, and GimKit. All paper-based assessments are uploaded to Google Classroom to provide our virtual students with access to the documents. This year, we have incorporated more online assessments using programs such as Google Forms, Edulastic, and Illuminate.

Although our curricula are mandated by the district, we adapt the material in order to meet the needs of our students. Eureka is our core math curriculum, and teachers supplement the material by assigning lessons on Zearn and iReady, two online learning sites, to accommodate various learning styles and address learning gaps. All Eureka materials have been uploaded to Google Classrooms, and students are able to use online document annotation tools to complete their assignments.

In English/language arts, all students receive instruction in advanced English/language arts standards. Pre-K through first-grade teachers use Amplify’s Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) curriculum which focuses on phonics skills, reading skills, and background knowledge. In second through fifth grade, students use Learnzillion Guidebooks that connect students with engaging books across multiple genres. The program integrates reading, writing, speaking/listening, and language skills. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, our teachers have modified the number of students and the amount of time spent in small groups. This forces us to plan more effectively.

Our social studies curriculum allows students to analyze primary and secondary sources in order to develop a deeper understanding of the content and concepts. Our teachers act as facilitators by providing students with opportunities to discuss various topics, share resources, and interpret documents with both virtual and in-person classmates. Students further delve into the content through various types of writing which help push their thinking and help them make connections across time periods and continents. In addition, students are able to make cross-curricular connections in ELA by reading various novels and informational texts.

The primary science curriculum is StemScopes, which also includes a technology component. Our teachers work to provide hands-on experiences for students so they can learn through experimentation and demonstration, while also developing their content vocabulary knowledge through real-world experiences. Materials are made available to virtual students so they can participate in these experiments at home. During demonstrations, teachers share their carefully positioned screens with virtual students to keep them engaged. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, we have been forced to exclude several experiments, but our teachers have shared videos that demonstrate the concepts.

In an effort to provide enrichment across the curriculum, we offer two enrichment clusters to our students annually. These clusters are based on Renzulli’s Schoolwide Enrichment Model, which is used to develop the strengths and talents of all students. This program is used to challenge and engage academically talented students. At the beginning of each semester, all students attend an enrichment fair where they watch a presentation of all enrichment clusters that are being offered. Students are able to select topics to study in-depth. Every effort is made to assign students to their class of choice. Students are then separated into small groups based on their interest selections, and they receive sixty to ninety minutes of enrichment weekly.

Enrichment topics include: More Than Money, (finance and running a small business), African Art, Sign Language, The Green Team (recycling), Greek Mythology, World War II, Cajun and Creole Cooking, Robotics, and CSI.

This year, we are maintaining static groups, so teachers incorporate some of these lessons into their science and social studies classes. For example, More Than Money is taught as a part of economics, and recycling is

a schoolwide initiative that is taught during science.

We provide our students with a variety of formative and summative assessments in order to analyze and improve student and school performance. Our teachers use formative assessments to identify students' strengths and weaknesses, provide remedial and extension activities, provide immediate academic feedback, make lesson adjustments, and target areas in need of refinement. Some examples of our formative assessments include exit tickets, white board activities, Think, Pair, Share activities, student response signaling, learning walks, Four Corners, and teacher-created quizzes. Summative assessments are administered at the end of major units, and district benchmarks are given quarterly. This helps our teachers determine if students have mastered the content that will be covered on the end of year state assessment and identify if further interventions are needed. We also use summative data to identify trends in student performance and identify actionable next steps.

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 Early Learning and Development Standards of Louisiana provide a high-quality, developmentally appropriate early childhood education organized into five developmental domains. Each domain identifies fundamental knowledge, learning, and skills for school readiness and long-term accomplishments. For example, approaches to learning include behaviors that show students how to acquire knowledge and relate past learning to new experiences. In math, students gain knowledge of mathematical concepts and skills through hands-on and play-based learning. Science lessons allow students to make inferences, become higher-level thinkers, and explore science across content areas. In social studies, students are provided with opportunities to recognize concepts related to immediate experiences. Language and literacy development provide our students with rich language and the literacy experiences needed to communicate effectively and develop reading foundations. The integration of creative arts affords students opportunities to express themselves daily through performing and visual arts. Physical well-being and motor development consist of students developing fine/gross motor skills and making healthy choices. Social-emotional development includes self-regulation, respect for others, and interpersonal relationships to respect themselves and individual differences.

Efforts to support students and adapt to COVID-19 health and safety protocols include wearing masks, frequently washing hands, taking temperatures, sanitizing classrooms, eating meals in classrooms, and assigned restroom breaks for classes. In the classroom, a static family (same student groups) is the modified setting for pre-K student engagement. Pre-K teachers maintain daily communication with parents by providing detailed lesson plans, conferencing, online learning activities, resources, and downloadable materials.

Cross-curriculum collaboration is provided for pre-K through third-grade teachers. These stakeholders establish measurable academic benchmarks and hold themselves accountable for achieving the benchmarks. A comparison of school benchmark data from 2018 to 2020, revealed the kindergarten students who participated in our pre-K program displayed a greater degree of readiness and success than those who attended other programs or had no preschool exposure.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Gretna No. 2 Academy incorporates the Louisiana Arts Content Standards and the National Arts Standards in both visual arts and theater arts. We adhere to the philosophy that the arts reinforce and strengthen students' academic skills. Students with individualized education plans attend class once or twice a week. The art and drama teachers also provide opportunities for other students to showcase their talents. For example, teachers select random students to work with the drama teacher on schoolwide presentations throughout the year, and the art teacher selects students to participate in a variety of art projects, such as "Welcome Back to School" banners, bulletin board art, and other schoolwide initiatives. These activities

also allow the art and drama teachers to identify potential candidates for their programs.

Our physical education curriculum provides students with the opportunity to gain information, develop motor skills, display sportsmanship, and improve their overall fitness daily. In 2018, we adopted the CATCH program, which develops students' physical, nutritional, academic, and emotional health. The CATCH program also focuses on non-elimination games and keeping students active at least 50% of their time in P.E. The content offered by the CATCH program requires few COVID-related modifications. For example, our students were able to learn the basic steps in square dancing without person-to-person contact.

From August 2008 until May 2020, our full-time Spanish teacher provided instruction to all students. Due to districtwide budget cuts, the position has been eliminated, but we are actively lobbying to have the program restored in the near future.

At Gretna No. 2, various forms of technology are utilized across the curriculum daily, and through fundraising efforts and district initiatives, we have acquired a 1:1 student-to-computer ratio. In addition, every classroom is equipped with a Promethean Board and document camera for use by teachers and students. The school is staffed with a full-time library media specialist who serves as a catalyst for the integration of technology into all curricular areas. Our librarian also supports classroom reading instruction and reading for personal/academic success. Each week, students in pre-K through fifth grade attend a 45-minute library class where they learn about internet safety, research skills, and a variety of other topics across content areas. Due to this year's COVID-19 restrictions, our librarian visited each classroom weekly to provide library services. Since students are unable to check out books, our librarian created a Google Classroom that provides a variety of online resources. For example, links to digital texts, educational websites, and electronic reference materials are posted for students and staff to access.

A high-quality comprehensive school counseling program is implemented by the school counselor through monthly classroom guidance lessons and individual/small group sessions. Second Steps, a research-based program, is also incorporated into the guidance curriculum. It promotes a holistic approach to building supportive communities for every child through social-emotional learning. The school counselor engages students in Pre-K through 5th grade in lessons that help all students become effective learners, build self-confidence, develop interpersonal skills, respect self and others, resolve conflicts, and make positive choices.

3. Academic Supports:

At Gretna No. 2, we have mastered the art of tailoring instruction, interventions, and assessments to meet the diverse and individual needs of our students. Since we focus on advanced grade-level standards in English/language arts and set rigorous expectations in each of the other core subjects, some students may occasionally find it difficult to navigate the challenging content. Therefore, teachers analyze student work weekly to identify learners in need of interventions, typically, those scoring in the bottom 20%, in order to close the achievement gap. Those students are assigned to "Data Gator Groups" where they receive varied, small group interventions that focus on previously taught skills. After the skill is mastered, our teachers review recent assessments, classwork, and anecdotal notes to determine if students may exit the group or if they would benefit from additional remediation in other areas.

We also provide grade recovery opportunities for our students in first through fifth grades who score a "D" or "F" on a summative (major) assessment. Those students are required to complete test corrections and any additional related assignments provided by their teachers, participate in a mini reteach of the tested skills/content, and retake the assessment. Upon completion, teachers average the two test grades, and students receive a new grade that is not to exceed 75%, which is a "C."

For students who consistently score above average and outperform expectations, teachers use

inquiry-based instruction to provide students with differentiated extension activities that allow them to develop solutions to real-world problems. For example, fourth-grade math enrichment activities include using math strategies to design dream homes and plan vacations. In addition, our gifted resource classes provide students with enrichment that meets their unique academic, social, and emotional needs. Our gifted students, who attend resource classes once or twice a week during their P.E. time, learn and apply creative and critical thinking skills while strengthening their problem-solving abilities. Students complete projects and mini-lessons based on their interests, culminating in independent project units which follow Renzulli's Enrichment Model. For example, students complete KWL questions before the start of their independent project units. By the end of the unit, the KWL questions are answered, and students then complete a product to show what they learned to their fellow students and their teacher.

We have a small population of students with autism, who are fully included and thriving in the regular education setting. Our teachers incorporate a variety of auditory and visual supports into their lessons. For example, students are provided with math manipulatives and other tactile objects to enhance their learning experience. If needed or requested by the students, small group instruction is provided. They are also provided with flexible seating and given brain breaks when needed.

Since we are an Advanced Academy, our English Language Learners (ELL) usually have a good grasp of the English language and exit the program after one-two years. While participating in the program, our teachers develop lessons that are focused on grade-appropriate content, including a daily language objective aligned with the language domains: speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

The activities, practices, and procedures at Gretna No. 2 have always supported our belief that it is our responsibility to provide all students with a well-rounded education in a positive learning environment that supports their academic, social, and emotional growth. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, we were compelled to make some adaptations in order to provide our students with as much of the Gretna No. 2 experience as possible.

When teaching and learning went virtual in March 2020, our teachers maintained rigorous academic expectations for all students. Teachers tweaked their daily agendas to incorporate time for small group instruction, modified lesson plans, and met with our principal and colleagues to discuss what online learning should look like. Our teachers, who occasionally performed virtual wellness check-ins with individual students, also scheduled time for students to simply chat with one another and reconnect with their peers.

This school year, our teachers plan for academic success by incorporating as many traditional activities as possible, including our Gator Book Swap, Black History Essay Contest, 100th Day of School Celebration, Mardi Gras Floats representing science themes, and Chinese New Year Celebration to name a few.

However, some of our activities had to be modified. For example, our fourth graders visit a local bowling alley annually to experience real-world examples of energy transfer; however, the lesson was successfully modified to create mini bowling lanes in our courtyard. We also adjusted Pi Day where students work in groups with pies to cut across the diameter to determine the relationship with the circumference. This year, students worked independently with individual-sized pies in order to determine the same relationship.

Another big attraction at Gretna No. 2 is our annual Fall Festival where students play a variety of carnival-type games, enjoy snacks, and socialize with their peers. This year, our teachers created mini Fall Festivals in their classrooms where students played more sedentary games like Bingo, listened to music, ate snacks, and socialized.

The social and emotional well-being of our students is equally important to us, so individual teachers plan behavioral, attendance, and character-building incentives, such as pizza parties, treasure walks, Gator Ticket giveaways, and daily brain breaks. Schoolwide incentives include motivational treats purchased by our PTO, Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) rewards, names on the “Caught Ya’ Doing Something Good” bulletin board, and weekly Gator Ticket pulls. Our school counselor meets with the students monthly to discuss various topics, including character traits, feelings, and good decision-making.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

The Gretna No. 2 faculty and staff understand the positive impact family and community engagement has on our school. Therefore, we have always provided our parents and members of the community with opportunities to actively participate in the growth of our school, and community members have often reached out to support schoolwide initiatives. Typically, we schedule and publicize a variety of events that bring the community to Gretna No. 2, including Dads’ Club and PTO meetings, guest speakers, plays and cultural arts performances, art and theater enrichment projects, picnics, LEAP Night, Field Day, etc. Our Dads’ Club and PTO host an annual fundraiser known as the Gretna Jubilee where ticket-holders are treated to an evening of music, dancing, and food donated by local vendors. Also, an auction is held featuring class art projects and gift baskets filled with donations from parents and local businesses. As a result of this event, we have been able to purchase Promethean Boards and laptops that are used on a daily basis. Twice a year, our dads visit the campus to complete a “Honey Do” list of projects for the teachers, and our moms are always available to assist with a variety of projects and tasks.

Due to district mandates, we have been forced to postpone or modify most of this year’s events and identify creative ways to engage our stakeholders while keeping our students and staff as safe as possible.

Technology has played an integral part in our community outreach efforts. Prior to the start of the school year, we sent an inspirational video featuring the staff of Gretna No. 2 to our students and parents via email.

In addition to sending a variety of other communications to our stakeholders via email and text, our PTO president facilitates a Gretna No. 2 Facebook page where she highlights school-related events. Teachers communicate with parents via Google Classroom, email, and text messaging. Also, we use various platforms to hold virtual meetings with parents such as our Back to School Event and report card conferences, and the monthly Dads' Club meetings are held online. Neighbors email the principal and/or plant manager regarding the status of the campus after storms. The school has partnered with a local uniform shop to provide discounted items to families impacted by COVID-19, and – on two occasions – the Westbank Kiwanis Club has sent donuts to the teachers as a show of gratitude for their dedication.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

Jefferson Parish Schools has adopted the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) model in which educators focus on ways to reinforce and refine designing and planning, environment, and instruction in order to increase student achievement. Our teachers are expected to reserve Wednesday planning periods to meet with our principal and participate in a variety of activities, including analyzing student data, developing action plans, and learning and/or reviewing instructional strategies. This is a beneficial practice because it allows us to focus on best practices that increase student achievement and eliminate actions that hinder student learning. After analyzing student data, we are able to make adjustments to our best practices and measure the impact on student learning. This cycle is repeated throughout the school year, and we understand that it is essential to the growth of our school.

At Gretna No. 2, a growth mindset is essential to enhancing teacher and student performance; therefore, we believe it is never too late to learn and grow professionally. Since everyone on our faculty has something important to offer, we have developed an environment in which we recognize each other's strengths and successes. Also, we have worked hard to develop an atmosphere where sharing and collaboration are valued in order to build the capacity of the entire staff. For example, when COVID-19 required teachers to transition from traditional to virtual learning, we were forced to quickly learn about various technological advancements that would enable us to continue providing our students with a top-notch education. We still met weekly via various online platforms to analyze student work, identify needs, and share success strategies in various virtual learning modalities. In addition, our school counselor met with us virtually to discuss the emotional and mental impact of the pandemic, offer her services, and share a variety of resources.

Teachers and other professional staff members are highly encouraged by the principal to participate in district-sponsored meetings and outside activities that will allow them to hone their skills. Participation also extends beyond content-specific events as our teachers seek opportunities to expand their areas of expertise and share their newly acquired knowledge with students and colleagues. For example, it is common to see teachers meeting after school in small groups or with the principal to elicit and share a variety of ideas. These types of informal gatherings not only broaden our views but also strengthen our collegial bond.

4. School Leadership:

Gretna No. 2 has welcomed only its third administrator since the school's inception in 2006. Our principal has embraced her role as school leader and is dedicated to maintaining and enhancing the standards of excellence that were established by her predecessors. As the school's only administrator, our principal is responsible for handling all administrative tasks. She does so while cultivating a familial environment where a student-centered approach to learning is combined with effective and efficient communication among all stakeholders.

By focusing on student performance, our principal initiates conversations with teachers that prompt us to evaluate the effectiveness of our policies, programs, and daily actions. She maintains an open-door policy and is always willing to give and receive feedback on whether or not we are meeting the needs of all students. For example, if students fail to meet a benchmark, the teacher and principal devise an action plan to provide students with additional support. Also, our principal reviews various policies and procedures throughout the school year to identify concerns that may need immediate revisions.

Our principal takes a proactive approach to relationship-building among all stakeholders. In an effort to keep everyone informed and ensure our virtual families stay connected, she sends a weekly newsletter – the Gretna Gator Gazette – to all families and staff. She also encourages reciprocal communication between faculty and families. For example, teachers are expected to contact parents with commendations/concerns and engage in meaningful dialogue with virtual and in-person students that will foster a nurturing environment and build a sense of trust. In addition, parents are regularly encouraged to contact faculty and office members with questions or concerns.

In order to combat challenges brought about by COVID-19, our principal spearheaded the development of the Gretna No. 2 Strong Start Plan which outlines our new operating procedures and safety protocols. For example, the principal and assigned staff members take student temperatures daily before they exit their parents' cars, and the principal and school nurse personally call the parents of students that must isolate or quarantine. She also created guidance for our virtual families to ensure the success of our online learners. In a true display of leading by example, our principal has cleaned student restrooms in the absence of custodians and taught a math and science class after the resignation of a teacher due to COVID-related issues. To date, we remain among the public schools with the lowest percentage of COVID-related incidences in Jefferson Parish.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

At Gretna No. 2, we embrace diversity and celebrate the uniqueness of all members of our school family. Each year begins with a focus on developing a positive rapport with all of our families in which two-way communication is key. By getting to know our student population, we are better able to provide for their distinct needs. In addition, we are aware of the lingering effects lack of representation can have on children, so we take an inclusive approach to decorating classrooms, writing assessments, selecting supplementary materials, and recognizing the major cultural events that are celebrated by members of our school family. For example, our lower grade students learned about the history of Chinese New Year and celebrated with a Red Dragon Parade around the school. Our older students participated in a Black History Month essay contest, and the winners were allowed to read their reports to the student body. Also, classroom libraries are filled with books on a variety of Lexile levels with culturally rich content.

We have proudly fostered an environment in which respect is non-negotiable, and all stakeholders are expected to model this behavior at all times – whether in the cafeteria, carpool line, or classroom. Our teachers and staff are encouraged to reflect on their own childhood experiences, personal biases, and parenting beliefs when dealing with our school community. This insight allows us to be mindful of our words and actions as we interact with our colleagues, students, and their families. As a part of PBIS, every teacher posts the four rules of the program in their classroom: Be safe, Be respectful, Be responsible, and Be a problem-solver.

Due to the district's expectation that all schools implement the adopted Tier 1 curricula, we introduce supplementary materials/concepts that complement the existing curricula. For example, fourth-grade students learn about the Declaration of Independence, the branches of government, and the U.S. Constitution, then they participate in a mock presidential election to exercise their right to vote. Also, our teachers have held age-appropriate conversations with students about the impact of COVID-19 on the world. In fifth grade, our students have made connections between the current pandemic and the outbreak of smallpox in the New World. Since many of our families were impacted by COVID-19, information was sent to parents and staff members regarding food banks, health providers, and other community services. In addition, the district operates an emotional support line that is available to all stakeholders.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

At Gretna No. 2, our commitment to teaching with technology has been most instrumental to our school's continued success in educating and supporting our students since March 16, 2020, when COVID-19 forced us to transition from traditional to virtual teaching. Our ability to quickly adjust to the unique demands and somewhat unfamiliar realm of online teaching has allowed the high expectations we have always set for our students to remain the norm. Our faculty worked collaboratively to share information, solve problems, and provide technology training to colleagues. Although most of our teachers had limited knowledge of the technology that soon became a main resource, assignments were immediately posted in Google Classrooms and Zoom meetings were scheduled as substitutes for classrooms.

In April 2020, the district announced a series of professional development sessions on Google Classroom. The goal was to ensure that all teachers were able to create, maintain, and teach their students how to use the platform. Due to the collaborative efforts and self-motivation of our teachers, Gretna No. 2 was ahead of the curve. Our teachers still voluntarily participate in webinars and online groups to keep abreast of technological updates and advancements.

This year, our teachers were tasked with teaching students in person and at home concurrently using Google Meet. Again, we worked together to troubleshoot and brainstorm solutions so there were minimal issues on the first day of school. For example, our teachers alternate between their cell phones and microphones to enhance the audio for virtual learners, use document cameras and Promethean Boards for greater instructional flexibility, and place laptops around the classroom to reach virtual learners with ease. As a result, our students have become more technologically savvy. They are proficiently using Google Suite, taking tests online, employing a variety of extension tools, and troubleshooting technology issues. Our kindergarten students are using the Nearpod platform to engage in peer-teaching and class presentations.

The level of perseverance displayed by our teachers is evidenced by test scores. Our fifth graders, who are the only students to have taken the LEAP 2025 state assessment on which over 95% scored Mastery and above in math and ELA, have continued to receive high marks on the district benchmarks. This year, 95% of these students scored Mastery or above in all content areas on the district tests. While we are pleased with the results, the work is ongoing as we continue to push our students to reach their full potential.