

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

Official School Name Weston Middle School
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 456 Wellesley Street
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Weston State MA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 02493-2631

County Middlesex County

Telephone (781) 786-5600 Fax (781) 786-5609

Web site/URL https://www.westonschools.org/middle/ E-mail gibbonsj@weston.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. Marguerite Connolly E-mail connollym@weston.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Weston Public School District Tel. (781) 786-5210

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. John Henry
(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	0	0	0
K	0	0	0
1	0	0	0
2	0	0	0
3	0	0	0
4	0	0	0
5	0	0	0
6	68	70	138
7	79	67	146
8	97	73	170
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	244	210	454

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

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 18 % Asian
 - 6 % Black or African American
 - 8 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 61 % White
 - 7 % Two or more races
 - 100 % Total**

(Only these seven standard categories should be used to report the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.)

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2019 - 2020 school year: ≤1%

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	3
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	1
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	4
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	487
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	<.01
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	<1

6. Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):
Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Spanish

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 8 %
 Total number students who qualify: 38

8. Students receiving special education services: 18 %

82 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>6</u> Autism	<u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities
<u>0</u> Deafness	<u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment
<u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness	<u>39</u> Other Health Impaired
<u>0</u> Developmental Delay	<u>36</u> Specific Learning Disability
<u>11</u> Emotional Disturbance	<u>12</u> Speech or Language Impairment
<u>2</u> Hearing Impairment	<u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury
<u>1</u> Intellectual Disability	<u>1</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 20

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.	35
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	20
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	16
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	8

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 13:1

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%	98%	96%	97%	97%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

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

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

Post-Secondary Status	
Graduating class size	0
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	0%
Enrolled in a community college	0%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	0%
Joined the military or other public service	0%
Other	0%

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.

Yes No

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award.

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

The Weston Middle School strives for excellence and fosters a community of learners, guiding students toward their optimal intellectual, social, emotional, and physical development.

16. Briefly describe how your school has been operating during the current 2020-2021 school year (e.g., open as usual, online only, a hybrid model, etc.)? If different grade levels in your building operate in different ways, include this. If the school began with one model and switched to another partially through the year, include this as well.

The Weston Middle School began the 2020-2021 school year in a hybrid model. The hybrid model consisted of three cohorts: Cohort A, Cohort B, and a Remote Learning Academy (RLA). Cohort A and B attended school in-person two half days a week each for math, English, social studies, and science, and two remote days for all other subjects, and jointly attended school on Wednesdays remotely as combined A/B cohorts for a four period day, no lunches served. Teachers taught in-person students and remote students separately. The RLA cohort attended school remotely for all subjects and followed the same schedule as our other cohorts. This model lasted from September 2020 to January 2021. From January 2021 to March 22, 2021, our school switched to a new schedule for the A/B cohorts, which had a six period school day using a three day rotation, where all subjects met in-person, some remotely, and the RLA continued following our new schedule. Teachers taught both the in-person students and the simulcast remote students simultaneously. The school day was expanded from 8:30-A.M. to 1:00 P.M., with no lunches served, and some specialty classes were offered from 2:00-3:30 P.M. each day. After March 22, 2021, our school switched to a schedule where both A/B cohorts were combined five days a week from 8:30 A.M. to 1:00 P.M., no lunches served. All instruction was in-person, with allowances for absent students to livestream into classes. The RLA cohort continued following our adjusted schedule remotely. As we progressed through each change to the model, our in-person cohort sizes increased as many students transferred from the RLA to the in-person model. On April 28, 2021, our school day will expand to a full-day/all-in model with lunches, with a smaller cohort still remaining in RLA until

the end of the school year. All of these schedule implementations were a direct result of our school's teamwork, collaboration, and partnership with our community.

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

Weston, Massachusetts is an historic town of intriguing contradictions: both urbane and rural, rich in history and tradition, but also welcoming of innovation. Home to many Boston professionals, it is located a mere 12 miles from Boston, yet is known for its pastoral feel, open space, trails, glens, and forests. The Weston Historical Society, located on one of the oldest roads in the country, sits not too far from the Weston Media Center and the new Weston Arts and Innovation Center. Originally a farming community, its oldest standing home -- a simple farmhouse -- dates from 1695. In contrast, twentieth century middle class homes nestle between nineteenth century estates. Nearby, adolescents snap photos of centuries-old gravestones with the latest smartphones.

Set amidst trees and meadows, but within earshot of the busy traffic of the Mass Pike highway, Weston Middle School (WMS) lies sandwiched between its very own maple sugaring shack and its student-planted garden. Meanwhile, the front of the building is adorned with modern, angular wooden sculptures created by middle school artists, made possible by a grant from the Weston Educational Enrichment Fund Committee known as WEEFC. Composed of parents and community members, this active committee demonstrates how very much the Weston Public Schools lie at the heart of this town of about 12,000. The racial diversity of Weston's historically white and affluent population has risen in recent years, and the town strives to use its leverage to advocate for equity and diversity. It was an early adopter of the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO) program, a voluntary school integration initiative within the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to promote school diversity, close the achievement gap, and overcome racial barriers; it has remained an active advocate and participant in the program since 1967. In 2018, Weston Public Schools hired its first administrator dedicated solely to equity, diversity, inclusion, and equal access initiatives. Weston also hosted a well-attended Black Lives Matter demonstration on the town green in the summer of 2020.

The Weston Middle School is the hub of the community for the middle level student. We offer a well-rounded program that focuses on the whole child, and empowers them to explore, investigate and engage. In 2019, we adopted the Responsive Classroom model and implemented student advisories to complement our weekly grade-level morning meetings. We employ a Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTRSS) model that is flexible and supports students in every classroom, directly focuses on student achievement using current data, and provides interventions, homework clubs, and 1:1 teacher help. Our students have access to Affinity Groups, Peer Tutoring, and Community Service Learning. We are a high performing school that offers robust academics, combined with high quality arts, music, engineering, performing arts, music ensembles, and both interscholastic and intramural opportunities. Students engage in grade-level leadership through student councils and are active members of the Sources of Strength leadership model. We are built as a grade level house system, with each grade level serving as a smaller community of learners within the larger context of the school. Our house system and team structure are essential to our success as a school.

Weston Middle School is a family whose members thrive in the intimacy of our school, where we feel "known." Our close-knit faculty encourages a "literacy of learning" through brokering partnerships between and among students, parents, and each other. We strive for excellence using a collaborative ethos to nurture the optimal intellectual, social, emotional, and physical development of our learners -- and we are all learners. We emphasize learning as a process and respect both individual learning styles and the diverse cultural and family backgrounds of our constituents. Our school works in partnership with our parent community through active relationships with our parent organizations like Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), WEEFC, Creative Arts Council, and an active School Improvement Council.

This past year, our ability to shift our practices to remote learning, continue our team collaboration, and re-invent our instructional models were a direct result of our house system, team structure and active coaching leadership. We demonstrated that we were nimble and able to adjust our approaches to optimize our remote learning platform. As a 1:1 technology school, we were able to design a remote instructional model that bridged the gap between school as we knew it and the new normal for COVID-19 learning. Through careful planning and collaboration, we were able to build a new schedule, establish a remote learning model using Google Classroom, Zoom, and Google Meet to continue our engaging curriculum and instruction. Our grade

level teams continued weekly meetings remotely, to plan and coordinate, always keeping our students at the center of our planning, instruction, and assessment. We focused heavily on the social and emotional well-being of each other and our students as we navigated this very challenging period.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

Weston Middle School's curriculum includes a carefully planned sequence of courses in English language arts, social studies, science technology and engineering, mathematics, world language, physical education, and health. Students have opportunities to take many courses in the fine and performing arts. In addition we offer a variety of intervention courses for students who demonstrate a need for general education support including a directed support program, Topics Math courses, and teacher directed studies.

The WMS English program is designed to enhance each student's reading, writing, and oral skills. They are also specially designed to encourage open and clear communication, and foster reading for comprehension, analysis, and enjoyment. Each course requires homework and student participation in class discussions. In addition, the program is constructed to give students the opportunity to succeed in a wide variety of learning experiences including: writing poetry, short stories, and essays; delivering speeches; and reading literature.

We are continuously expanding representation of diverse voices in our content, and offer choice reading and assessments frequently to encourage greater individualized engagement. Titles include *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*; *The Outsiders*; *Of Mice and Men*; *To Kill a Mockingbird*; *Animal Farm*; *Seedfolks*; and a variety of classic short stories and poems. Dramatic selections include *A Midsummer's Night Dream*; *The Monsters are Due on Maple Street*; Reader's Theatre versions of chapters in mentor texts; and monologues created and performed by students, based on characters' journeys. Students also read self-selected non-fiction, and take part in Choice Reading Circles across genres. We use literary constructs such as the RAFT model, Freytag's Pyramid and The Hero's Journey to help students apprehend structure. Figurative, connotative, and technical language, as well as literary devices, are taught in context. Our assessments include exit tickets, individual conferencing, games, discussion, polling, and traditional tests with open ended questions, as well as performance-based assessments and projects. The Youth Activist Research Project, the Living Themes Project; the Holocaust Project; the Non-Fiction Book Review Presentation Project; Interactive Notebooks; and original short stories, narratives, essays, and memoir are but a few examples. We use AI-assisted feedback on student writing to help differentiate grammar and style instruction, and use a writer's workshop approach for editing and revision.

During Covid, we worked to decrease difficulty while maintaining complexity this year, winnowing down larger projects, and streamlining units. We increased formative assessments to inform differentiated instruction. Teams met regularly to norm expectations for summative assessment grading, discuss outcomes and areas for improvement, and identify students needing additional support.

The WMS math program emphasizes the pattern, structure, and unifying ideas of the discipline. Since we have witnessed tremendous growth in the use of mathematics during the past thirty years, it is virtually impossible to predict all our future mathematical needs. We attempt to provide opportunities for students to achieve the mathematical, statistical, and computer literacy that will be required by tomorrow's society. Acquiring problem-solving skills is a major emphasis of the program.

The eight Mathematical Practice Standards are interwoven throughout daily instruction and can be identified in all daily assignments and activities. Ratios and proportional relationships, the number system, expressions and equations, geometry, statistics and probability, and functions all increase in complexity by grade. A whole-class mini-lesson, followed by small group practice on whiteboard walls, fosters peer discussion and allows the teacher to act as a facilitator in the classroom. Teachers employ the use of manipulatives and project-based learning to link mathematical concepts to real world applications, such as the stock market, sports statistics, and engineering. We see assessments as learning opportunities, and explicitly teach about growth mindset. We use traditional assessments with open response questions added, plus performance-based assessments. Student favorites include *The Alligator Growth Project*, *The Remote Control Car Experiment*, the *Catapult Project*, *Inequality Graphing Tangrams*, and *Mini Math Labs*. To get all students to Algebra I in 8th grade, we condense four years of content into three, allowing all students to accelerate, without tracking them. We value depth of understanding over breadth of exposure.

The addition of technologies such as Desmos helped us accommodate the challenges of Covid school. However, much of our response to pandemic schooling lies not in what we changed, but rather in what we retained. For example, we still stressed the process standards of mathematics, with an emphasis on communication, problem solving, and building mathematical reasoning. We maintained emphasis on making student thinking visible. For example, students took photos of their thought processes recorded on paper and uploaded them to Google Classroom. We continued to give students choice in their assignments and helped them determine which choice provided the appropriate level of productive struggle. Teachers upheld our common assessments and collaborated in grading and error analysis.

The WMS science and technology/engineering program is designed to guide students toward science literacy in our increasingly complex technological world. Our goal is to help students learn to think scientifically in analyzing and evaluating important science-based questions, while at the same time encouraging curiosity and wonder about the details they observe in the world around them. Likewise, through project-based experiences in design, computer-science, and the technological arts, students learn to both understand and to become active creators of the human-made world that surrounds them. The middle school science and technology/engineering curriculum has been revised in accordance with the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), and updates to the Massachusetts Science Frameworks. In place of traditional disciplines, science and technology/engineering is taught in a spiral manner, emphasizing cross-cutting concepts including patterns, systems and system modeling, energy and matter flows, cause and effect, scale, proportion and quantity, structure and function, and evolution.

The Next Generation for Science Standards provide students with continued opportunities to engage in and develop a deeper understanding of Earth and Space, Life, and Physical Sciences. Building on the knowledge and skills gained from each grade, students have multiple opportunities to revisit and expand their understanding of all three dimensions, plus engineering technology and design. We have worked tirelessly over the past several years to roll out the science 6-8 curriculum spiral. Teams have planned collaborative lessons, by grade level and as a department, to engage with diverse content and methodologies. We updated our textbooks to better align with the standards, along with new online tools that support all learners. Our student-centered classrooms embrace science as a living, vibrant, and creative discipline. We utilize the inherently differentiated 7-E model: Elicit, Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, Extend and Evaluate. Labs have accommodative options, while also offering challenge questions for inquisitive students. We incorporate problem-based learning, using technologies such as smartboards, G-Suite, Peardeck, Kahoot, Quizizz, Socrative, Quizlet, and Gimkit. In addition to traditional assessments with open ended questions embedded, we also use performance-based assessments such as The Minion Genetic Project, Create-a-Creature Project, the Windmill Project, the 3-D Cell Project, The Reason for the Seasons Simulation, and the Tectonic Plate Simulation.

In preparation for the pandemic schedule, teachers designed safe lab experiences for both in-person and virtual classrooms. We purchased several new online tools, including Kesler Science and Gizmos, but the beating heart of our efforts was the ingenuity and dedication to inquiry-based science instruction by our science faculty, who were committed to finding success under difficult and uncertain conditions.

History / Social Studies

The WMS history/social studies program is designed to help students acquire the knowledge, judgment, and skills to participate intelligently and responsibly in civic life and continue to learn for themselves. Essential skills of writing expository papers, using library resources and technology, reading maps, interpreting authentic documents and data, preparing research papers, and participating in discussions are taught and reinforced in all courses.

Our texts blend rich resources from Democracy Lab, Facing History and Ourselves, iCivics and more. In alignment with the new Frameworks, we instituted an eighth-grade civics curriculum, including textual analysis of the Constitution; grades six transitioned to a regional/thematic approach to world geography and ancient history, including Western Asia, the Middle East, North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, Central America, the Caribbean Islands, and South America. Grade 7 examines the physical and political geography and ancient societies of South and East Asia, Oceania, and Europe. Project based- and place-based learning

utilize local community connections and resources. From the grade 6 Art and Activism Project, to the 7th Grade Super Civilization Portfolio, to the grade 8 Mock Trials, students are offered choice and voice to show what they have learned. In a typical year, the culminating experience would be a grade 8 trip to Washington, DC, after which students would complete a Reflective Scrapbook.

This year, we balanced common assessments with flexibility to meet distance learning parameters and individual student needs. For example, the Document-Based Questioning (DBQ) Project mini-question writing prompts have worked for all students, with tools such as Jamboard to facilitate at-home learning. These types of assessments are easily differentiated, using textual evidence to analyze, compare, and contrast. Data from these writing prompts is used to inform teacher recommendations for ninth grade history class placements.

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

Our Middle School program directly supports all of our students in future success at the high school level and for college and career readiness. Most of our graduates attend Weston High School; some move on to a private school setting, and some attend a technical high school. Our Weston High School students graduate at a 99% rate, and matriculate to a variety of colleges and universities. Access to high level courses is offered to all in our program of studies through heterogeneous groupings and differentiated curricula. Students participate in service learning projects independently, as part of a class, and through our many clubs and organizations. For example, students created an outdoor classroom as part of the Weston nature trail circuit. Students, faculty, and staff participated in our town-wide Black Lives Matter march last year. A number of our students have explored entrepreneurship opportunities by forming their own businesses, websites, and organizations.

We infuse civic engagement and activism into our courses by relating studies to current events, social justice, and by discussion in advisory meetings. We offer Robotics and Engineering as part of our coursework for all students, which affords them exposure to current research and emerging technologies. Our school year culminates in June with a Project Based Learning (PBL) Program known as J-TERM, where students choose a PBL course based on interest and collaboratively cycle through the PBL process. Our students experience J-TERM three times in their middle school tenure, engaging in real-world and personally meaningful projects. Some examples of our courses are: Global Climate Crisis, To the Moon and Beyond, Calling All Activists, Can You Stop the Outbreak?, Water is Life, and Everyone Has a Story. By engaging in our J-TERM, our students acquire deeper life knowledge through active exploration of real-world challenges and problems. In doing so, they create powerful learning experiences, allowing for transfer and extension as they develop.

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

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Weston Middle School has always prided itself on our feast of artistic curricular choices, offered three to four times weekly, because arts-literate students are process-oriented learners who are aesthetically enriched for life. Visual Arts offerings include Digital Photography, Drawing, Sculpture, and Contemporary Art. Our Drama choices include Drama, Dance, Acting and Improvisation, Musical Theatre, Playreading and Playwriting, Scene Study, and Video Production. Musical electives abound: General Music, Guitar, American Popular Music, Music Theory, Band, Orchestra, Jazz Band, Wildcat Voices, and Chorus. COVID-19 has not stopped us from performing school plays over Zoom, holding Zoom concerts that are edited into beautiful videos, or making art from materials students have at home.

Embodying mindful approaches to mental and physical health education, our Wellness Program grants the knowledge and skills to make good health decisions. We have adopted the Massachusetts Comprehensive Health Curriculum Frameworks' core concepts: health, literacy, health self-management, and health promotion. Our Wellness staff responded to hybrid school with characteristic initiative, such as obtaining a NBRS 2021

grant for snow shoes, so students could trek outside winter long. We even continued our annual Thanksgiving Turkey Trot tradition -- virtually!

Spanish, French, Latin, and Mandarin classes follow the proficiency model reflected in the Massachusetts State Curriculum Frameworks and the National Standards for Education. We believe that awareness of cultural differences and similarities is essential to building the strength of our community. We use interdisciplinary pedagogy for students to learn about their world through language, focusing on communication versus rote memorization. Vocabulary and grammar are taught in context; assessments focus on interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational modes.

Pandemic learning has evolved into more project-based demonstrations of learning. Students can follow instruction online, with slide decks posted to Google Classrooms. Classes usually have a direct instruction component and students have many opportunities to respond, both orally and in the Zoom chat. Technology such as Edpuzzle is used for formative assessments, so we are better able to circle back instructionally when needed.

Sixth graders experience Media Literacy for one quarter. They learn to be virtual upstanders through coursework on digital citizenship, use, and safety. Participants complete a mini-research project of their choice using library databases, digital tools, and citations.

Guidance Seminar helps sixth-graders acclimate socially, emotionally, and academically to transition smoothly into middle school. Weekly advisories for all offer students connection, character building, and current event discussion. Students lead our Sources of Strength program, a suicide-prevention model that increases help-seeking behaviors and promotes connections between peers and caring adults. Our Guidance Counselors work with our Adjustment Counselor and METCO Liaison to care for all students, referring those in need to our COMPASS program for clinical, academic, and/or familial support.

3. Academic Supports:

As a high performing school, we annually meet or exceed our targets. Moreover, we have narrowed achievement gaps with an “all hands on deck” attitude to improve learning for all. For gaps of ten or more percentage points with any of our sub groups, we look at multiple forms of relevant data, using the DataWise approach and working collaboratively through evidence-based analyses. Our instructional coach is involved in this process, and because of our size, can make individualized curricular, technological, and instructional recommendations.

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and Response to Intervention (RTI) begins with differentiated classroom instruction. Amplifying student voice and choice motivates and engages all learners. Choice boards, learning menus, and playlists help meet students where they are, in ways that are personalized for them. Escape rooms, mock trials, simulations, Socratic seminars, student-led discussions, structured improvisation, open-ended questions: these are our default settings. Scaffolds, such as graphic organizers, visuals, and small group instruction, as well as physical activity breaks, help all learners and are commonplace at our school. Frequent student surveys also inform instructional practice.

We emphasize growth over grades. We strive to build assessments driven by state and district learning frameworks through applied, multi-modal questions, as suggested by the work of Grant Wiggins and Jay McTigh. We also get to know our students as people, and then think outside the box to design personalized assessment opportunities. We are currently developing a School-Wide Support (SWS) period to formalize differentiated support within our school day.

We are strong collaborators who advocate for the good of the whole child. Tier two interventions are discussed at weekly meetings, where teachers analyze student work, and look to our District Plan of Accommodations to determine which additional strategies should be implemented. Plans

are documented, effectiveness evaluated, and further interventions selected. Parents are often part of this collaborative problem solving process. Students may be referred to one of our many support structures, or to our Instructional Support Team (IST). English Language Learners (ELL) instructors and Special Education educators are an essential part of these meetings as well.

In our weekly RTI and IST meetings, teachers collaborate on accommodations and interventions to meet all students' needs. They analyze data and consult with specialists, such as our instructional coach, and ELL and Special Education professionals. Students are often referred to Homework Club, Direct Support Program (DSP), Topics Mathematics, Writing Workshop, MCAS "Boot Camp," teacher office hours, and peer tutoring programs. We may connect students to our Adjustment Counselor, or to our Social Skills Groups. They may also be referred for special education or ELL testing, if applicable.

For direct Special Education services, teachers work closely with our special educators to accommodate Individualized Educational Plans (IEP's). Weekly reporting by general education teachers helps caseworkers track and communicate progress to parents. Special Education students may be enrolled in Academic Strategies, Orton-Gillingham, Phonics, and Social Skills classes. Our grade-level school counselors and school adjustment counselor work closely with our assistant principal to support those students in crisis situations, struggling with transitions, or in need of alternative educational approaches. Our COMPASS Program provides safe, structured space and integrated therapeutic and academic support for students faced with medical, mental health, or social-emotional challenges.

Our English Language Learners (ELL) are supported by teachers who collaborate with our instructional coach and our English Language Educators. Teachers work one on one with ELL students before or after the school day proper. Our ELL educators follow a special curriculum in pull-out support blocks. They have also created ongoing professional learning opportunities for teachers in summer workshops, during faculty meetings, and as Professional Learning Community (PLC) work. Additionally, all of our faculty have been trained in Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) courses.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

If the Weston Middle School community is a family, then the school building is our physical home. In our “front yard,” students and our principal planted beautiful flower gardens, complete with a monarch butterfly waystation. Our “dining room” is graced by a wall-hung quilt, made by social studies students and depicting the Tree of Respect. Above our front stairs live the words, “Diversity is learning how to walk in this world together,” a sign painted in one of our community-minded, project-based learning units. Upstairs lives a huge, beautiful mural of diverse students playing together, painted by our students with another artist-in-residence. Flags from every nation abound, and signs everywhere remind us that in our school, we take care of ourselves and our learning, we take care of each other, and we take care of our community.

What you hear when entering our school: laughter. And the faces you see? Smiling. Students are greeted at least once by teachers, staff, principal, or the assistant principal upon arrival. It truly is a welcoming place to be, and the connections are palpable: love lives here. Our school is a place where teaching and learning are joyful and whole-hearted, further bolstered by the use of advisory groups, morning meetings, surveys of student preferences, affinity groups, and special community events such as Unity Day. Our positive environment builds confidence to learn and grow, creating multiple connection points and resulting in many “islands of competence” at WMS. All students can explore multiple interests, as well as a wide variety of sports, activities, and clubs throughout the year.

During COVID-19, our welcoming routines have necessarily grown more innovative. For example, the entire faculty danced in a video to inspire students, along with welcoming webinars and orientation videos. Our assistant principal sends out weekly messages, songs, and stories of success; he is not above dancing about in a turkey costume or elf pajamas to brighten students’ days. And somehow, we were still able to offer many virtual extracurricular activities, such as Community Service, Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA), Debate Club, Math Team, Chess Club, and Asian Affinity Group.

A silver lining of the pandemic is that the disruption of school as we knew it gave us pause to consider how we might better place students at the center of their learning. More students are doing more self-assessment than ever before. We are asking our learners to reflect more, and we are offering them more choice and voice to demonstrate what they know.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Weston Middle School embraces community partnership through an open-door ethos and a free exchange of ideas. For example, our collaborative School Council synthesizes parent and teacher voices relating to the continuous improvement of our school. We host monthly parent coffees, and annually hold a Project Based Learning open house and a Back to School Night. We celebrate METCO with a bi-annual parent potluck meeting and actively participate in our Boston/Weston METCO PTO meetings. We survey parents frequently, work with the parent-funded WEEFC board for mini-grants, have lunches with our PTO, brainstorm with our parent-led Creative Arts Council for community enrichment, and work with parent volunteers to set up our much anticipated annual Art Show. We offer parent educational forums on vaping, cyberbullying, healthy eating habits, and social media. We cherish our long-standing relationship with Land’s Sake, a local organic farm with whom our students can choose to work -- they help collect sap and render maple syrup on our campus, and we help with farm animals and gardens on theirs. We also partner with Weston Media Center, Weston Special Education Parent Advisory, and Weston Boosters.

Parent-teacher conferences occur four times a year, and teacher teams invite parents to additional collaborative problem solving sessions for our students. Both principal and teachers update our daily happenings on our website, Facebook and Instagram feeds, and parents can subscribe to our daily newsletter. Parent volunteers run our school store, provide refreshments for plays, and serve as guest speakers in classrooms. Our Project Based Learning Units provide a unique opportunity for community members to contribute their special skills and knowledge to student learning; our Community Service Club

regularly works with the community to help those in need. Our wonderful school resource officer provides a further interface with our community.

This partnership has expanded through COVID-19 school: our assistant principal sends out weekly updates, usually with funny and inspiring videos; we regularly hold informational webinars with parents; and this year we expanded our annual Turkey Trot to a virtual community event. Teachers report on progress frequently, reaching out to parents regularly to relay updates on student skills as well as grades. Our parent conference format shifted to a virtual one, allowing our parents/guardians to meet successfully together, and discovered that such a format allowed for better accessibility for working parents. Similarly, attendance for all of our parent forums has increased this past year using our virtual format, providing our community access to information in a flexible, accessible manner. Last year, we provided a drive-by parade as our Moving On ceremony for eighth-graders, faculty, and parents. It was such a joyous event that a new tradition was born!

3. Creating Professional Culture:

Our professional development is anchored in best practices to help all middle school community members face the ever-changing global community. An inspirational book that has informed our work is *Learning By Heart*, by Roland Barth, which asserts, “When teachers stop learning, so do their students.” Our faculty is supported to explore ideas, research interests, enroll in workshops and formal coursework, and participate annually in our vibrant Summer Learning Institute. District goals are woven into the fiber of our school’s improvement planning and teachers are encouraged to propose summer workshop ideas that make our school a better place for our students. Professional culture is fostered by encouraging, modeling, facilitating, and guiding. Using the guidance of the book, *Just Start*, teachers are given freedom to “take action, embrace uncertainty, and create the future.” To partner in teachers’ ongoing learning, a building instructional coach works to further differentiate professional development.

Our school embodies the ethos of professional learning communities (PLC). As teams of eclectic educators, we share ideas to enhance our teaching practice and create a learning environment where all students can reach their fullest potential. Across all areas teachers use reflective dialogue, focus on student learning, engage with teacher colleagues, collaborate to address needs, and uphold shared values and norms for all working teams. This occurs at the content team, grade team, department team, and faculty team levels.

Our strong and connected culture is demonstrated in our Faculty Wellness Team and its annual Wellness Auction, our annual Faculty Picnic concluding each school year, and regular monthly social connections for faculty and staff. Our monthly faculty meetings (with rotating breakfasts provided by each department), we begin by sharing “What’s Good?” These meetings conclude with the time-honored tradition of passing the revered “ball” to a person who has gone above and beyond. Finally, teachers give freely to our Sunshine Fund, a donations-based account expressly for supporting and celebrating events in our teachers’ lives. At no time in our history did we face such a challenge when thrust headlong into distance learning and a hybrid model of education on March 11, 2020. We shifted all of this support to a fully virtual format -- including our New Teacher Mentor Program, whose curriculum was placed fully online. We also instituted weekly Teacher Support Zoom Meetings, a collaborative problem-solving forum with a peer-driven agenda. Our focus shifted to how to best support teachers to provide high quality instruction in the hybrid classroom. Our instructional coach, technology integration specialist, administration, and teacher leaders provided mini-courses and development to shift pedagogy to both in-person and virtual formats. Building upon our knowledge from last spring, and responding to the faculty surveys we employed, we designed summer workshops that prepared us for the upcoming year, and extended into the school year at weekly team meetings.

4. School Leadership:

Our school employs a strong model of distributed leadership, organized in a House System of teacher teams that creates smaller communities of learners in our school. Our principal and assistant principal work collaboratively with three grade directors, who lead dynamic teams at each grade level. Cabinet members, School Council members, curriculum department chairs, and active teacher leaders all have ongoing input to

decision-making. A full leadership cabinet composed of administrators, grade directors, school counselors, instructional coach, school nurse and our team chair meets weekly to strategize. Simultaneously, each grade level team works together on a horizontal level, centered around the student. Additionally, the grade-level subject departments work collaboratively led by our secondary curriculum department chairs, focusing on vertical curriculum alignment and articulation. This combination of horizontal and vertical structures contributes to a highly effective leadership, fueled by consensus.

Everyone has the capacity to work as a leader in our community, and empowering students and adults to assume leadership roles to promote learning and well-being has been a focal point of our school. The belief that everyone's ideas are important guides much of our work. We build leadership capacity by encouraging participation in "think tanks" exploring given topics -- for example, Advisory Think Tank provides monthly feedback on previous advisories and offers input on the development of the program. These are open to anyone who wants to contribute their time and ideas. and we have used this format to evolve as we have adjusted to the COVID-19 school requirements. Similarly, we use "implementation teams" as a means for teachers to explore initiatives and further develop planning throughout the school year. For example, we had a Safety Implementation Team to help plan for the return of students to a hybrid model, as well as each schedule change encountered this year.

Other times we might ask a faculty member or student to share a project, idea, or presentation with their peers. By fostering a culture of leadership in this way, a significant by-product is enhancing the well-being of participants. Both adults and students hear the message that "you matter," "your ideas are important," and "by stepping up and leading our learning, you make us better."

Our WMS faculty meetings are opportunities for adult leadership empowerment. We share best practices, and strive for teachers to leave the meeting more energized to lead the learning tomorrow than they were today. Our teacher-led Culturally Responsive Teaching team presents at each faculty meeting, just as our Innovative Learning Team and Differentiated Learning Team have done in the past.

We have worked together to adjust our leadership models in a number of ways during COVID-19 school. All teams established operational and Zoom meeting norms that guide collaborative work together. At the school level, our grade teams met weekly, focusing on students to monitor, communicate, and follow up on progress. At the department level, our curriculum chairs met monthly with their teams to ensure communication, clarity, and implementation standards.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

Weston Middle School has used Facing History, Facing Ourselves training and curricular materials for many years, and has an anti-bias course requirement for all educators. More recently, we instituted Responsive Classroom pedagogy and student advisory meetings. Last year's amplification of racial injustice compelled us to renew our anti-bias activism. In the spring of 2020, three Weston Middle School teachers modeled a courageous conversation about race via Zoom. The resulting video was widely shared with and beyond the Weston school community, and helped spark a district-wide book study of Zaretta Hammond's, *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*.

At monthly meetings, our district's Teaching and Learning Leadership Team discusses the current chapter of the reading, and prepares teachers to lead professional development at school-based faculty meetings. These teacher-leaders help faculty reflect on implicit bias, learn about culturally responsive instructional practices, and focus on student learning outcomes in tangible ways that promote educational equity.

Our instructional coach is also part of another book study, this one focused on *Coaching for Equity* by Elena Aguilar, along with other district coaches. In addition to making equity a focus, our instructional coach also supports middle school teachers in professional goal-setting that

aligns with our district strategic goal of “championing a school community that is committed to cultural competency, trust, and mutual respect.” Our instructional coach is currently collaborating with our district equity advisor to plan a summer professional development workshop around *Grading for Equity*, by Joe Feldman.

So how are these ideas reflected in our school? One of the most important ways is how we communicate high expectations for all students. Consistent messages from both teachers and administrators convey that our students will succeed, based upon genuine respect for students and belief in student capability. This positive perspective extends to our parents and families, who participate in ongoing dialogues on cultural issues. Our active teaching methods are informed by these beliefs, and we design instruction to promote student engagement by requiring that students play an active role in crafting curriculum and developing learning activities. We strive to instruct by facilitating, not just as teachers, but as guides, mediators, and knowledgeable consultants. Instruction is characterized by the use of culturally mediated cognition, culturally appropriate social situations for learning, and culturally responsive images and values. We are still learning how to dismantle institutionalized inequities, and we are committed to lifelong learning in this regard.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

The one most instrumental practice in our continued ability to successfully educate and support students since school closures began last year is this: We have been committed to collaborating in our interdisciplinary teacher teams with the guiding value of knowing and honoring the needs of each student to inform our decision-making. At WMS, our core belief is that every student is known, and therefore ALL of our work, organizational decision-making, instructional models, support systems, culturally responsive teaching, and teaching teams revolve around this essential, embedded component.

Knowing our students is fundamental to every decision we make. Tests scores, student folders, attendance information, progress reports, student work samples, paper and video portfolios, prior-teacher input, student surveys, daily observations, parental feedback, IEP goals, counselor information, 504 plan strategies, school climate data, current performance, teacher hunches: all of this comes together weekly in our collaborative teacher team process meetings led by our grade directors.

A well-designed, organizational team structure to guide all of our work is centered around our students, led by its grade director. Each team serves as a smaller community within the larger context of our school. They review data sources, design interventions, collaborate on effective strategies, and utilize all available support specialists. Teacher teams are the life-blood of our school, and the collective effort to deeply know and care for our students has enabled us to successfully navigate the complex and layered changes thrust upon us last spring.

Throughout the pandemic year, this process continued and blossomed using a virtual format. Routine meeting times were driven by student-centered agendas, guided by an active student progress monitoring system. Weekly, teachers and support staff worked to build bridges between our successful in-person format and our new online circumstances. Whole-hearted, whole-school approaches to the whole-child ensured adequate support for all students, both academically and socio-emotionally.

In order for kids to succeed during a pandemic, they must feel safe, valued and validated. Because we have continued to collaborate weekly, student concerns of any kind have been raised and discussed. Data-informed action plans, follow up, and closure, along with parent enlistment, has taken more time and energy than ever before. We maintained this level of care and support, collectively knowing and respecting students as individual people. Despite the challenges, we continued to put our whole hearts, minds, and souls into doing what we do best to make Weston Middle School a highly effective school for all learners.