

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

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

School Mailing Address 6500 Wydown
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Saint Louis State MO Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 63105-2216

County MO

Telephone (314) 854-6400 Fax (314) 854-6491

Web site/URL https://www.claytonschoools.net/wms E-mail jamiejordan@claytonschoools.net

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. Nisha Patel E-mail nishapatel@claytonschoools.net
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name School District of Clayton Tel. (314) 854-6000

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

Date _____

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board President/Chairperson Mrs. Amy Rubin
(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	108	97	205
7	99	103	202
8	107	114	221
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	314	314	628

*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
 - 11 % Asian
 - 15.5 % Black or African American
 - 4.9 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 59.4 % White
 - 9.2 % 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: 2%

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	12
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	2
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	14
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	628
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.02
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	2

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

Spanish, Mandarin, Korean, Portuguese, Amharic, Arabic, Bosnian, Dutch, Estonian, French, Italian, Persian, Russian, Rundi, Serbian, Turkish, Urdu, Vietnamese

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 11 %

Total number students who qualify: 69

8. Students receiving special education services: 11 %
69 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>8</u> Autism | <u>1</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>23</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay | <u>24</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>5</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>6</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>1</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>1</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 6
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	3
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	32
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	38
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	11
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	10

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 20:1

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	92%	95%	92%	92%	94%
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. 1991

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

At Wydown Middle School we inspire each student to love learning and embrace challenge within a rich and rigorous academic culture.

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.

In the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, all students were learning in synchronous virtual classes. This meant that all classes were taught online at specific times within the school day. In November we switched to a hybrid model where there were two learning options. Students could continue to learn at home in a virtual setting or they could come to school in a responsive learning model. This model in the beginning meant that students were split into two groups. Half of the students went to school in the morning and the other half in the afternoon, five days a week. Starting with the fourth quarter, we switched our schedule again. We continue to give the choice for students to learn at home, however the students that were learning at school went to more typical school day with longer periods of learning, combining the afternoon and morning sessions of students into one class.

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

Wydown Middle School serves 620 students from sixth through eighth grade in the School District of Clayton. Wydown believes in a true middle school philosophy, with eight core teams of teachers (literacy, math, science, and social studies) and a rich variety of elective offerings.

The location of Wydown Middle School helps define our community. While our school district is small, only three square miles, it has a diverse student population and strong sense of community. Wydown serves students who are residents of Clayton, students who participate in a Voluntary Desegregation Program in St. Louis City, students who are from neighboring unaccredited school districts, students whose parents pay a tuition to attend, and students whose parents work in the district. The integration of these groups helps to bring a wide variety of perspectives and talents to our school. Our school sits beside two universities that bring community partnerships to our students. We are also just a few blocks from Forest Park which we use as a learning space in a myriad of ways, including through science expeditions and excursions for creative writing.

Our elective program is more robust than many typical middle schools. We offer classes to sixth through eighth graders in practical arts, world languages, and performing and visual arts. We offer a host of specialty classes: fiber arts, digital arts, musical theater, technical theater, coding, and Project Lead the Way. Finally, our world language program is enhanced by Latin and Chinese offerings, as well as the staples of French and Spanish. One-half of a student's day is spent in elective programming, a uniqueness in which we take great pride. We see our electives as a way to foster creativity and scores of other talents that may not always be nurtured in a "traditional" classroom.

Our academic program, however, is also strong. Our teachers have incredible content knowledge and the drive to create differentiated learning experiences for our students. As much as possible, we seek ways for students' work to be authentic and for them to take ownership of it. For example, this fall, students planned and implemented an interdisciplinary virtual conference about challenges facing the environment. Last year, when COVID kept us at home, under the guidance of their teachers, our eighth grade students created and ran a television station complete with a comedy channel, a talk show about books, and roundtable discussions about political issues. When learning about immigration, our school grounds transform into Ellis Island, as we simulate what entry might have been like. And, each year, the 4H Center on Jekyll Island, Georgia, opens its arms to us. Our eighth graders travel across the country to learn about the impact that changes in the environment have on everything from the beach to the maritime forest. These are a few of many examples of how our teachers work diligently to ensure that learning is meaningful, and that content is centered around our greater responsibility to the world.

This became abundantly clear in the past year when we transitioned through many different learning environments due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the course of one week in March of 2020, teachers moved from in-person instruction to an asynchronous virtual classroom. Teachers pulled together to improve and systematize their use of Google Classroom, shared dozens of tutorials relating to educational technology, hosted practice Zoom sessions for each other, and shared a seemingly endless supply of materials on how to monitor the social and emotional health of our students (from behind screens). That spring, instead of canceling an annual event that has been a longstanding hallmark at Wydown, we decided that "Give Back Night Must Go On." So, we enlisted student-leaders who organized an event for a local non-profit that addresses food insecurity and raised more than \$5,000. All of this, without ever leaving our homes.

In the fall of 2020 we began again with virtual learning but this time it was synchronous. Therefore the instruction pivoted again to how to set up times and have students online for a day, using breakout rooms, Zoom, and other online teacher materials to ensure learning. We pivoted again in November to a hybrid learning model where teachers had three sets of students that they needed to serve, two in-person smaller groups and one group of online students as well. Finally, this spring, we pivoted again where teachers have the majority of their students in-person, but still teaching a class of students online as well. Through our focus on the whole child, and emphasis on the importance of academics, we expect all of our Wydown students will head into high school with a strong knowledge of who they are as learners and of what they

can contribute to the world.

Wydown Middle School has received the Blue Ribbon Award in the past. As Wydown Junior High in 1984-1985 and the last time, as Wydown Middle School in 1990-1991, a point of achievement for our community and true validation of our work. Since that time, Wydown has continued to transform in powerful ways. Most notably, our curriculum is more culturally responsive and our use of technology, more intentional. We appreciate the chance to share with you the ways in which Wydown reaches for excellence, moment to moment, day to day, student to student.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

Wydown Reading/English Language Arts (ELA) teachers challenge and empower students to make a difference in the world through a curriculum that provides a wide range of shared literature experiences and process-oriented writing opportunities. We encourage our readers to ask and explore the answers to philosophical questions through the readings of books, such as *Bamboo People and Speak*, as well as choice-driven independent and book club reading units. Teachers maintained this focus through remote and hybrid learning by learning and using collaborative technology like Google Drive, Pear Deck, Flipgrid, Mote, and Edpuzzle.

We are guided by Missouri Learning Standards, but we are also deeply committed to those crucial aspects of literacy, such as a genuine love of literature. A typical literacy block consists of some combination of the following: direct instruction, conferencing, analysis of mentor texts, cooperative learning groups, formal discussion such as Socratic seminar, peer review, as well as helping students build stamina as readers and as writers.

Wydown’s writers explore important questions, sometimes through a formal essay and other times through a creative, multimodal presentation. Our need to rely heavily on technology this year has led to the discovery of new ways to respond to and to publish student writing. One example would be the use of Padlet as a showcasing tool.

Teachers individually assess students’ mastery of skills and provide them with specific and personalized feedback through both reading and writing conferences. During the COVID pandemic, these conferences took place in Zoom breakout rooms. Generally, students set individualized reading or writing goals following a conference.

Wydown’s Middle School Math Curriculum is designed on the foundation of conceptual understanding and provides learners with a balanced approach to mathematics that includes both pure and applied mathematics. Furthermore, we are committed to using the Standards of Mathematical Practice and Missouri Learning Standards, to ensure students attain not only content mastery, but also the tools to be lifelong learners.

We develop lessons in response to student feedback and progress. Desmos and TI-Nspire technology provide teachers and students with continual open lines of communication throughout the learning process. Teachers use technological tools to post lesson notes, examples and assignments and solutions as a way to provide students and families with continued access to daily instruction.

Committed to empowering students with skills that stretch beyond the walls of a math classroom refine instruction to include flipped learning opportunities, project-based learning experiences, and interdisciplinary projects as means to make math in their world more visible.

In Science students grow into critical thinkers who can transfer knowledge of content, conceptual understandings, and science practices to solve problems in our world. To this end, our science curriculum was designed using the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) and Missouri Learning Standards. Students experience physical, life, and earth science each year.

We use a variety of experiential learning approaches including inquiry, problem-based, and phenomena-based instruction. We believe that the best way to learn science is by doing science, and this philosophy informs the learning experiences we plan and lead. Within this framework, students are regularly asked to represent their models of understanding in multiple modalities including sketches, graphs, verbal, and written expressions.

During the 2020-2021 school year, we have worked to retain the lab and inquiry components that are integral to our science classes at Wydown. We developed a variety of ways to engage students in hands-on labs and in virtual labs. We have sent home materials for at-home labs, such as kits for “egg car”

construction, seeds, and a variety of other curated materials to support distance learning. When physical or in-person labs were impossible, we have used Gizmos virtual labs. We have learned and adopted a variety of programs (ExplainEverything, Educreations, Padlet, EdPuzzle, Google Classroom, PearDeck, and many others) to meet the needs of our students.

As a department, we have established expectations for each grade-level for skills related to writing scientific explanations (CERs) and graphing/data analysis and developed common assessments and rubrics. In general, we use this and other assessment data to identify where students are in their learning progression, and to inform our planning and teaching.

Students learn social studies as part of two larger curricular sequences. This intentional design connects middle school content directly to the elementary and high school experiences. The history of the United States is chronologically organized for grades five through seven with nineteenth century and twentieth century events in sixth and seventh grades, respectively. Eighth grade begins a three year sequence in world history with global civilizations prior to the 1500's.

Learning standards have been locally written as a combination of state and national objectives with increased attention on reading, writing, and critical thinking. Ongoing formative assessments incorporate critical thinking skills and common summative assessments include many projects and essay responses that are integrated into literacy units of study. Teams use assessment data to monitor student growth and differentiate current and future instruction.

For the current pandemic response, modifications have been made to synthesize student outcomes and incorporate software programs, such as Newsela, Pear Deck and Jamboard. Teachers use a wide variety of student-centered instructional approaches, including cooperative learning with Kagan strategies and Socratic seminars. Interdisciplinary problem-based learning units are increasingly being designed; examples include a science unit on the creation of cities in eighth grade, a fully interdisciplinary unit with literacy in seventh grade on the Civil Rights Movement, and Civil War research in sixth grade.

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

The Career and Technical Education (CTE) department (grades 6-12) provides students with hands-on, project-based learning opportunities. In middle school, these courses give students both curricular and extracurricular outlets to apply learning from core classes in the areas of Video Production, Family Consumer Sciences, Engineering, and Computer Science. These courses provide students with exposure to industries in high demand and build students' capacity to problem solve, think critically, work in teams, and build essential skills for college and beyond.

CTE is a unique department in that it brings together information traditionally learned in science, math, art, music, English, history, and technology and focuses on application of those skills as used in various industries. CTE helps our students make curricular connections and experience many different fields in an effort to help them find their passion. Students who have experiences relating to a particular career are able to make more informed decisions for college and beyond.

Our social studies curriculum has provided an increased focus on civics in recent years. In surveying our students, we determined that middle school students want to learn more about being an engaged citizen. They want to be involved with understanding issues and with taking action. Our civics focus is not just about knowing legal "rights and responsibilities" but helping students through proposing real-world applications of these concepts. While we want students to intellectually know their duties as informed citizens, we also want them to exercise their responsibilities within diverse communities.

Finally, student voice and leadership are important to us. While we have many examples, among the richest opportunities that we provide for students is through leadership in our restorative justice program. Students facilitate circle discussions in our building and for elementary school students throughout our district.

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

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

The Wydown community believes that our elective program is essential to the development of the whole child. With our impressive array of elective courses, we give students opportunities to explore open-ended, real-world problems beyond those addressed in core subjects. Our students are encouraged to become creators rather than just consumers of art, music, drama, research, and technology.

In performing arts Wydown also offers daily choir, band, and orchestra to students at all grades. Students have opportunities to participate in multiple groups, both auditioned and non-auditioned, including Jazz Band, Wind Ensemble, and Chamber Orchestra. They also consistently participate in the St. Louis Suburban Music Educators Association's Honor Band, Choir, and Orchestra ensembles. Visual Art is also available daily to students of all grades, including computer graphics, photography, fiber arts, as well as the more traditional forms of art. We strive to help students understand that art and design have a vital role in society and to help them develop an individual sense of aesthetics. The Wydown community believes Theatre, an art of synthesis, is an essential aspect of every child's education, so we offer daily drama classes to students of all grades. It gives them the opportunity to develop empathy, self-esteem, and to explore varied cultural experiences, and universal themes of humankind. With its intricate choreography and impressive set designs, our productions have been likened to professional theatre, with over 100 Wydown students participating in each production both on stage and behind the scenes. And COVID could not stop us. In the spring of 2021, the Wydown Theatre Company produced and presented a virtual production of Disney's Moana Jr.

In addition to classes in the fine arts, we offer an array of courses in practical arts, including Family and Consumer Science classes where students participate in in-class competitions akin to Project Runway and Chopped. Students learn the basics of sewing, cooking, and babysitting, and then move on to more advanced student selected projects. Students also have the opportunity to take a variety of courses in coding, video production, engineering, and robotics. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, these classes adjusted in creating "kits" so all students could complete hands-on learning activities at home.

Participating in daily Physical Education, students of all grades learn to move with competence and confidence. In health, which students have for one quarter each year, we focus on gathering, understanding, analyzing, and acting upon information to improve personal, family, and community well-being. Students research health topics of interest and write letters to companies and legislators to advocate for Beyond class. Our teachers create "Toilet Talks" (posted in our bathroom stalls) about such topics as safe dating and the dangers of vaping.

World Language classes, which are offered daily to students of all grades, help students make cultural, historical, and interpersonal connections. At Wydown, we offer French, Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, and Latin. We work to ensure that students are prepared for a global world in which they learn to respect differences among cultures. Middle school language learners at Wydown gain firsthand knowledge through various field experiences to Ecuador and Quebec.

The Wydown Information Commons helps teachers and students integrate technology and information literacy into their coursework. The professionals in our library media and technology department work with teachers and students to learn new technology systems and applications, and to understand and evaluate the many uses of technology, media, and information in our world. During our pandemic, the library pivoted to a curbside process to ensure all students had access to books.

3. Academic Supports:

Wydown Middle school offers a variety of differentiated support to meet every child where they are and then to move them forward in a positive environment. We offer co-taught math classes that have two math content teachers to help with individualized instruction, alleviating the need for students to learn in an alternate environment. Next year, we will be offering a new literacy lab class

for students who want or need more time for a reading/writing workshop. We also offer a learning center class, both during the school day and after school, for students who benefit from additional support with their executive function skills. Beyond their work in the classroom, our teachers provide exceptional support to students and families based on need. This includes individualized planner checks, team meetings and one-one-one tutoring sessions. We are deeply committed to making school a place where all students excel.

Gifted specialists support classroom teachers in differentiating by increasing the depth and complexity of content for those students who need additional challenges. Together, they help students build advanced critical thinking, creativity, and authentic projects. With a focus on the whole child, they also provide strategies to help students find comfort with ambiguity and with failure.

Students with exceptional math abilities enroll in extensions class, moving through content faster and/or with greater depth. A district-wide acceleration process allows students who demonstrate higher-level skills to be moved to the next grade level (or beyond) for a given content area.

In conjunction with the Special School District of St. Louis County, a wide variety of supports and services are provided for students with identified educational disabilities. A continuum of services is provided based upon each student's Individualized Educational Program (IEP). Special education and general education teachers collaborate to develop differentiated instructional strategies and provide accommodations to meet the needs of these diverse learners. Services are provided in the general education classroom through co-teaching. Study Skills classes provide reinforcement of strategies, reteaching of skills, monitored application of skills through homework completion, progress monitoring of IEP goals, and development of self-advocacy skills. Students receive functional academic skills through Essential Skills classes. Those who require unique social-emotional support receive services through direct teaching of social emotional curricula and sessions with a social worker.

Our English Language Development program leverages the assets our diverse English learners possess as we support them in learning the language skills needed for social and academic achievement. Depending on their English proficiency level and educational background, English learners (ELs) receive direct instruction in English as well as the strategies, scaffolds, home language materials, and technological tools necessary for success in the general education classroom. We believe that meaningful and motivated interaction with others happens best within a community of learners where ELs are valued and encouraged to participate. This includes after-school activities and family engagement events and services for international families that promote cultural competency for the entire school community.

Wydown Middle School is proud to offer an ongoing food pantry, which also distributes personal hygiene and household items, for our families who are in need. Through our resourceful and caring counseling department and staff, we also ensure that all students have access to planners, school supplies, and appropriate clothing. During COVID, we issued Chromebooks to every student, as well as personal hotspots for families who needed support with adequate Wi-Fi. We also maintained curbside service from our school library for those students who needed access to books for escape, enjoyment, or, of course, for their academic growth.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

A supportive school culture is established even before our school year begins. To motivate our new sixth graders each year, the WEB (Where Everybody Belongs) program has eighth grade student-leaders design and implement an orientation for our sixth graders. Through this year-long program, eighth grade students serve as role models by mentoring their younger peers.

Our Pack Time, a student advisory program, helps every student feel safe and successful throughout the year. Assigned to one mentor teacher, small groups of students meet regularly to discuss academic as well as social-emotional issues. Students develop close relationships with Pack classmates, and the mentor teacher serves as a staff advocate for each child. This program, even through COVID virtual learning, has helped to foster a positive school environment.

Our school climate is grounded in the Wydown Ways: Perseverance, Respect, Integrity, and Compassion. The common language of Wydown Ways supports our school's culture and helps with students' emotional growth. The messages are reinforced during Sixth Grade Camp, during Pack time, through classroom procedures, and in our school-wide Restorative Practices program.

To build an even stronger sense of community, in 2016, we trained every teacher in Restorative Practices and embedded this as a focus throughout our building. By emphasizing the importance of regular community circles in the classroom, teachers create rapport and trust with their students. Both macro-level and micro-level issues are addressed in the context of these community circles. Also, during disciplinary incidents, students use established protocols to repair relationships with adults or peers who may have been harmed.

We are committed to teaching students about their responsibility to care for themselves, for each other, and for the wider world. To that end, each year, our students and staff plan a community-wide event, Give Back Night. This celebration includes carnival games, a raffle, student "street" musicians, and, of course, food. Most importantly, we donate the proceeds of this event to a local student-selected, non-profit organization. To help choose this organization, eighth graders research possibilities, and then they present at an assembly where the larger school community gets to decide.

During the pandemic, Wydown has worked together to keep our students engaged. Our WEB leaders created a virtual tour of our building to engage the incoming sixth graders in August. Pack time shifted to Zoom, which allowed students to continue to build a sense of community despite the screens. Remote community circles continued, and, amazingly, our annual Give Back Night even went virtual. While the pandemic caused many pivots, we did not lose sight of our important mission to show up with positivity, ready to teach the whole child.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Like many schools, Wydown strives to involve all families and our community in social events, celebrations of learning, and in curricular activities. On the micro level, we conduct home visits, send team newsletters, and regularly reach out to our parents for help and for support. However, perhaps our real uniqueness lies in the way in which we network to build alliances. One example of this is our extensive Career Day, in which we invite parents to lead seminars about their chosen professional paths. Beyond that, our administration and teachers stay active in our community through leadership and participation in a large variety of organizations, including Educators for Social Justice and various other local non-profits. These involvements enable us to be better role models for students, and also provide us with connections to guest speakers who enhance our curriculum. We have had the following come to Wydown to teach our students: scientists from Washington University, local writers, Black history scholars, and representatives from non-profits, including Saint Martha's Hall, and a shelter for women and children, just to name a few. We have taken students to collect data around product placement and availability in various grocery stores throughout

our region, and we have taken students on bus tours to learn about local history. As part of our eighth grade social studies curriculum, we bring students to a myriad of places of worship, including a synagogue, mosque, a Hindu temple, and a Catholic church. While there, students explore with their senses and learn about world religion from spiritual leaders in our community. Most of these incredible learning opportunities are built from the deep connections our staff has to Saint Louis and its people.

We are also fortunate that our school is close to many places of cultural and community significance. Therefore, we can easily transport our students to our award-winning zoo for observation and data collection, to our St. Louis Art Museum for creative writing, to rooftops to learn about urban farming, to Washington University for book studies, and to Fontbonne University for a host of other learning opportunities.

For many years, we have maintained a strong partnership with Washington University, whose students have provided before and after-school tutoring through our Y-Tutor program, and who also mentor our Science Olympiad participants. We are proud of the tremendous success the Science Olympiad partnership has brought to our community. Wydown also hosts a weekly chess competition each winter, as well as the annual Chris Bollinger Memorial Chess tournament. Both of these events draw students and coaches from a variety of schools around the Saint Louis area to our campus.

Even during COVID, we have continued to build bridges with our parents and the larger community. In addition to a drive-through, community-wide promotion celebration for our eighth graders, we also showcased their talents through a virtual Wymies Awards ceremony (modeled after the Emmy awards). In addition, we continued to hold many of our other events virtually. This included Parent-Teacher conferences, Open House, Model United Nations (UN), and our eighth grade religion field trip.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

Professional learning is a hallmark of the Clayton School District and that is certainly evident at Wydown. Teachers and administrators work collaboratively to respond to the diverse needs of our students.

As we all know, this pandemic year tested most schools in terms of flexibility and responsiveness. To accommodate for that, we embedded choice into many of the learning experiences for our staff. With technology at the forefront, the building Professional Development Committee (PDC) organized several learning opportunities hosted by staff for staff to meet their individual needs. The variety of topics, presenters, platforms, and timeframes all benefited teachers. In addition, the PDC wanted ongoing support for staff, so they also created a Google Site that staff could continue to access and contribute to in an organized and accessible way. They also hosted several Virtual Staff Rooms via Zoom to allow teachers to connect with each other about personal as well as professional concerns.

However, this type of responsive planning is not unusual for Wydown. Cohorts of teachers have regularly used data to inform their practice, and both coaches and colleagues have provided feedback and support as they worked to implement changes in their classroom. What started as part of a district initiative twelve years ago called the Lab Classroom Leadership Program has grown into building-based versions. This Plan-Do-Revise process is embedded into all professional learning.

A culture of true support is part of the status quo at Wydown. Ask any staff member and they will respond that it is the “Wydown Way” to take care of each other, through our celebrations and our personal losses. As one teacher said so eloquently, “This is a beautiful place to spend a life.” Wydown shows up. We start every staff meeting with shout-outs to each other.

There have been many specific ways that we have helped each other wade through the COVID pandemic with positivity and with strength. For example, administrators drove to staff members’ homes in the early months of the pandemic to post yard signs of appreciation. Teachers with health-related concerns were encouraged to teach from home to maintain connection with their students. As each new pivot occurred, teacher-led committees worked tirelessly to pose solutions. This created ownership for the continual change that was required to meet safety concerns and learning needs. Finally, administrators openly discussed the

challenges connected to teaching in a pandemic. This transparency helped us recognize that we were, in fact, all in this together.

4. School Leadership:

Collaborative Leadership is the heart of our philosophy at Wydown. We depend on each other to share the responsibility of ensuring the best possible outcomes for our students. Wydown has several different leadership teams that include professional development, subject managers, student support, and building leadership. These teams are appointed by the building principal and/or selected by colleagues. The committees meet regularly, with developed agendas to ensure the conversation stays focused on instruction and on our annual school improvement plan, since that is the heart of our work. However, it also allows for tough conversations when there are concerns in the building that need to be addressed. We have been able to work together as a faculty leadership team to address concerns regarding scheduling, to look at our data around school discipline, and to develop and implement school improvement action steps.

Our team-based leadership and communication structure became especially important as the Wydown administration addressed concerns associated with COVID. Administration worked in partnership with teachers. Together, they developed protocols on how to learn virtually, and then on how to bring students back to a hybrid learning model. The assistant principals engaged the teachers, through the Building Leadership Team, to address concerns and have clear lines of communication to ensure impactful learning continued. For example, teachers established procedures around Google Classroom, Pack Time, and the teaching of some crucial technology skills to our students. Implementing these new structures allowed for uniformity of practice, which made it easier for students and their families to navigate these new learning platforms and environments. Finally, when most students opted for in-person learning, we built a timeline collaboratively with the Building Leadership Team to ensure teachers, families, and students felt prepared, safe, and ready to learn.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

Wydown Middle School prides itself on being one of the top-performing schools in the state; however, we have struggled with closing the opportunity gap for our African American students. We started by focusing our School Improvement Plan on attainable social-emotional and academic goals. After the goals were set, we began evaluating systems, structures, and prioritizing which ones needed immediate action.

First, we hosted evening fishbowl conversations with our parents about their experiences with Wydown. Following that, we elicited help from our student focus groups. Under the leadership of teachers who facilitate our Social Justice Club, students prepared town hall meetings for our staff. We heard from our African American males and females, and students from our LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) community, about their experiences at Wydown.

Following this, we began analyzing our discipline data which led to the training of all our staff in Restorative Practices. Subsequently, we changed our referral form. We removed language that allowed for ambiguity, as this plagued some of our African American males. We also added a restorative component to the form, which asked teachers to call a parent prior to submitting the referral to administrators, and then to schedule a meeting with all involved parties. In addition, one of our administrators led staff in a series of professional development workshops on Culturally Responsive Classroom Management. Staff also attended training with Zaretta Hammond and Sharroky Hollie on Culturally Responsive teaching and learning.

This past summer, teachers led book studies on *White Fragility*, *Culturally Responsive Teaching & the Brain*, and *Grading for Equity*. These challenged us to consider how to transfer our learning into practice.

We also began to conduct Instructional Accountability Walk-Throughs centered around culturally responsive teaching. After each series of classroom observations, our staff analyzed our strengths, our improvement, and the areas in which we needed to grow. From this walk-through data, we restructured our intervention programs, as they seemed to be dominated by our African American students. We also overhauled our grading practices with the aim toward equity. Furthermore, we conducted a series of Courageous Conversations where our teachers of color shared their personal experiences of racism with our staff, the aim of which was to heighten awareness around implicit bias and micro-aggressions.

This year we have watched more egregious acts of violence against African Americans by the very hands that are meant to protect us coupled with acts of violence against Asian Americans. We continue to have difficult conversations, among adults and with our students, around racism, discrimination, and prejudicial practices that have plagued our schools for centuries. We have acknowledged the presence of racism that has created negative images of cultures and histories for all marginalized groups. And, while we have organized an Educational March for Justice, led restorative conversations, offered vibrant Black History programs, and implemented important changes to our curriculum, we are ever-mindful that we need to push farther, both in our space and in our teaching. We strive to have every corner of our building be one with positive self and cultural affirmations.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

In March 2020, Wydown quickly had to adjust to the realities of supporting student learning in the midst of a global pandemic. Over the past 14 months, the evolution of the intervention programs we put in place to support students during the pandemic have been instrumental in ensuring student learning.

Initially, we quickly developed a green-yellow-red system to identify our level of concern for various students. At first, it was built on the number of consecutive days that we had not heard from the student, despite outreach to both the student and the parent. The intervention steps included the classroom teacher, the school counselor, the social worker, and the grade level principal. We even reduced some students' schedules. Yet, some students were still failing by the end of the quarter in June 2020.

In August 2020, like many schools, Wydown was faced with a serious question: "How do we assure that our students who fell through the cracks during virtual learning in April and May do not continue to do so?" We identified students who received two or more Fs during virtual learning. We committed to better monitoring these students' academic and mental health.

We noticed three things after gathering data and discussing our targeted students with teachers, counselors, administrators. First, some students, who did not appear to have a caring adult at home, were not participating in their coursework. Second, students were giving up if they were having technological issues that prevented them from attending class. Third, frustrated parents had stopped engaging with the school.

We are fortunate in our school to have teacher interns who work with our classroom teachers. We decided to assign each intern six students who would become "their kids" during virtual learning. The interns tutored their students virtually for 30 minutes per day, attended class with the student, contacted the caring adult weekly to report progress, attended team meetings to brainstorm the progress of the student, and completed a daily log of what work the student had completed and the skill area focus for intervention.

Training the interns to take ownership was a huge task. However, the intervention program empowered the interns to know that they had a positive impact on kids, and also gave them a level of accountability for their performance.

Despite much success, by September, we realized that some students were not going to succeed virtually regardless of our interventions. So, we altered the program and arranged for students to come into the building one day per week for in-person tutoring. When necessary, we helped families with transportation.

We are proud that our COVID intervention program was responsive, flexible, and had an overwhelmingly positive academic and social-emotional impact on our students.