

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

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

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

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

School Mailing Address 825 O'Fallon Road  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City St Charles State MO Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 63304-8150

County St. Charles County

Telephone (636) 851-4800 Fax (636) 851-4124

Web site/URL https://fhms.fhdschools.org/ E-mail kirsteen.james@fhdschools.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. Nathan Hoven E-mail nathan.hoven@fhdschools.org  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Francis Howell School District R-III Tel. (636) 851-4000

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 Mary Lange  
(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**

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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

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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):
- 10 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 5 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 4 High schools
  - 1 K-12 schools
- 20 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	154	133	287
7	144	146	290
8	151	141	292
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	449	420	869

\*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):
- 0.2 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 4.4 % Asian
  - 4.5 % Black or African American
  - 3.5 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 83.8 % White
  - 3.6 % Two or more races
  - 100 % Total**

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

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2019 - 2020 school year: 3%

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

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

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	8
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	14
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	22
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	873
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.03
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	3

6. Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):  
Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, French, Hindi, Korean, Spanish, Telugu, Ukrainian, Vietnamese

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 11 %  
 Total number students who qualify: 99

8. Students receiving special education services: 12 %

105 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>13</u> Autism                 | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>21</u> Other Health Impaired                |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>49</u> Specific Learning Disability         |
| <u>7</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>4</u> Speech or Language Impairment         |
| <u>6</u> Hearing Impairment      | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>2</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>3</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 2

10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to the nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below. If your current staffing structure has shifted due to COVID-19 impacts and you are uncertain or unable to determine FTEs, provide an estimate.

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	3
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	43
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	13
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	9
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	4

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.

<b>Required Information</b>	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016
Daily student attendance	96%	96%	82%	96%	97%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

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

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

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

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

Yes  No

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

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

We promote leadership through academics, character and 21st century skills.

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.

For the 2020-2021 school year, Francis Howell Middle School offered students the opportunity to come to school in-person or take classes virtually. Just under 20% of students chose the virtual option with the remaining students returning to in-person learning. At the beginning of the second semester, students had the option to choose virtual or in-person again, and this time only 14% of students chose virtual. Sixth through-8th grade in-person students are experiencing a mostly typical school year with only minor adjustments to schedules and common COVID protocols, like mask requirements and smaller lunch cohorts. Virtual students are placed in classes taught by Francis Howell School District teachers, with the majority of FHMS students being taught by FHMS teachers. The virtual students have access to mostly typical course offerings, with only minor limitations in elective classes due to the difficult nature of adapting certain classes to a virtual environment (e.g. Industrial Technology).

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**

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Located thirty miles west of St. Louis, Francis Howell Middle School has been a thriving school in the Francis Howell School District since its opening in 1992. As the Francis Howell School District continued to experience population growth and expand, Francis Howell Middle School became the fifth middle school in one of the largest districts in the state of Missouri. Situated in the southern end of the Francis Howell School District, Francis Howell Middle School covers both suburban St. Charles County and the rural communities of Wentzville, New Melle, Defiance, Marthasville, and Foristell. Today, Francis Howell Middle School is the largest middle school in the district serving 846 students in grades six through eight. Entering its twenty ninth year, Francis Howell Middle School has a longstanding tradition of excellence in academic achievement, character education, and family and community engagement.

Francis Howell Middle School's excellence in academic achievement can be attributed to relationships, high expectations for all learners, a long history of strong professional learning communities, and strong leadership teams of both administrators and teachers. The learning community climate at Francis Howell Middle School is reflective of a commitment to continuous improvement; staff regularly collaborates to ensure the success of all students, researches and refines instructional best practices, and measures outcomes through assessment analysis and data protocols. Professional learning communities are focused on increasing rigor and relevance in curriculum, instruction, and assessments as well exploring the opportunity gap and ensuring that all students have opportunities to access more rigorous courses. Students at Francis Howell Middle School are screened multiple times a year in the areas of reading, math, and social emotional behavior. Response teams for each area analyze the data and work to put interventions in place based on individual student needs. A Student Teacher Assistant Team (STAT) is in place to identify any educational gaps based on data and respond with interventions targeted for the individual student. Francis Howell Middle School also recognizes that academic achievement is not possible without first supporting social emotional needs and building strong relationships. The Francis Howell Middle School CARE team works to ensure that those needs are met and that students have trusted adults who can help them reach their full academic and social emotional potential. As a result of research based instructional practices, professional learning communities, and comprehensive interventions and extensions, Francis Howell Middle School consistently performs in the top tier of the district, region, and state on standardized assessments and end of course exams.

During the 2001-2002 school year, Francis Howell Middle School began its character education journey. Character education and family engagement have become the cornerstones of the Francis Howell Middle School community. They are embedded in the daily work as well as the mission and vision statements which read: "We promote leadership through academics, character, and 21st century skills" and "We serve. We learn. We lead." In 2007, Francis Howell Middle School received the Missouri School of Character Award, and in 2008, received the National School of Character Award. More recently, the Francis Howell Middle School community recommitted to the principles of character education and earned the National School of Character designation again in 2017. Through character education, students at Francis Howell Middle School have many opportunities to engage in authentic service learning and give back to the community. For example, Francis Howell Middle School has partnered with Greater St. Louis Honor Flight for over a decade, raising more than \$15,000 for the organization. Additionally, the school hosts an annual Fun Run to raise money for families in need. The school community also prepares holiday meals for families in need and adopts ten families each Christmas. Moreover, several student organizations support local fire and police departments as well as a local shelter called Our Lady's Inn. Throughout the school year, students create and send greeting cards to a local assisted living facility. This work allows students to engage in genuine community service and see the impact of their actions.

Francis Howell Middle School continues to build on the positive school climate and works to increase student and staff sense of belonging. Through the character education initiative, every school day begins in Character Connection class. This is a multi-grade level class dedicated to Francis Howell Middle School's core ethical values, character development, fostering and strengthening relationships, social emotional learning, and building academic efficacy. Where Everyone Belongs (WEB) is the student mentor program at Francis Howell Middle School responsible for helping students transition to middle school and increase

their sense of belonging. WEB mentors plan and facilitate an entire transition day for rising 6th graders. These mentors also plan socials for 6th grade students and serve as a support system throughout the year.

Recognizing the need to close opportunity gaps, increase the voice of marginalized populations, and the need to better understand and appreciate differences in race, ethnicity, gender, religion, cultures, socio-economic statuses, and abilities, the Francis Howell Middle School Equity Team was formed. This team is working to create a more inclusive, caring school community, and works alongside the Character Connection team to plan and implement lessons and events. This team has held book studies, book socials, and is preparing to implement a research based survey to measure student sense of belonging and acceptance to determine action steps for the future.

The mission of the Family and Community Engagement (FACE) team at Francis Howell Middle School is to enhance, strengthen, and foster a greater connection within the educational and social environment by working alongside families, the school, and the greater community. Francis Howell Middle School received the Johns Hopkins University National Network of Partnership Schools Award in 2014 and 2019 for its dedication to partnering family, school, and community. Additionally, Francis Howell Middle School has had several National Network of Partnership Schools Promising Practices Awards over the past two decades.

During the beginning of the global pandemic, Francis Howell Middle School shifted course to a completely virtual education. During this time, social emotional well-being was the primary focus and connecting with students and families frequently was critical. Instruction was delivered via Zoom and Google Classroom and teachers provided live instruction each day. While completely virtual, Francis Howell Middle School monitored student engagement and work completion weekly in grade level team meetings and counselors provided additional support and resources as needed. During the 2020-2021 school year, families in the district selected either in-person learning or virtual learning. At the beginning of the school year, Francis Howell Middle School had 685 in-person learners and 180 virtual learners, running two school schedules simultaneously with the same staff to meet the needs of all families. To help virtual students maintain a sense of belonging and connection to Francis Howell Middle School, virtual trivia nights were held, and prizes were delivered to homes. Administrators were guests in virtual classes, presenting various recognition and awards to students, and teachers developed meaningful, interactive learning activities utilizing a wide range of technology.

Throughout its twenty nine year history, Francis Howell Middle School has adapted to the ever changing needs of the school and community. The staff and school community at large works together to turn challenges, like a global pandemic, into opportunities to refine practices and demonstrate growth. Francis Howell Middle School is always committed to focusing on relationships and maintains a collective belief in their ability to positively affect students.



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

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

#### Overall Approach and Response to Pandemic

The implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices at Francis Howell Middle School is grounded in its mission to promote leadership through academics, character, and 21st century skills. Achieving these goals begins with a curriculum that is produced by a research-based writing process and supervised by a team of content specialists and community stakeholders. This curriculum provides priority standards, pacing guides, learning targets, and common assessments to measure student progress. Teachers are heavily invested in the creation and implementation of curriculum as they are the primary writers of the document and spend time developing resources to carry it out as building and district teams.

To turn this curriculum document into student learning, teams of teachers in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) engage in a continuous cycle of instruction and assessment to measure student progress toward mastery of the prioritized standards. PLCs meet weekly to monitor the instruction of the core material, review student feedback generated by common assessments, and develop both intervention strategies for students that have not mastered the material as well as extension activities for those students that have. Working as a team and with the support of administrators and district content leaders, PLCs identify specific, measurable goals for student learning. As PLCs track student progress toward these goals, teachers reflect on practices, celebrate successes, and identify next steps in the collective effort toward continuous improvement.

In the spring of 2020, the appearance of school changed at Francis Howell Middle School, just as it did around the country due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. What did not change however, is Francis Howell Middle School's commitment to keeping students safe, both physically and emotionally, while providing an exemplary academic education.

Francis Howell Middle School met the challenges of transitioning to virtual learning and ensuring access to students in quarantine as an opportunity to explore new instructional techniques and tools that will continue to be utilized in future years. Through the use of Canvas, students are able to review recorded lessons, access assignments and submit completed work, and teachers are able to differentiate instruction, release feedback, and monitor progress. Electives, such as band, choir, and drama programs, have adapted by singing outside, modifying performer masks, holding virtual performances, and using instrument cover adaptations. Weekly social emotional check-ins occur to monitor and support students during this time.

#### English Language Arts/Reading

The English Language Arts (ELA) department at FHMS uses the Workshop Model approach to teaching core communication skills. This approach involves providing short mini-lessons on targeted skills, independent student-driven practice, and conferencing around reading and writing skills. A handbook of basic reading and writing resources is provided to students with common academic vocabulary terms as well as examples to help with commonly asked questions. This handbook is used in classes throughout the building to assist students with reading and writing skills in all curricular areas. Within the ELA classroom, students participate in a variety of book club groups, Socratic seminars, and writing circles to hone essential skills and deepen their understanding of literature, non-fiction texts, media sources, and styles of writing.

Grade level curricula are vertically aligned and the department reviews standards and expectations yearly to ensure consistency and growth for students. Each PLC meets regularly to discuss priority standards, align pacing, plan instructional strategies, and review student progress with skills using data driven discussions. PLCs also utilize a team approach to instruction by sharing students for small group instruction and co-teaching multiple levels of abilities in the same room. FHMS ELA teachers have also been part of the district curriculum and benchmark writing teams at every grade level and have set rigorous standards for skill acquisition. The ELA department, as well as the social studies department, also has aligned grading practices to priority standards and set up gradebooks to clearly communicate progress with students, parents, NBRS 2021

and other stakeholders. Additionally, the ELA department meets yearly to review vertical alignment and discuss common rubrics and scoring practices, a conversation shared with the social studies department also.

Student progress with standards is monitored through formative and summative assessments. PLCs use the data collected from classroom assessments, district benchmark exams, and the MAP assessment to identify student needs, and plan intervention and enrichment activities. There is ongoing collaboration with the Special Education department to support learners with specific needs. In the classroom, teachers provide one-on-one time with students, diversified group collaboration to include students of all abilities, and topic extensions for more advanced students. After school tutoring is available for students who require additional support.

Approximately 25% of FHMS students have a targeted reading intervention focused on building foundational reading skills that include phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, and vocabulary building. All students at FHMS are given two reading assessments three times a year: the FastBridge aReading test screens for dyslexia tendencies, a screening required by the state of Missouri, and a district created benchmark test screens for student progress with grade level reading and writing standards. Data from these screeners is analyzed and then used to determine which students need further diagnostic testing for reading. Next, reading teachers identify which students need additional testing based on skill gaps. Reading intervention classes are small and range from five to fifteen students. The reading curriculum utilizes two programs, Language Live and Read 180 Universal, to close skills gaps and help students acquire the necessary skills to succeed in all areas.

### Social Studies

The social studies department at FHMS consists of sixth grade geography, seventh grade ancient world civilization, and an eighth grade U.S. history (1492-1865) course. Instructors use a variety of instructional approaches to connect with students in meaningful ways and provide rigorous but high interest assignments. In the classroom, PLC teams are keenly aware of the skills students are required to have to move forward into the next unit and grade level. The social studies team of teachers have worked diligently to vertically align the department expectations to provide opportunities for civil discourse about world events, cultures, and through the lens of opposing perspectives. Priority skills the department focuses on understanding perspectives by focusing on context of time and place; analyzing sources, such as texts, images, and graphs; and historical thinking including reading and writing like a historian. Assignments and lessons often vary and are tiered to meet the needs of all students.

Though not a state tested subject, the social studies (SS) team at FHMS has worked hard to support the ELA team to address tested standards. ELA and SS met as a whole group five years ago to select priority standards that could be tracked quarterly by both departments. Teachers selected a reading and writing standard as a focus for both departments to align expectations and instruction cross-curricular as well as vertically. After selecting standards at each grade level, assessments were developed for both ELA and social studies that could be practiced quarterly. Gradebooks were set up using common standards to track student progress in both ELA and SS. The ELA and social studies departments also meet quarterly by grade level teams to discuss writing instructional strategies, student writing samples, and common scoring practices. This approach has strengthened the writing of FHMS students in all areas.

### Mathematics

In 2017, FHMS adopted the enVision math 2.0 curriculum series, a three-year sequence of courses designed to prepare students for college preparatory high school mathematics courses. This comprehensive mathematics curriculum supports coherent, focused, and rigorous learning through problem solving, interactive experiences, and visual reasoning. In 2020, CPM (College Preparatory Mathematics) was piloted and adopted, providing a student-centered, problem based curriculum. Students engage in problem-based lessons structured around a core idea, interact in groups to foster mathematical discourse, and practice with concepts and procedures over time.

The math curriculum provides three course paths for students. The traditional on-grade level path includes NBRS 2021

Math 6, 7, and 8. The first advanced option is Challenge 6th grade math, Pre-Algebra 7, and Algebra 8. Finally, accelerated math students may take Pre-Algebra 6, Algebra 7, or Geometry 8.

Math 180 is an intervention course for students struggling with foundational math concepts. This program is designed to bridge the gap between skills students may have missed and their current learning. Students also have the option to stay after school for intervention support and several evening, virtual options are offered as well.

The math department roots its pedagogy in creating a collaborative classroom environment. Instructional strategies include implementing problem-solving techniques; questioning, investigating, and analyzing mathematical concepts; gathering and constructing evidence; and engaging in rich mathematical discourse. Under teacher guidance, students at FHMS learn in collaboration with others while sharing information, expertise, and ideas as well as developing multiple strategies to solve problems and to recognize the connections between concepts. PLCs use vertical alignment strategies to decide on priority standards and create common benchmark assessments for each grade level to track student growth and achievement. Students are involved in tracking their data on common priority standard benchmark tests. They set goals and track their growth throughout the year.

## Science

The science curriculum at FHMS is aligned with the Missouri State Standards and is further guided by the Next Generation Science Standards and the principles of the International Society for Technology in Education. Sixth grade Earth Science course covers topics such as weather and climate, weathering and erosion, and the solar system; and seventh grade focuses on Life Science, including cells and body systems, growth and development of organisms, flow of energy, and interdependent relationships in organisms and both grades explore how humans impact the planet. The eighth grade Physical Science classes concentrate on matter, reactions, energy and force, and motion. FHMS also offers a high school level Physical Science class for those students who would benefit from an accelerated physical science experience.

All grade levels are vertically aligned to provide students a natural progression of skills and knowledge. The science department works collaboratively with other disciplines to support writing, math, and analytical thinking across curricula. Enrichment opportunities, such as parent speakers, STEMscopes Career Connection, and Scientist Spotlight video clips, as well as the community outreach program with Ameren enable students to experience real life applications of science.

A variety of instructional approaches used to include hands-on experiments, project based learning, building models, researching phenomena, and collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data to form evidence-based conclusions. The science curriculum is enhanced through the integration of STEMscopes, allowing students to explore science, technology, engineering, and math in both digital and print form.

Student progress with standards is monitored through formative and summative assessments. PLCs use the data collected from these assessments, the quarterly benchmark exam, and the MAP assessment to identify priority standards, determine placement, guide instruction, and highlight areas of intervention and enrichment. In the classroom, teachers provide one-on-one time with students, diversified group collaboration to include students of all abilities, and topic extensions for more advanced students. After school tutoring is available for students who require additional support.

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

During middle school, all students access the Missouri Connections platform. Sixth grade students focus on a career interest survey, a personality assessment, and learning styles; seventh grade students focus on employability skills and an interest profiler, and eighth grade students participate in a four year plan day during which students take their plan and course guide to each class to discuss the high school pathways for each content area. In 8th grade, students complete the ICAP (Individual Career and Academic Plan) form, career clusters, and a reality check survey to learn more about the concept of money and how they could finance the lifestyle they see for themselves. Students then transfer this information to their ICAP form

where it can be utilized for future high school course planning. Additionally, students are provided information and access to an online program (SCOIR) to explore colleges and other pertinent information for future college applications.

Where Everyone Belongs (WEB) student leaders attend a Cardinal's game on their career day and listen to a panel of employees at Busch Stadium to learn about a variety of career opportunities. Afterwards, there is a college fair that students attend to learn more about college opportunities that are offered in Missouri. A select group of students, interested in a career in the trades, visit the Lewis and Clark Technical School to learn more about course offerings available to them during their junior and senior years of high school. Additionally, a "Career Cafe" has been offered to students interested in hearing about different career types from community members in the field. These take place during lunch and students have opportunities to learn about specific careers and pose questions directly to those with expertise in those careers.

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

## **2. Other Curriculum Areas:**

Francis Howell Middle School is devoted to supporting students with a well-balanced education that recognizes the need for personal exploration and growth into the multitude of interests outside the core content and a mode of expression of their imagination, artistry, and passions. The array of course offerings we provide students include, but are not limited to, the Fine Arts, Visual Arts, World Languages, World Cultures, Engineering by Design, Physical Education, and Health.

### Arts (Visual and Performing)

Francis Howell Middle School has thriving visual and performing arts programs which encompass the programs of music, speech and drama, and art. The music program offers two performance-based classes, band and choir, as well as a course in music production and technology. The band program begins with basic instrument skills and offers performance opportunities at every level. Through the exploration of new instruments, students will learn how to read and perform music as well as develop lifelong skills such as teamwork, responsibility, and personal goal setting. FHMS also has an after school group that meets weekly, called Jazz Band, which performs within the school community. The choral program is open to all students; it provides opportunities to learn performance/concert skills for a wide variety of music and explore the different styles, history, and music theory through vocal music literature. There is also an after school choral group that meets to promote community service through music; and events, such as community caroling, early childhood music education, and nursing home performances, give students the opportunity to extend their learning beyond the two concerts scheduled at FHMS.

Francis Howell Middle School's music production and technology program explores the world of music production and audio engineering through hands-on learning experiences in examining composition, songwriting, and recording. These projects help students create, present, and perform works through various multimedia projects, such as commercials, podcasting, film scoring, remixes, and digital storybooks. Technology provided for students to complete this course includes a Mac lab that with the use of Garageband and iMovie as well as other Mac based technology. Francis Howell Middle School's music production and technology program also provides an after school club where students can extend their learning beyond the class.

The speech and drama program encompasses various performance opportunities for students to gain confidence in front of an audience. Students learn drama, speaking, and listening skills through topics that include basic acting, public speaking, mass media, electronic communication, and performance production. Performances in speech and drama teach presentation techniques for informative and demonstration speeches, pantomimes, improvisations, monologues, and skits. The drama program also includes after school activities such as drama club and live productions including on stage all school community plays, musicals, and assemblies.

The art program at Francis Howell Middle School offers courses that help students create, respond, present, and connect their ideas visually and verbally in traditional and new media. Creativity and aesthetic thinking skills are developed with real world applications; students are encouraged to experiment and take risks in the creative process which provides them with opportunities to explore diversity and innovation. Students develop artistic skills and behaviors while learning skills for the art-making process and using media such as graphite, pastels, paint in studio work and portfolio production.

#### Physical Education/Health/Nutrition

The Physical Education (PE) and Health program focuses on students maintaining a healthy lifestyle by encouraging them to be continually moving in class and staying physically active beyond the classroom. PE class activities are modified to accommodate the abilities of all students. All students are invited to attend after-school intramural sports also. The PE department also sponsors an annual Pancake Fun Run which is open to the entire FHMS community and all its stakeholders.

PE classes also incorporate health lessons quarterly. The health curriculum focuses on first aid, nutrition, body systems, mental health, and drug/alcohol awareness. Teachers at each grade level plan and implement specific lessons to meet both the needs and maturity levels of students. Outside organizations, such as Compass Health and National Alliance on Mental Illness, give presentations during health classes on various topics such as responsible social media use, sexual abuse, and suicide prevention.

The PE department meets weekly to discuss instructional strategies, plan engaging activities that will allow students of all abilities to participate, and monitor student's physical, social, and academic health. Life-long sport activities, such as roller skating, archery, pickleball, and ping pong, are intentionally incorporated into the curriculum to encourage students to explore a variety of fitness options. Cardiovascular health is monitored throughout the year with a series of fitness tests and students create bar graphs to assess their own progress. The PE department also plans cross curricular activities that incorporate writing and presentations skills to support other content areas.

#### World Cultures, World Language Discovery, and Foreign Language:

World Cultures is an exploratory course that introduces students to French, German, and Spanish-speaking regions. There is an emphasis on understanding the components of culture, recognizing cognates (borrowed words), and basic vocabulary in each language. Created for introducing students to the French, German, and Spanish languages and cultures, World Language Discovery brings these countries to life through vocabulary, games, songs, and hands-on activities. This course includes colors, numbers, greetings, food, transportation, clothing, family, and telling time.

For eighth-grade students seeking to learn an individual foreign language, Francis Howell Middle School offers singular French, German, and Spanish language classes. Each of these courses is designed to introduce students to the specific language fundamentals. Students acquire vocabulary and grammar through reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Understanding the people, culture, customs, and geography of the native countries is integrated throughout the course. These foreign language courses count toward the student's high school GPA with earned credit on their high school transcript.

#### Technology/Library/ Media

Francis Howell Middle school strives to promote digital literacy across all content areas. The Library Media Specialist teaches quarterly lessons through English Language Arts classes. Students learn how to critically evaluate sources for credibility and how to effectively use research databases. All students also have Digital Citizenship instruction on the impact of a digital footprint. The Library Media Specialist also curates a variety of media to include diverse voices in the library. The LMS also facilitates instruction and support with Canvas (learning management system) as well as other digital tools and platforms.

Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) standards through project based learning. ITD courses at each grade level begin with a collaborative exploration of Digital Citizenship that evolves with students' social and developmental needs. Students then choose a focus area to design a project using a variety of digital tools, including website builders, video game designers, and video/audio editors. Students use 3D design tools (CAD software) and the design process for multi-step projects. A coding and computational thinking unit is included in each class teaching students to use software and hardware such as block, JavaScript, and Python coding languages. Eighth graders have a capstone project where they identify a problem that can be solved by technology. They question, research, and design a solution using the tools of their choice. Volunteers from Mastercard join the class yearly to promote technology careers.

The Robotics Club is open to all students. Students use Mindstorm software to program Lego EV3 robots to perform a variety of tasks. The club competes in the First Lego League Explore Competition. In 2019, the team was the Champion of the Easter Missouri Qualifying Tournament and competed in the Regional Championship. They also compete in a GM tournament that focuses on industrial robot tasks.

### All Other Curricular Programs

Francis Howell Middle School believes that all students must have multiple opportunities to learn about various practical arts facets. The courses embedded with practical arts help students understand the progression and scope of technology through exploratory experiences.

Industrial technology classes emphasize safety procedures while presenting firsthand knowledge of tools, machines, materials, and applications. Hands-on opportunities provide students time to design, evaluate, and construct personal projects. Instructors advise students on current social trends and career awareness within industrial technology in preparation for high school and beyond.

Family and Consumer Science course offerings provide students with direct experience in food and nutrition. Students learn how to prepare nourishing meals as well as the fundamentals and benefits of sewing by hand and the safe use of sewing equipment. Interior design units provide students with skills to design and utilize spaces efficiently to suit their purpose and function. Child development units teach students how children develop and how to appropriately interact with children at various ages and stages of life.

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

#### Students Performing Below Grade Level

Students needing additional support are placed in intervention courses, such as reading or math intervention, and guided study hall. To provide extra support for core classes, Tier 2 success classes are in place to provide small group instruction on prioritized skills. These classes are also co-taught by a regular education and special education teacher. All students at FHMS have access to a drop in room which is staffed by a Special Education teacher who provides support through read aloud of tests, small group settings, and re-teaching. Intervention tutoring is offered after school both in-person and virtually for English, math, and science assistance. An extensive placement process is used each year to identify students who will need additional support and progress is monitored frequently by a team of staff members.

#### Students Performing Above Grade Level

The Spectra program serves the top 5% of the general student population in grades 6-8 and meets daily for one class period. The specialized curriculum focuses on four essential 21st Century Skills: communication, collaboration, creative thinking, and critical thinking, in addition to addressing individual needs and challenges gifted students face. The Spectra program stresses the importance of students' self-advocacy, the development and promotion of autonomous learning, team development and peer partnerships, and personal ownership of their education.

## Special Education/Students with Disabilities

The Special Education department at Francis Howell Middle School is dedicated to the individual success of every student with a disability. The school has demonstrated superior academic results for this population, due to a commitment to student-centered interventions that help each child reach his/her full potential. All incoming 5th grade students do a tour of FHMS in the spring, but students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) have opportunities for a more private and personalized tour. They visit special education and support classes, eat lunch in the cafeteria, tour several specialized rooms, and meet key staff members, like the social skills teacher, guidance counselors, administrators, and the nurse. Their visit culminates in a question and answer session with older students who also receive special assistance. This extensive effort is intended to begin each student's academic journey at FHMS with a welcoming and personal introduction.

Students with disabilities have supports embedded throughout their day which are tailored to their needs. All three grade levels offer success classes in math and English that provide a smaller class environment with a regular education and special education teacher working in tandem. Special education students, needing more support than a regular education setting (success class), have access to a resource class specifically designed for students with higher needs. Special education teachers, who teach a resource math, English, or 8th grade social studies classes, participate in PLCs with regular education teachers to discuss curriculum, pacing, and expectations for skill mastery to ensure resource classes are aligned with regular education classes.

Special Education teachers also supervise a drop in room to provide accommodations and modifications as well as general school assistance from a special education teacher for students in the SPED program. For students with disabilities, who need consistent academic support built into their daily schedule, they have the opportunities to join a guided study hall with regular education peers or an academic support class that is reserved specifically for students with IEPs that need help completing tasks, staying focused, and learning important executive functioning skills like planning and organization.

Special Education supports also extend beyond the academic setting. FHMS is a trauma responsive school and is on the cusp of being a trauma informed school. The Special Education teacher, who runs the Social Skills program and Sanctuary room, is Crisis Prevention Intervention certified and has completed numerous trainings including: Understanding Trauma 1, Trauma 2, Exploring Principals For Students Who Live Adversity, Introduction to Restorative Practices, Restorative Practices Academy, Summer Institute in Character Education, Sanctuary Model Training, Exploring Equity, and The Therapeutic Classroom: Teaching Students the Confidence, Courage, and Persistence That They Need to Succeed in Life. FHMS also has several staff teams in place, CARE, Crisis Prevention Interventions (CPI) and the Trauma-Informed Leadership Committee (TLC), who respond to students in crisis and help them become regulated and able to move back into the academic setting.

The sanctuary room provides social-emotional support to students as well as a setting for a daily Social Skills class. The sanctuary space is available for students who become dysregulated and has a well-equipped sensory zone. When students enter this area they are expected to set a timer for seven to ten minutes; after this period students will converse with the teacher to formulate a plan for moving throughout the day successfully. Each plan is created specifically for the dysregulated student and then communicated to the team of staff members who provide support for the student throughout the day.

Social Skills lessons focus on meeting students' needs and personal goals based on their individual needs. The district curriculum focuses on teaching students about: growth/fixed mindset, emotions, relationships, communication skills, executive functioning skills, self-Regulation, mindfulness, and self-esteem. Students are given opportunities to participate in targeted activities that focus on skill gaps like conversational skills, fine motor skills vs. gross motor skills, understanding and responding appropriately to different social situations, and decision-making skills.

Another level of special education instruction is the Essential Skills Program. In that program students work on functional life-skills aimed at growing their independence. The Styer Fitzgerald curriculum is utilized to meet the unique needs of each student at his/her instructional level. This curriculum is delivered through individual and small group instruction.

Community-Based Instruction (CBI) is an additional method of instruction where students take skill acquisition in the classroom and generalize those skills in the community. The purpose of Community/Career Based Instruction is to generalize learned skills in all environments, with an emphasis on exploring career opportunities, improving social skills, increasing community access, money management skills, and accessing a number of services in the community. The CBI team includes the Essential Skills teacher, the Speech and Language Pathologist, Occupational Therapist, and support staff.

The special education team at FHMS also includes a teacher of the deaf and hard-of-hearing and a teacher of the visually impaired. The teacher of the deaf and hard-of-hearing teaches and supports students with varying levels of hearing impairment. Some students are in a direct instruction support and/or English class, while others utilize technology supports in the general education environment. The teacher of the visually impaired supports students in their course study, allowing them to have the necessary technology and access to the general education curriculum.

### English Language Learners

The Francis Howell Middle School community is enriched by the diversity of students' backgrounds, experiences, and abilities, including those of English Language Learners (ELL). As the Francis Howell School District believes that students will progress more successfully both linguistically and socially in an inclusive environment, ELL services focus on a push-in strategy of supporting students within the natural classroom environment. Students are assessed annually with the ACCESS assessments to determine the level of support they will need. Students receiving direct services will have an ELL teacher push in to several of their classes to offer individualized support. This most often occurs in classes with heavy reading and writing, such as English Language Arts and reading intervention. These students also have a number of accommodations that are tailored to their specific language needs and supervised by the building ELL teacher. For those students that qualify for monitor status, the ELL teacher works with staff to make sure they're aware of individual student needs.

As with all programs in the building, student academic success is grounded in relationships. The ELL teacher works hard to establish positive relationships with ELL students and their families. Sometimes this looks like finding translated documents and scheduling translators for Parent-Teacher Conferences. Other times it is coordinating with the school's holiday Adopt-a-Family program so that non-English-speaking families have access. Successful collaboration between the ELL teacher and the regular education teachers is also a driving factor of student success. The ELL teacher is embedded in the English Language Arts Professional Learning Communities so that she is a partner in instruction and assessment and can advocate for the needs of ELL students





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

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

Francis Howell Middle School understands the importance of high expectations for all students and the need to support those expectations with a variety of instructional strategies to help each student reach his or her potential. Foundationally, FHMS instruction focuses on Classroom Instruction that Works, cooperative learning, and frequent formative assessments of essential learning outcomes that drive instruction within units. This approach allows teachers to respond quickly and effectively to student needs which, in turn, raises student engagement. Teachers incorporate project-based learning, student choice, and service learning opportunities into their coursework regularly and actively seek to provide students with leadership opportunities within the classroom and school. Students are also involved in setting academic goals and regularly monitor their own progress and skill mastery through data analysis and reflection.

Staff at FHMS also recognizes that high expectations are best met through continuous relationship building embedded in a positive, focused environment. Francis Howell Middle School is proud of the focused and strategic approach to building relationships which begins with a morning Character Connection Class (CC). This multi-grade level class meets daily for lessons focused on time management, character building, social-emotional skills, and school/life balance. CC teachers loop with their students through all three years of middle school which provides students with a consistent support system for academic and social success.

Throughout each year, including during remote learning, students are encouraged to participate in activities beyond the classroom. Trivia nights, fun runs, drama productions, concerts, robotics meets, spelling bees, and book clubs are examples of activities hosted by FHMS to extend engagement beyond the walls of the classroom. In fact, even before a student walks through the doors as an incoming sixth grader, WEB Leaders (Where Everyone Belongs) are there to welcome the newest members of the Jr. Vikings Family. This yearly induction of new students includes a spirited greeting, a personal tour of the building, introductions to teachers, time to walk through their schedule, locker instructions and engagement activities. The inclusion activities do not stop once school begins though; WEB leaders continue to plan events throughout the year to build and maintain a solid community feeling.

The structured, intentional approach to engage and motivate students helps FHMS build and maintain a positive environment that promotes the academic, social, and emotional growth of all.

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

The mission of the Family and Community Engagement (FACE) team at Francis Howell Middle School is to enhance, strengthen, and foster a greater connection within the educational and social environment by working alongside families, the school, and the greater community. Francis Howell Middle School received the Johns Hopkins University National Network of Partnership Schools Award in 2014 and 2019 for its dedication to partnering family, school, and community. Additionally, Francis Howell Middle School has had several National Network of Partnership Schools Promising Practices Awards over the past two decades. Parent and family education are prioritized at Francis Howell Middle School. The FACE team has presented parent and family education on a variety of crucial topics: drug and alcohol prevention, suicide awareness, bullying, and internet/social media safety. Working in conjunction with community partners such as the Child Center, FHMS is able to bring in experts on these topics and provide families resources and interventions as needed. Despite restrictions due to COVID, Francis Howell Middle School has been continuing to provide parent and family education virtually, with the most recent program focused on the emotional development of adolescents.

Engaging families and community at Francis Howell Middle has always been a vital part of the school's success. While limitations due to the global pandemic have been challenging, these limitations have also provided opportunities for creative new measures to continue time honored practices. For example, sixth grade transition night, Open House, parent teacher conferences, and other similar events crucial to welcoming new students and acclimating families to Francis Howell have continued in a virtual format.

Incoming 6th graders were able to have virtual tours with current WEB (Where Everyone Belongs) Leaders, with a full question and answer portion via Zoom. Parent-teacher conferences were moved online with staff utilizing the program My Conference Time to ensure parents had opportunities to connect with staff members to discuss student progress.

The Francis Howell Middle School community recognizes the hardships many families are facing due to Covid, but needs have existed before COVID also. Each year, the FHMS Physical Education department hosts a fun run, with the proceeds benefiting families in need. As a result of this event, FHMS has paid for glasses, negative lunch balances, and provided clothing and other personal care items for students. The Bare Necessities program, led by a FHMS community member, helps to feed families each week. The school nurse, in partnership with St. Charles County Police Department, facilitates the adoption of ten families at Christmas time, providing holiday meals and gifts to all members of the families.

The local community is extremely important to Francis Howell Middle School and students are frequently engaged in authentic service learning, benefiting local organizations. A cooking club provides desserts once a month to the local fire and police departments. The National Junior Honor Society and Spirit Team work with a local shelter, Our Lady's Inn, to provide booties and blankets for babies. Francis Howell Middle School has partnered with Greater St. Louis Honor Flight for over a decade, raising more than \$15,000 for the organization. This work creates partnerships with local businesses and organizations, while allowing students to engage in genuine community service and see the impact of their actions.

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

Francis Howell Middle School makes it a priority to honor teacher voice because the teachers are the heart and soul of the building. The administrative team remains open and transparent with building initiatives, policies, mission, vision, and values to create trustworthy relationships where teachers feel safe to share feelings, concerns, or suggestions. This form of two-way communication provides teachers the opportunity to influence important building decisions which impact the entire school community. For example, meeting agendas are created with teacher input about potential needs and topics that need to be addressed. At staff meetings, cooperative learning strategies are used to not only model engagement, but to also promote a collaborative environment.

Professional development is typically shared during staff or team meetings; the administrative team leads some of this work and other sections, such as Classroom Instruction that Works, are teacher-led. Teachers at FHMS are driven to excel at their craft and all professional development is designed with their needs in mind. Collaborative time and immediately applicable tools are highly valued, and all professional development offered keeps this at the forefront of the agenda. FHMS also recognizes that professional development is essentially new learning, and just like with students, teachers and staff must be given the opportunity to practice new skills before the 'next thing' is introduced. All long term professional development plans include a balanced approach to ensure that teachers maintain efficacy and fidelity.

Finally, recognizing and celebrating the work teachers do, especially this year, is crucial to the school's morale. Throughout the year, there have been several planned events, and a few spur of the moment celebrations, to let staff know how much they are appreciated. For example, all staff were encouraged to participate in FHMS's own "SUPER- Bowl" which included complimentary soup, prizes, and notes to celebrate how 'super' everyone has been this year. Staff members also take advantage of the opportunity to give each other "Shout Outs" in the Monday Morning Memo each week. After a long night of conferences, teachers were surprised to find a coffee truck waiting when they arrived the next morning.

These concrete displays of gratitude have helped bolster spirits during a difficult year, but they are really just outward examples of the supportive climate and culture the entire staff at FHMS cultivates. The administrative team realizes grand gestures have little meaning though if not supported by open communication, support, and follow through. Therefore, the administrative team, using feedback from staff, works to streamline expectations and provide support to staff throughout every year. Collectively, all these measures create a culture and climate where teachers feel valued and supported in all areas.

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

The driving leadership philosophy at Francis Howell Middle School is a blend of relational and transformational leadership. Shared leadership at FHMS is focused on developing relational skills at the individual level and across teams. The administrative team believes that all staff members, and students, should have opportunities to grow and develop as leaders, working together interdependently toward the FHMS vision. The building leadership team, consisting of principals, department chairs, and intervention specialists, work together to identify needed change and then work to create the vision, guide the change, and monitor results.

Being dedicated to continuous improvement means sharing and distributing leadership among staff is critical. Leadership teams at Francis Howell Middle School include: Department Chairs, Intervention Specialists, PLC Leaders, Equity and Access, Literacy, Achievement, College and Career Readiness, Trauma Informed, and Family and Community Engagement. All FHMS staff, through their various leadership roles, work collaboratively to ensure that policies, programs, relationships, and resources focus on student achievement. For example, department meetings and PLC meetings focus on collaboration, instructional practices, and data reflection. The leadership team intentionally structures faculty meetings that will focus on student learning and achievement. Professional development plans include a balanced approach to ensure that teachers maintain efficacy and fidelity.

During the 2020-2021 school year, administrative responsibilities shifted to ensure the health and safety of all students and staff. The building principal served in a new role as the building COVID coordinator, which included working in coordination with the district and local health department, conducting contact tracing and monitoring quarantines, as well as ensuring that the social-emotional safety of students are prioritized. Ensuring that newly adapted processes continue to focus on student achievement and relationships has caused the administrative roles to shift and adapt. The administrative team, consisting of one building principal and two assistant principals, meets weekly with a detailed agenda focused on school improvement initiatives.

What drives school improvement at Francis Howell Middle School is shared leadership and shared vision for positive change.

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

Recognizing the need to close opportunity gaps, increase the voice of marginalized populations, and the need to better understand and appreciate differences in race, ethnicity, gender, religion, cultures, socio-economic statuses, and abilities, the Francis Howell Middle School Equity Team was formed. This team's goal is to create a more inclusive, caring school community and is currently working alongside the Character Connection team to plan and implement lessons and events. This team has held book studies, analyzed research based practices in equity, and is preparing to implement a research based survey to measure student sense of belonging and acceptance to determine action steps for the future.

Through Character Education, part of Francis Howell Middle School's efforts to nurture growth in students' character is to instill democratic values like civic awareness and social consciousness. Francis Howell Middle School addresses important topics, such as equity and social justice, with students and encourages them to be critical thinkers about their role in society. As current events unfold and social justice movements gain traction, students are encouraged to think and have dialogue respectfully with one another. Opportunities to share stories about the impact of these events and movements on students, their families, and staff members occur frequently in all classes at Francis Howell Middle School due to teachers providing a safe, respectful, and inclusive environment reflective of the school's core values. Weekly social emotional check-ins allow teachers and counselors to provide support as needed to students and families experiencing hardships.

In an effort to engage students in literacy grounded in diversity and equity, Francis Howell Middle School recently held a book social on a Mark Twain Award nominee that addresses racial diversity and social justice. This opportunity provided students with an opportunity to share their experiences and identify a need for a social justice student group, which will be implemented in 2021-2022. The FHMS Literacy Team is engaged in an extensive study on an equity framework for culturally and historically responsive literacy. This team has developed common writing rubrics and literacy expectations, and most recently is analyzing those to monitor for bias and ensure equitable opportunities for student learning. Expanding the literature collection and historical texts at Francis Howell Middle School has been a priority of the English Language Arts and Social Studies departments.

The Francis Howell Middle School achievement team is focused on decreasing the gap between scores for identified underperforming groups (FRL, Black, and IEP) and the overall student population. Department and PLC teams are updating the placement process, examining the data triggers, and analyzing subgroup representation in interventions and advanced coursework. This year, the leadership team engaged in a book study *Engaging Students with Poverty in Mind* and a plan was developed to provide learning opportunities for staff.

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

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The foundational strength of Francis Howell Middle School is its focus on relationships. The existing relationships between staff members, students, and the community at large provided a safety net during extended school closures. Weekly team meetings with staff members focused on student engagement; every single student at FHMS was named weekly in a meeting and every single student had adults at FHMS reaching out, checking in, and providing support in various ways. Shared spreadsheets to track student attendance, mental health, and individual needs were created and updated regularly. The entire school community drew even closer together to make sure that no one, student or staff alike, fell through the cracks.

Since Francis Howell Middle School began character education in 2002, the focus has been on relationships. While structures may have changed over time, the intent and purpose of the work has not. The school closures did not require a radical change for FHMS, but rather drew into focus the importance of the work we were already doing. Weekly check ins have continued, although now students are more actively involved in providing feedback about their own needs. Community meetings take place in all classrooms frequently to address academic and social emotional needs that arise in the classroom. Student of concern and CARE team meetings address student needs and intentionally build relationships to provide extra support.

Over time, Francis Howell Middle School has adapted to the ever changing needs of the school and community, and closures due to COVID were no different. The staff and school community at large worked together to turn challenges into opportunities and confirmed that focusing on relationship building and emotional resilience is the right work to do in order to successfully educate and support students.