

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

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

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

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

School Mailing Address 125 Overby Street
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Brandon State MS Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 39042-3022

County Mississippi

Telephone (601) 825-4706 Fax (601) 824-9574

Web site/URL https://bes.rcsd.ms/ E-mail vlacey@rcsd.ms

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. Sue Townsend E-mail stownsend@rcsd.ms
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Rankin County School District Tel. (601) 825-5590

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

Date _____

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board President/Chairperson Mr. David Farmer
(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):
- 16 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 3 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 8 High schools
 - 1 K-12 schools
- 28 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	178	183	361
5	202	179	381
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	380	362	742

*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
 - 1 % Asian
 - 32 % Black or African American
 - 3 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 62 % White
 - 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: 7%

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	20
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	35
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	55
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	745
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.07
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	7

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

Spanish, Arabic, Vietnamese

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 33 %

Total number students who qualify: 248

8. Students receiving special education services: 13 %

97 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>0</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>0</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay | <u>0</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>0</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>0</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 3

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

	Number of Staff
Administrators	3
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	36
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	17
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	4
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	2

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 21:1

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	97%	96%	95%	95%	95%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

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

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

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

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

Yes No

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

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

To intentionally establish an inclusive environment which empowers students to reach maximum potential by embracing individual uniqueness while cultivating a tradition of distinction in education.

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.

Brandon Elementary School staff and students have faced many challenges as a result of COVID-19 with scheduling, navigating online learning platforms, establishing relationships with stakeholders, and adhering to social distancing requirements, but failure has never been and will never be an option. Due to strong district leadership, Brandon Elementary School was prepared to reach and teach students from day one of the 2020/2021 school year. We started with both 4th and 5th grade students following a hybrid model for two weeks. Students were grouped by last names in Cohort 1 or Cohort 2. Each cohort rotated attendance for in-person learning. Virtual instruction was conducted on the opposing days.

After the first two weeks, we transitioned to a traditional enhanced model. This serves as our current face-to-face instructional model. Students attend class in person Monday through Friday. Students remain in the same classroom throughout the day with social distancing and mask mandates in place (due to COVID-19 and contact tracing.) Team teachers and enrichment teachers rotate through the classrooms to keep student movement in the building to a minimum. Lunch and enrichment are conducted in the classrooms.

Parents/Guardians of medically fragile students or parents/guardians with reservations concerning their child returning to in-person learning on school campuses were given the opportunity to apply for the CHOICE Learning Program. In an effort to ensure equitable instruction for our CHOICE

learners, a dedicated team of veteran Brandon Elementary School educators was assigned to lead our CHOICE program. Frequent (daily) collaboration among enhanced traditional educators and CHOICE educators ensures our virtual learners are receiving high quality instruction and assessment of the Mississippi College and Career Readiness Standards. As a result of concerted efforts by each Brandon Elementary School educator, all of our students continue to grow socially, emotionally, and academically. Throughout the year, families have been given the option for their student to return to enhanced traditional, in-person learning. Brandon Elementary School started the 2020/2021 school year with approximately 200 students participating in our CHOICE Learning Program, and to date, 64 students remain in the program.

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

N/A

PART III - SUMMARY

Brandon, Mississippi is located in Rankin County, one of the fastest growing counties in Mississippi. With seven incorporated cities, Rankin County offers its residents unique shopping, dining, entertainment, and outdoor activities as well as high quality educational opportunities. Although Brandon is home to more than 23,000 residents, its unique charm offers a "small-town" feel. The same can be said of our schools. Our "A" rated school district's Class of 2020 received over \$33 million in scholarships, and our high schools continue to climb in dual enrollment rates as we continue to offer more dual enrollment classes each year. Through stakeholder involvement, our teachers create an environment of excellence which cultivates students who are ready for the workforce and/or post-secondary success.

With twenty-eight schools within the Rankin County School District, the Brandon zone schools are home to over 5,000 students. Our community has experienced significant growth in recent years, and our schools have changed through the years to accommodate this growth. Brandon Elementary School was established in 1978 and originally served 3rd and 4th grade students. At a later date, 5th grade was incorporated into Brandon Elementary School. In 2009, construction of a new elementary school was added to the Brandon zone. This addition transformed Brandon Elementary School to a 4th and 5th grade only school which currently serves approximately 800 students.

The community support of Rankin County schools is abundant. In 2017, Rankin County voters approved a \$178.5 million bond issue to renovate/update existing buildings and construct new facilities based on the needs of each of the 28 schools individually. Brandon Elementary School received considerable upgrades such as newer, larger parking lots, additional conference room areas, dining facility expansion, updated fire/security systems, and mechanical systems. These improvements were necessary as safety and security measures continue to drive day-to-day procedures within the school. These improvements ensure staff, students, and all guests on campus have a safe, comfortable environment in which to learn, teach, and interact within the school.

Recognizing that each student deserves an opportunity to be celebrated, our principal implemented a "Top Dog" ceremony. Receiving the title "Top Dog" is one of the highest honors bestowed upon a student at Brandon Elementary School. Top Dog recipients are selected by the homeroom teacher based on the act of citizenship being displayed by the student. While strict social distancing guidelines were in effect throughout the 2020/2021 school year, our principal felt it was vital (more so than ever) to continue the tradition of recognizing and celebrating Top Dog recipients quarterly. The first quarter ceremony took a great deal of preparation, but the school leadership team worked tirelessly to ensure the tradition continued. With safeguards in place that closely monitored virtual participation, we were able to invite parents to celebrate their "Top Dog" via zoom. Our Top Dog recipients were overjoyed to be celebrated (safely) all the same.

At Brandon Elementary School, our students have the opportunity to serve not only their school but also their community by participating in numerous service-oriented clubs offered at school. PawPrint Promise is a service organization that is open to all students with an application process that outlines the expectations of community service. The completion of the application serves as a student contract/commitment to serving others at school or in the community. Monthly service hour requirements allow students to document and take ownership in various service projects. Brandon Elementary School students are also able to participate in HALO (Helping and Leading Others). HALO members are 5th grade students selected by their homeroom teachers for outstanding character, citizenship, and volunteerism. Both service groups are able to participate in SOLE Hope, Pay it Forward, Salvation Army bell ringing, can food drives, and are afforded other opportunities to serve our school and community. BETA Club is a 5th grade academic club where students are selected based on academic achievement and teacher recommendation. BETA Club members participate in community service projects, donation drives, and volunteerism at various school events. Brandon Elementary School offers a Book Club to our students that is sponsored by our STEM teacher and our librarian. The goal of this club is to promote collaboration among students throughout the campus on books based on a monthly genre. Book Club members participate in an annual toy drive to benefit our local children's hospital. Another opportunity for students to get connected is by joining Club Unify. Brandon

Elementary School is proud to be the first school in Rankin County to partner with Unified Champion Schools, which is part of the Special Olympics. As a result of this partnership, Brandon Elementary School established Club Unify in 2018. Club Unify strives to foster our vision of social "Inclusion for ALL" by allowing non-disabled students to mentor and build relationships with our disabled students. Monthly meetings are held for our Club Unify students, and each month a different guest speaker discusses the value of embracing others' "uniqueness."

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

Brandon Elementary teachers strive each day to engage students in learning experiences that are rigorous, individualized, and focused. Through use of research-based curriculum, Brandon Elementary School's teachers prepare our students for 21st century learning. The Mississippi College- and Career- Readiness Standards adopted by the Mississippi Department of Education provide the guidance necessary for student achievement. Teachers assess mastery of subject-area standards (ELA, math, science, and social studies) by utilizing formative and summative assessments. Appropriate scaffolding practices are incorporated into instruction, and the needs of every student are considered when determining best strategies for delivery. High-quality instruction and high expectations have proven to be key to student success at Brandon Elementary School.

COVID-19 has shaped how we instruct in-person and distance learning students. We currently have a team of educators who are solely dedicated to our CHOICE students. We deliver our curriculum virtually primarily through the use of Zoom, Google Classroom, and Edulastic. CHOICE teachers and traditional teachers collaborate weekly to ensure equity to all of our learners. Assessments are currently administered online for our distance learning students and are utilized in the classroom for our face-to-face learners. Virtual students are required to take benchmark assessments in person on our campus. This provides us with the valid, reliable data necessary to make informed decisions regarding the instructional needs of each student. Formative and summative assessment data are analyzed by teachers (with the assistance of the Teacher Support Team) to address best instructional practices for each student. Academic material is presented at the student's present performance level. Culturally responsive teaching methods are employed to address students' diverse backgrounds to all of our students. Examples of differentiated instructional models include learning stations, project-based learning scenarios, cooperative base groups, and leveled reading passages.

The Mississippi Academic Assessment Program (MAAP) measures academic growth and mastery of standards for all public-school students in grades 3-8. Each year, students are tested in English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science (5th/8th grades). This year, our state department of education has determined that Mississippi students will continue with the normal assessment process. However, due to COVID-19, assignment of accountability ratings has been suspended for the present school year. Nonetheless, Brandon Elementary teachers continue to teach with high levels of fidelity and integrity for each of their students with the confidence that students will demonstrate adequate mastery of grade-level concepts.

Technology is used across all disciplines within our curriculum framework including English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. As a result of COVID-19, the use of and access to technology has increased. Teachers create lessons with Google Docs/Slides, Flipgrid, Kahoot, Quizizz, Nearpod, Bloocket, etc. in order to effectively engage students. Even other curriculum areas (i.e. music, library) utilize technology to address students' understanding of content. These methods make learning fun, and our teachers are able to diversify instruction. Likewise, technology is an invaluable tool with regard to our assessment practices.

Our English/language arts (ELA) curriculum is taught using a balanced literacy approach, with specific emphasis placed on reading, writing, speaking, and listening in each grade level. Several resources are utilized to support balanced literacy: Comprehension ToolKit, Content Literacy, Lucy Calkins, Fountas and Pinnell Literacy, Leveled Literacy Intervention. Independent, shared, and guided reading lessons are designed from a diverse library of literature and informational text. Teachers select high-quality texts to support students in their development of new skills and aid in building of their stamina ... all while broadening student exposure to a plethora of genres to foster a life-long love of reading.

Brandon Elementary mathematics curriculum is taught using Eureka Math. Our teachers focus on student-centered learning, use of in-depth thinking and problem-solving, and many levels of differentiated instruction to reach students at, below, and above grade level. Along with Eureka Math, other supplemental

resources are used, such as InSync and iReady to promote the conceptual and procedural understanding of mathematical concepts. An emphasis is placed on questioning methods, making math learning visible, providing teachers with opportunities to provide immediate feedback, and clarify misconceptions in a timely manner.

Full Option Science System (FOSS) curriculum serves as our primary tool to teach Mississippi College and Career Readiness Standards for Science at Brandon Elementary School. Teachers utilize a hands-on, inquiry-based approach for engaging students in scientific standards related to life science, physical science, and earth and space science as outlined in our state standards. Students enjoy a variety of hands-on, instructional methods. Focus questions guide inquiry, and digital technologies, multi-sensory strategies, and science-centered language development supports integration of writing components in lessons.

Using the Mississippi College and Career Readiness Standards for Social Studies, Brandon Elementary teachers create units of study that focus on civics and citizenship, civil rights, economics, geography, and history while integrating reading, writing, research, and interactive classroom discussions. Integrating social studies into day to day activities is essential to prepare students to be life-long responsible citizens in an increasingly diverse world.

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

N/A

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

N/A

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

All Brandon Elementary School students attend a weekly enrichment rotation consisting of music, library, STEM, and physical education classes. These classes foster creativity, critical thinking, athleticism, and imagination in our students while increasing academic achievement. Enrichment teachers work closely with classroom teachers to incorporate and reinforce state standards taught in our core curriculum classes. Brandon Elementary School's performing arts curriculum includes music classes for all students biweekly. Students get the opportunity to learn about music history, theory, and foundational skills in instruments. Likewise, our weekly library enrichments focus on book studies, literacy skill-building, and author spotlights. Library enrichment serves as an extension of our ELA instruction. STEM is a relatively new enrichment class at Brandon Elementary, and students love to participate in hands-on learning activities that reinforce reading and mathematical skills. Physical education is another fundamental element of our curricula. Physical education lessons focus on gross motor skills and healthy lifestyles. Students learn about physical fitness, nutrition, and healthy choices all while learning the benefits of teamwork and collaboration.

Other opportunities for inventiveness involve the BES Robotics Team, an extension of our gifted program. Students are selected to participate on certain teams based on programming knowledge, collaborative effort, and communication skills. Members learn about teamwork by conducting a research project. Students research their selected topic, identify a problem, develop a solution, and present it during competition. Our team has had the honor to compete on the national level and has represented our state at the FIRST LEGO League World Championship.

Our school counseling program follows the American School Counselor Association's national model and was one of the first schools in Mississippi to achieve RAMP (Recognized ASCA Model Program) designation. By incorporating several research-based curriculum, our school counselors implement developmentally appropriate lessons that have a positive impact on student achievement. Each month a character word is the focus of character education lessons implemented in the classroom. Students get the opportunity to learn about social connectedness and development while interacting with classmates. Recognitions are held throughout the year to acknowledge students who exemplify the monthly character traits.

Emphasis on the social/emotional needs of our students results in positive student outcomes. The Mississippi Department of Education addressed the need for social/emotional learning by adopting SEL standards. Brandon Elementary School incorporated SEL components into our classroom activities from day one of the 2020/2021 school year. These activities encourage interactions among peers, further the development of coping skills, and assist with healthy lifestyle choices. SEL lessons are included in all subject areas within the curriculum. Technology has been a vital tool for the delivery of social/emotional lessons, especially during COVID-19. Our CHOICE students as well as traditional students have the benefit of social/emotional learning. SEL standards provide our students with the skills needed to meet the challenges of teenage years, young adulthood, and beyond. The emotional welfare of all who enter the doors is top priority at Brandon Elementary School.

3. Academic Supports:

At Brandon Elementary School, each student's needs are carefully considered as if he/she has an individualized education plan, beginning with classroom roster placement for the upcoming school year. Student's academic and social needs are thoroughly discussed with previous teachers, counselors, administrators, and other key stakeholders with pertinent information regarding each student. Teacher/student personalities are considered to ensure meaningful relationships are established early to maximize student performance.

Teachers collaboratively plan instructional lessons to meet the diverse and individual needs of students performing at, below, and above grade level. These lessons provide intense small group and one-on-one academic support for students at their individual levels. The intervention program is a multi-tiered process that individualizes instruction based on the academic ability of each student. This process is designed to minimize achievement gaps in all areas, challenge advanced learners effectively, and address behavior concerns as needed. The teacher support team (TST) consisting of the school principal, interventionist, and counselors meets with each classroom teacher every four weeks to discuss each student's interventions, enrichment activities, rigor of classroom instruction at various levels, and behavioral progress or lack of progress. Progress monitoring is administered with fidelity and integrity by all TST members. Current intervention/enrichment success is discussed, and methods are adjusted as needed to maximize student achievement. Targeted small group instruction is administered by the classroom teacher, interventionist, and counselors to focus on growth areas based on ongoing data collection through assessments and leveled learning programs adopted by the school district.

In the rare event that multiple, targeted intervention methods are not yielding adequate student growth for a student performing below grade level, he/she is referred by TST for a comprehensive evaluation to identify/rule out a possible disability. Multiple data pieces over an extensive amount of time are reviewed by the teacher support team before recommending a student for a comprehensive evaluation. If testing reveals a disability which significantly impacts a student's academic success, a need for special education services is considered and discussed with school and district personnel and parents. If all parties agree that services are warranted, an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is created and implemented. At Brandon Elementary School, we utilize the inclusion classroom setting where a special education teacher and a general education teacher work seamlessly together to educate every child at his/her level. The inclusion classrooms contain 51% or more nondisabled students with both the special education teacher and the general education teacher working with ALL students. In the inclusion classrooms students eligible for special education services under IDEA are not easily identified to those who are not a part of the IEP team. Removing "labels" allows all students to experience an inclusive environment where everyone's needs are met academically and socially within the general education classroom.

above grade level to reach his/her full potential without causing frustration. Although COVID-19 has posed challenges for student interaction due to social distancing guidelines, our teachers provide a safe classroom environment to promote engaging activities. Academic support through individualized instruction, rigorous lessons/assessments, and social interaction are the keys to accelerating growth for all students.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

The overall mission of Brandon Elementary School is to inclusively educate the whole child. While developing a child’s academic skills is primary, educators have a single focus to support the overall social and emotional well-being of each student. Teachers at Brandon Elementary School begin developing relationships with families immediately once classroom rosters are distributed. Teachers do their research to familiarize themselves with demographics and dynamics of incoming students. At Brandon Elementary School, we believe that meaningful relationships are essential for student success. Our school counselors foster this support through the use Chick-fil-A’s Core Essentials Program, which teaches students about social connectedness and development while interacting with classmates. Likewise, Start with Hello is another opportunity for students to engage with each other. This program fosters an inclusive environment by teaching empathy to all students on our campus. Events are held throughout the year to promote Start with Hello’s focus of ending social isolation—a real threat to our students during this pandemic.

Each year Brandon Elementary School holds college and career fairs, informational nights for parents, and lessons for students. Even though our student population is composed of fourth and fifth grade students, it is never too early to inform students of potential career paths and college opportunities. Our teachers develop lessons that help students explore career choices, conduct interest inventories, and prepare college planning. We regularly invite community members to be guest speakers on particular jobs of interest, but this year we have had to be more innovative to find ways to continue inviting guest speakers. This year, specifically, guest speakers have participated via zoom as an added safety precaution. During College Week, students created their own college pennant and completed research on their college of choice based on their future career interests. These engaging activities empower students to envision the future beyond being an elementary school learner.

Even though our procedures have changed during COVID (due to social distancing and mask mandates and enhanced sanitizing/disinfecting protocols), we have made a commitment to our students to continue to hold recognition ceremonies, awards programs, etc. just as we have done in years past. This year, we have intentionally focused on recognizing student achievement beyond academic achievement. During the month of November, teachers sent student awards home to parents recognizing good behavior, citizenship, leadership, empathy, kindness, etc. Due to such positive feedback, teachers repeated this celebration in the spring. COVID-19 has taught the staff at Brandon Elementary School the value of the “little things,” which has yielded stronger relationships with students and higher levels of student success.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Recognizing the value of family/community support and effectively utilizing that support is key to student success at Brandon Elementary School. Establishing an open line of communication each year is vital ... especially during a pandemic. This year parents/guardians sent their most prized possessions to Brandon Elementary School without attending a traditional open house, meeting their child’s teacher, or seeing their child’s classroom in person. For more than half of our 800 students, the first day of the 2020/2021 school year was their first day on the Brandon Elementary School campus. The size of our campus can be intimidating and “scary,” but our faculty went the extra mile to earn trust and reiterate that our top priority is (as always) the safety and health of all staff and students.

Prior to the first day of school, Brandon Elementary School held a drive thru “Meet and Greet” for students and families to see the smiling faces of our staff members (all socially distanced six feet apart). CHOICE students were able to retrieve virtual learning materials and checkout technology at that time, and a support team was developed/available to assist families with technology issues as needed while learning to navigate technology platforms.

To ensure communication was readily available, multiple forms of communication were implemented to enable guardians to meet in person, by phone, and/or video conferencing with the classroom teacher. Each

teacher created an introductory video that included pictures of the school and their classroom. Needs assessments were sent to families in August, September, and periodically throughout the school year to ensure Brandon Elementary School was addressing all needs of students and families as we chartered the unknowns of the pandemic together.

Beginning with school closures in March 2020, and throughout the 2021 school year, Brandon Elementary School has closely partnered with local churches and businesses to address needs of families. Recently, Brandon Elementary School families experienced a school closure due to a historical ice storm. Our families prepared for the storm by purchasing food and necessities, but as we learned during the COVID-19 shutdown, no one can fully prepare for a “shutdown.” A meaningful parent/teacher relationship enabled a family of seven to reach out to the school with a need for food. Due to a strong relationship forged with one local business owner, this family received items needed to sustain until city streets could safely reopen. Strong family and community communication has yielded a great deal of student success in closing achievement gaps at Brandon Elementary School.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

As the world of education is constantly evolving, educators must be dedicated to continuous learning and growth. At Brandon Elementary School, striving for excellence in all aspects of education is a top priority. Our faculty and staff are dedicated and continuously seeking out opportunities to grow professionally. COVID-19 created an unprecedented situation for educators; and Brandon Elementary School, like every other school, had to redefine the way we educate children. When we were unable to return to in-person learning after spring break last year, our district curriculum department immediately stepped in to assist teachers in creating lessons for students to complete at home. During this time, our faculty and staff met frequently on Zoom to maintain a sense of cohesiveness and routine while we were apart. Teachers were encouraged to reach out to their peers who were struggling to stay focused during this uncertain time.

While state and national conferences have been unavailable or limited during the pandemic, our school and district have increased opportunities for in-house and virtual trainings. Rankin County School District (referencing needs assessment feedback) provides numerous options for professional development every year. This year there was a shift to include additional professional development opportunities on virtual/online learning. Technology and curriculum specialists make themselves available to assist teachers through online instructional presentations and one-on-one virtual meetings. Brandon Elementary School teachers participate in weekly Professional Learning Communities (PLC). These meetings are a time to analyze data, plan instruction, refine assessments, review pacing guides and share best practices amongst their peers. Although social distancing protocols have required a shift from in person to virtual (PLC) meetings, our faculty has continued to make planning meetings a priority. Beginning in January 2021, Rankin County School District Board members approved a request from our superintendent to reduce the instructional day each Wednesday. The remainder of the workday is designated as protected time for teachers to collaborate, plan, prepare, and sanitize their classrooms.

Cultivating a professional culture is a primary focus of the Brandon Elementary School administrators. Our principal is regularly encouraging teachers to be involved in leadership positions at the district and state levels. She supports membership in educational organizations that provide learning opportunities and professional growth. Many of our teachers have returned to school to complete advanced degrees, while others are pursuing national board certification. Our leaders inspire our teachers to do the same thing that we ask our students to do...become lifelong learners.

4. School Leadership:

Our principal regularly says, “People do not care how much you know until they know how much you care.” This statement exemplifies the servant leadership philosophy our principal embraces at Brandon Elementary School. As the leader in all aspects of our school, her role is vital. A strong leader strives to establish meaningful relationships. She creates a supportive environment and a culture of family where connections are prioritized over corrections.

Following this model, the administration works in close collaboration with the school leadership team, which is comprised of diverse faculty members. The team meets regularly to evaluate and revise the systems, routines, and policies that support the daily functions of our school through our strategic plan. Each department chair facilitates weekly team planning sessions with their department to share information and gain insight to help guide the leadership team. School Needs Assessment surveys are conducted throughout the year to gain feedback from all stakeholders (students, staff, families, and community). Data collected is utilized by the leadership team to assess progress and identify growth areas. Team discussions encourage diverse viewpoints, leadership, and teamwork.

COVID-19 has yielded more loss, grief, and fear than any other previous experience in most of our lifetimes. Ensuring that our school is a safe and happy environment has been a top priority. In a year where there are so many unknowns, consistently providing quality academic instruction and support to our students has required a great deal of emotional flexibility. Due to these overwhelming circumstances, the administration at Brandon Elementary School has intentionally focused on the mindset that leading with grace and kindness is the expectation in every situation for ALL staff, students and families. During school closures, teachers and other school personnel were focused on the overall well-being of our students and their families. In turn, our principal was focused on the well-being and mental health of Brandon Elementary School staff members. She made regular visits to each employee's house to wave through windows, deliver notes of encouragement, and even delivered toilet paper in an effort to maintain personal connections during a time when many felt isolated and overwhelmed. As a result of our principal's servant leadership style, Brandon Elementary School encompasses a culture of family, and we strive to extend that family atmosphere to our students and their families. This mindset has resulted in our school maintaining high levels of success during difficult and unprecedented times caused by COVID-19.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

The number of students in our community with differing races, cultures, backgrounds, and experiences is continuously growing. Cultural responsiveness must be exhibited by teachers and leaders to ensure the elimination of inequities within our educational system. The diverse needs and backgrounds of our students, families, and staff are addressed in our daily activities, planning, and events at Brandon Elementary School. Our teachers develop culturally responsive assessments during Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). They evaluate each assessment for cultural awareness/accessibility and address areas of improvement. Another culturally responsive process has involved our gifted program. When looking at subgroup data for our gifted program (Venture), an underrepresentation of certain demographic groups (particularly black males) was noted. As a result, we implemented a targeted testing process that involves all subgroups. Our school/district goal is to alleviate low representation of any subgroup in all school sponsored programs.

One of our most notable cultural efforts was exhibited during the COVID-19 school shutdowns. Our teachers did a phenomenal job of addressing the needs of our economically disadvantaged students. For instance, we were informed of certain neighborhoods within our zone where students had food insecurity and technology needs. Our teachers were able to work with local food bank organizations, supply weekly food bags, and deliver essential items. Laptops were distributed for virtual learning needs, and hotspots were installed to expand wi-fi connectivity. Workbooks were delivered to technologically disadvantaged students. Additionally, Brandon Elementary School administrators addressed the mental health of staff members by reaching out to each member of our staff, distributing PPE needs to over 100 employees' homes, and delivering written notes of encouragement throughout the lockdown. All of these actions made a direct impact on our students', families', and staff's social-emotional health.

In order to create an environment of connectedness, Brandon Elementary School administrators have made a commitment to address the need for culturally diverse staff members. Hiring practices that promote cultural diversity have been a focus during teacher recruitment. This year,

Brandon Elementary School administrators actively participated in a district-wide book study on the book *Culturize*, by Jimmy Casas. Book studies, culturally appropriate discussion groups, surveys, and informal conversations provide relevant feedback to incorporate culturally diverse practices. Building a diverse staff is an integral part of Brandon Elementary School's effort to create an inclusive culture among all key stakeholders. We are truly advocating for all students and staff; therefore, we strive to embrace the backgrounds and experiences of diverse populations for successful outcomes for all.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

On Friday, March 6, 2020, our students, teachers, and staff left Brandon Elementary School with great anticipation and excitement for our upcoming spring break. We never could have predicted what was on the horizon. Had we known that the COVID-19 pandemic would rob Brandon Elementary School of our 4th quarter, we certainly would have hugged a little longer, smiled a little bigger, and shouted “I love you” a little louder. At what should have been the conclusion of spring break, our school faced a mandatory shutdown due to the pandemic. Even though our students could not attend school in-person, our administrators, teachers, and all other staff members immediately sprang into action to develop a plan to instruct our students and address their social/emotional needs from a safe, social distance. With no precedent to guide our actions, we recognized the importance of immediate communication with all families to determine their needs. Brandon Elementary School employees (safely) delivered essential items, workbooks, instructional materials, and letters of encouragement to our students.

With the advent of the 2020-2021 school year, our school administrators’ primary goal was getting our students and faculty back on campus safely and keeping the doors open to meet the needs of all students. In June 2020, the Mississippi governor called upon school districts to develop plans for reopening school in the Fall. Our district developed the RCS D Smart Restart Plan, which prepared three scenarios for instructing students reliant on the guidance of the CDC and the Mississippi Governor’s Executive Orders.

Implementing Brandon Elementary School’s Smart Restart Plan effectively was the one practice that has been the most instrumental to the school’s continued ability to successfully educate and support students since school closure began in March 2020. By following strict social distancing guidelines, administering daily temperature screenings, adhering to mask mandates, limiting transition times for teachers and students during the day, and aggressively conducting routine disinfecting protocols, Brandon Elementary School has remained open for student learning without interruption throughout the 2020/2021 school year. Our Smart Restart process has allowed us to keep our positive COVID-19 cases to a minimum, and we have experienced few student and/or staff quarantines. Strict contact-tracing policies have enabled us to keep exposure to a minimum. All of these policies and procedures have impacted our ability to remain open for the most effective school experience for all students regardless of virtual or face-to-face delivery. In a world of uncertainties, Brandon Elementary School has continued to offer a sense of “normal” to students, families, employees, and the entire community.