

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

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

School Mailing Address 300 Elk Spur Street
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Elkin State NC Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 28621-3308

County Surry County

Telephone (336) 835-3175 Fax (336) 835-1427

Web site/URL <https://ems.elkincityschools.org/> E-mail burtona@elkin.k12.nc.us

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. Myra Cox E-mail coxm@elkin.k12.nc.us
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Elkin City School District Tel. (336) 835-3135

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 Dr. Will Ballard
(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):
- 1 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 1 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 3 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	0	0	0
7	51	41	92
8	49	58	107
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	100	99	199

*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
 - 4.5 % Black or African American
 - 19.6 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 69.4 % White
 - 5.5 % 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: 5%

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	7
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	4
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	11
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	205
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.05
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	5

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

Spanish

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 7 %
14 Total number ELL

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

Total number students who qualify: 66

8. Students receiving special education services: 12 %
23 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>1</u> Autism | <u>1</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>4</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay | <u>0</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>2</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>3</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>2</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>1</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 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	1
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	17
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	3
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	0
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 12:1

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%	96%	96%	96%
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.

Elkin Middle School, in partnership with our community, will provide exemplary educational opportunities that encourage lifelong learning and responsible citizenship.

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.

All students at Elkin Middle School started the school year fully remote. EMS followed this online model until October 9, 2020. From October 12, 2020 through April 9, 2021, EMS switched to a hybrid model. In this model, students were divided into two cohorts, A and B, and received in-person instruction two days and remote instruction three days each week. Cohort A reported to school on Monday and Tuesday, and cohort B reported on Wednesday and Thursday each week. This meant that teachers were teaching students simultaneously, both in-person and remotely, Monday through Thursday. Students were receiving instruction at home via Google Meet while students in the building were given the same instruction in person. Beginning April 12, 2021, all students will report to the building for in-person instruction Monday through Thursday. Fridays have been remote learning days for the entire 2020-2021 school year. EMS parents have also had the option for their students to continue 100% remote instruction during each phase of reopening.

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

Elkin is a small town in Surry and Wilkes counties in the state of North Carolina. The nearby Blue Ridge Parkway, considered the nation's most scenic byway, draws thousands of visitors to the region throughout the year. The community not only cares for and supports frequent visitors, but it also cares for each other. Elkin Middle School is certainly no different. The students care about each other and truly strive to "work hard, be kind, and have a great day" as that motto is repeated each morning. Family roots run deep with many students being the third or fourth generation who have graduated from the school system. There is a great sense of pride as Elkin Middle School (EMS) students have had a long-standing tradition of excellence in academics, sports, and community support. That vested interest has the outcome of, "Once a Buckin' Elk Always, a Buckin' Elk." Parents/Guardians want students to attain an exceptional education and believe the school system provides that. In recent years, we have been challenged with a growing population of English Language Learners. However, having highly qualified teachers in every classroom providing the essential skills all students need to succeed is our priority. With nine core teachers and nine enhancement teachers shared with the high school, the middle school provides a family atmosphere with an "all hands on deck" approach in building relationships where the students are "our kids."

The mission of Elkin Middle School, in partnership with our community, will provide exemplary educational opportunities that encourage lifelong learning and responsible citizenship.

Elkin Middle School provides intentional educational opportunities for students to develop the whole child. Project-Based Learning and an emphasis on Global Education is an overarching goal for Elkin Middle. EMS participates in the University of North Carolina World View, which focuses on global competence while using the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Students examine local, global, and intercultural issues to understand and appreciate the perspectives and views of others from different cultures. Students receive lessons based on interconnectedness through text/literary pieces and real-world situations. Developing empathy for others is important. Students are currently raising money for the Iron Giraffe Challenge sponsored by Water for South Sudan to drill a well in Sudan.

The mission of EMS is to encourage lifelong learners and responsible citizens. In the Champion Cards initiative, teachers are paired with at-risk students to track attendance, follow grades, and provide emotional and social support throughout the school year. EMS feels the most vulnerable students need extra care. As a true commitment to the mission, a full-time At-Risk Outreach Advisor was hired to maintain and increase the help at-risk students need.

In partnership with the community, EMS Summer Intersession programs keep kids engaged and focused on expanding their horizons. The programs offer many choices, safe and inviting environments, and the chance for students to develop strong bonds with their community. Kids get their fill of thrills through sports, showcase their talents through the arts, develop discipline and leadership through JROTC exploration, invigorate their imaginations through creative play, explore the outdoors through nature programs, and have adventures galore. Summer is the perfect time to nurture young minds.

Upon investigating other middle school counseling programs, evidence indicated many counselors stayed in their office and students visited when necessary. EMS uniquely decided to have hour-long weekly guidance lessons as an integral part of the curriculum. The whole child is important, and focusing on social, mental, and emotional health is part of the Character Under Construction Lessons. Lessons occurred with each grade level every week, even when the school was 100% remote learning. These varied lessons on social media, drugs, alcohol, etc. contribute to lifelong learning, build character, and play a role in developing responsible citizens.

Elkin Middle has a variety of innovative programs that meet the needs of students. The most current programs developed to encourage students to reach their full academic potential are JUMP (Join Us. Make Progress.) and FOCUS FRIDAYS. JUMP offers small groups of students unique opportunities to learn together, in person, outside of the classroom. Students can attend either Tuesday or Thursday after school hours. FOCUS FRIDAYS provides students an opportunity to make up assignments or just have a quiet

place to work every Friday 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. High School Beta students provide tutoring during Smart Breakfast and virtual tutoring is also available during Smart Breakfast.

EMS offers two unique programs for authentic learning experiences: 9/11 Service Day and Creek Week. 9/11 Service Day is a project-based community outreach. All EMS teachers organize a different service project for every student to participate in during the service day. Projects range from pulling weeds and mulching the school grounds, to making kits for nursing patients, to serving as elementary classroom helpers who provide authentic learning experiences. Since EMS has a creek in the backyard, EMS partners with several organizations to provide students the opportunity to learn about water conservation and life cycles. The students are rotated through stations such as Envirascape Runoff, Turbidity, Hydrosphere, pH Testing, and Abiotic Biotic.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

Elkin Middle School provides relevant, rigorous instruction that is standards-based and curriculum-aligned by adhering to the North Carolina Standard Course of Study for mathematics and English as well as the North Carolina Essential Standards for science and social studies. All teachers create well-designed lessons that focus on three essential components for success: 1) direct instruction; 2) guided practice/independent practice; and 3) formative/summative assessment. Teachers create engaging lessons with effective strategies to encourage students to think, read, talk, and write about the content. Integration of these literacy skills into all core subjects is the ultimate goal to build students' comprehension and overall communication skills.

In seventh and eighth grade mathematics, students must reason through real-world problems pertaining to numbers, geometric shapes, measurement, and statistics. Students must persevere in creating logical arguments for their reasoning as well as critiquing the reasoning of others. Students also show their ability to be precise and clearly communicate their thinking using mathematical terminology, methods, and formulas.

Math 1 students study linear, exponential, and quadratic functions. They also learn to prove a figure is a specific type of triangle or quadrilateral through understanding of parallel and perpendicular lines, midpoint and distance. Math 1 students continue to work with statistics, describing univariate and bivariate data distributions. At the end of the course, students take the Math 1 End of Course Test.

In English language arts, students read a wide variety of literature and non-fiction texts with a focus on using text evidence to analyze explicitly and make logical inferences. Students incorporate vocabulary and grammar into their narrative, expository and argumentative writing. Digital tools and resources help students produce and publish writing and interact and collaborate with others.

The EMS science program boasts one of the best in the state. The program's student engagement in scientific investigation provides background for understanding the nature of scientific inquiry. Students learn vocabulary development and participate in problem solving through traditional hands-on labs. In addition, teachers facilitate learning with technology-based programs such as Discovery Education, Gimkit, Study Island, and Quizlet Live.

For social studies, teachers use primary and secondary sources to deliver material from the past, present and future. They scaffold questions to assist students in understanding and interpreting historical perspectives while making connections to the real world.

During the Covid-19 shutdown, instruction remained a high priority. Now that teachers are working simultaneously with students face-to-face and remotely, a greater emphasis is placed on quality instruction in all settings. In March/April 2020, while working 100% remotely, teachers met with one class period per day. Currently, all classes meet every day and provide instruction to students face-to-face and remote.

Adaptations for learning have occurred through blended learning. Teachers pre-record lessons for the purpose of student/parent review and clarification. These pre-recorded lessons used in a flipped classroom allow students to see and hear all information and refer to it as often as needed. These pre-recorded lessons include videos that teachers post to their learning management system (Google Classroom). Teachers use Promethean interactive boards, along with Kami software, to guide written instruction for both in-person and remote students simultaneously.

No matter the learning environment, the purpose of instruction is established via curriculum standards. Teachers use a lesson plan template developed for the entire school to plan lessons based on the NCSCOS and NC Essential Standards. Teachers prepare lessons based on learning targets. This provides a framework for learning by clearly communicating. The "I can... and I know..." student-friendly statements empower students to take ownership of their own learning. In addition, learning standards/targets drive everyday instruction by fostering connections between the classroom and the real world.

Traditionally, summative assessments were issued every two weeks. Now, daily formative assessments are used to check each student's understanding more frequently. Rather than paper versions, numerous digital forms of assessments are used, including Google Forms, Study Island, Discovery Education, Jamboard, No Red Ink, IXL, and CommonLit.

There is an understanding among teachers that students should be encouraged to use notes, texts, and prior assignments when being assessed. In addition to the End of Grade/Course summative assessments for seventh and eighth grades math and ELA and eighth grade science, students participate in quarterly benchmarks throughout their four core classes. Prior to COVID, quarterly benchmarks for ELA, math, and eighth grade science were administered using the NC Check-In assessments.

Assessment data is analyzed during the Professional Learning Community (PLC). PLCs review data using fundamental PLC questions: 1) What do we want all students to know and be able to do? 2) How will we know if they learn it? 3) How will we respond when some students do not learn? 4) How will we extend the learning for students who are already proficient? Using disaggregated data, teachers plan interventions to address skill deficiencies by using personalized learning platforms such as IXL, Study Island, and No Red Ink.

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

The demands of the 21st century require educators to prepare students for college, career, and life. EMS has several great programs in place. Passport to Your Future is an innovative Career Fair planned bi-annually. This idea is based on the National Career Clusters Framework, which identifies 16 career clusters and related career pathways designed to grow career awareness. A variety of careers in each of the cluster areas shared an informational booth about the career field and future opportunities. Students rotated through with a "passport" to explore the stations and learn about the careers represented.

During lunch periods in the fall and spring semesters, students attend a variety of Career Cafe workshops provided by the local community college. Topics included: Biology, Accounting, Animal Science, Paralegal Technology, Health Sciences. When the Covid-19 pandemic shut down face-to-face learning, Career Cafe became a virtual experience for students. The virtual venue allowed for additional topics such as Town Management, NCIS Agency, and Cardiothoracic Surgery.

Career and Technical Education (CTE) course tours take place each year before incoming freshmen register for classes. Through this experience, students meet each of the CTE course instructors, spend about 20-30 minutes in their classrooms, and participate in a planned activity introducing them to the course. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this year's CTE tours were showcased with pictures, videos, and student testimonials.

Providing relevance is key as it prepares students for life and learning in the 21st century. EMS does this by collaborating with external stakeholders. Eighth grade career exploration students were introduced to a Career and College Readiness program with a variety of program topics through the Surry County 4-H. These topics included resume and cover letter preparation, personality assessments, and more. In partnership with the NC State Employees' Credit Union, EMS hosts a Reality Store for eighth grade students. Students are given a life scenario (marriage status, number of children, career, salary, etc.) as they rotate through various stations with their check register to make life choices and financial decisions.

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

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

EMS students have two enhancement classes each day. Students who select band or chorus go to those classes every day, both semesters. If students take general music, they have that class one semester, then art the other. Band, chorus, general music, and art are offered to students in both seventh and eighth grades. All students are enrolled in Health/PE for one semester. The other semester students take either Exploring

Technology (7th grade) or Careers (8th grade).

When students were 100% remote, they worked on independent assignments and met virtually on Fridays. When students returned to campus on their cohort schedule, encore teachers traveled to the classrooms because students were staying with the same cohort throughout the day. Students now travel to both enhancement classes each day.

Chorus students study the anatomy of the voice, proper vocal and tone production, and a diverse musical collection. Sight singing, ear training, and rhythmic studies are embedded in lessons as well as connecting music to world history and events. Students learn and grow through social emotional connections associated with singing in a choir.

Students in band and general music explore a variety of topics such as music theory, history, and careers. Students play simple melodies and rhythms using woodwind, brass, and percussion instruments along with keyboards. Basic vocal production is taught through songs from different genres.

Exploring careers provides an orientation to the world of work. Some of the main skills learned in this course include communication, personal management, and teamwork. Work-based learning strategies include business/industry field trips and job shadowing. Student participation in community service and leadership activities prepares them for workplace situations.

In exploring technology, students learn about the nature and extent of technology and its impacts on society. They review the various approaches to solving problems, including engineering design and experimentation. Students are involved in activities and experiences where they learn about brainstorming, visualizing, modeling, constructing, testing, and refining designs.

Students in health and physical education (PE) discuss nutrition, decision-making, goal setting, character, and personality. Students learn basic rules and strategies of a variety of sports and games. Students also improve their overall health and fitness through physical education curriculum with different forms of cardiovascular activity and strength training.

These enhancement classes foster students' 21st century skills by building communication, critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration. EMS also has other programs worth mentioning as well. A robotics club sponsored by the FIRST LEGO League allows students to experience the importance of science, technology, engineering, and math through exciting hands-on learning. They gain real-world skills such as collaboration and problem solving through tasks performed during preparation for the robotics competition.

The maker space classroom and media center are active spaces. During Covid 19 closure, students use an online form to request books from the media center. High interest books/novels are pulled from the media center weekly, brought around on a cart available for students to check out. Tubs of makerspace materials can be requested for use in the classroom. Teachers also have the option to take students to the makerspace for use of 3D printers.

3. Academic Supports:

Each year, the School Improvement Team meets to review data, determine needs, and develop a plan to help establish and reach goals. Throughout the year, the plan is revisited to assess progress or failures and adjust goals as needed. Currently, EMS faculty uses a blended learning model that includes both face-to-face (when appropriate) and remote instruction to ensure student success. All teachers within the school use the same Learning Management System (LMS) (Google Classroom) to ensure continuity for students.

In order to meet the varied needs of the students at EMS, a variety of researched-based tools and strategies are used to engage students. Differentiated Instruction is provided for exceptional children, honors/Academically and Intellectually Gifted (AIG), and English Language Learners

(ELL) through graphic organizers, think-pair-share, Kagan strategies, and cooperative groups. Students performing above grade level are offered the opportunity to participate in advanced courses in math and ELA.

Teachers differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all learners. Knowing students are at various levels of cognitive ability when delivering instruction, teachers scaffold based on Bloom's Taxonomy model to not only meet students where they are but to help them move beyond their comfort zone. For example, teachers modify instruction by providing skeletal notes when needed, they use activities such as Think-Pair-Share to check understanding amongst students, and they allow students to use Choice Boards when creating projects that demonstrate what they've learned.

In seventh and eighth grades, students who are identified as AIG in reading have the opportunity to take an honors-level course. AIG students in seventh grade take a math course that compacts the seventh grade curriculum along with certain eighth grade math topics. Eighth grade students who are AIG take the high school level course of mathematics, Math 1. Students performing below grade level are provided targeted interventions during our school's intervention/enrichment (IE) time every day. In addition, to IE time being built into our master schedule, EMS provides a Smart Breakfast tutoring schedule. During Smart Breakfast, students can meet with teachers in small group settings to reinforce areas in which they are underperforming. With the assistance of high school BETA students, our teachers launched virtual meetings and held face-to-face tutoring sessions throughout remote learning.

Knowing that there was an achievement gap greater than 10 points for our students with disabilities in reading and math, EMS gave our special education students the opportunity to learn face-to-face every instructional day of the week during hybrid learning. This is opposed to learning remotely two days a week. This offer was also extended to our ELL students as there is a greater than 10 point achievement gap in reading. In addition, ELA teachers participated in a coaching program with the NCDPI English Learner Support Team. The team focuses on offering professional development for teachers of English learners across the state of North Carolina. Currently, coaching services are provided to teachers to explore the realm of coaching and the elements of the process that will be most effective and beneficial for the teachers of North Carolina.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

EMS is student-centered. Emphasis is always on building relationships and making connections with students. Faculty and staff believe the quote from James Comer, “No significant learning can take place without a significant relationship.” Relationships are developed by attending student athletic events, greeting students at the door and in the hallways, and having conversations to learn more about each other. Students always know, “It’s Always a Great Day to Be a Buckin’ Elk.”

Engaging lessons occur on a daily basis whether face-to-face or remotely. Teachers create a positive environment in which students feel a sense of belonging and are motivated to participate. An ideal learning setting encourages interaction with students and teachers. Creative lessons have students up and moving throughout the day. Yard signs, posted and placed six feet apart on the lawn or down the hallway, display problems or questions. Students rotate with clipboards to answer questions or work out problems. Remote students have a digital copy but will do the same activity with different questions/problems.

During a normal year, students have pep rallies, field trips, school dances, and sporting events. To make up for some of the events missed, EMS initiated other ways to socialize. Fun Fridays became popular. One Friday a month, clubs plan virtual activities where kids socialize with students in other classrooms or grade levels through Zoom or Google Meets to talk or play games. Virtual holiday caroling via Google Meet led by the chorus teacher, Halloween treat bags for the students, and a holiday face mask decorating contest made for positive environment activities. And, using Kahoot, the principal held competitive virtual trivia games every Thursday night.

Throughout the pandemic, our focus was always on our students. EMS continually offers a positive ambiance in which students feel motivated and engaged. Students were successful through all the challenges. We believe our history of a positive school climate reduced the anxiety for both teachers and students during the pandemic. Our learning outcomes remained high, and both formal and informal test data provided the results.

As a way to extend grace, yet hold students accountable, Reward/Makeup Workdays were offered. Students were given the opportunity twice in nine weeks to turn in missing work for partial credit. If work was completed, they were allowed to participate in fun activities that could be done six feet apart such as makerspace, board games, and outdoor games.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

EMS has an annual Holiday Outreach which begins with a chorus concert followed by a free pancake dinner. Informational booths line the interior walls of the cafeteria so parents and students can gather information from Daymark Counseling, school counseling, Elkin Enrichment Foundation, Elkin Athletic Foundation, and Surry Community College services.

Before COVID, eighth-grade students toured the high school and visited teachers and classrooms. After COVID restrictions, the high school guidance counselor arranged individual, virtual meetings with families and designed personal schedules for each student. This gave students and parents the opportunity to meet a friendly face and establish a positive rapport with a high school employee before the first day of high school.

In the spring of 2020, at the onset of the pandemic, EMS constructed Quarantine Survival Kits for each student. Students did not return to school after spring break, so the staff felt it was important to let students and families know they cared. In addition, the staff delivered pizza, birthday cake, and other party celebrations to all middle schoolers who had a birthday while everyone was mandated to remote learning.

Our school partners with the local Rotary Club and First Baptist Church to have a backpack program for our most needy students. These partners provide food and monetary donations to assist with the backpack

program. Led by the guidance counselor and social worker, the backpacks of food are organized and delivered weekly.

During COVID, our school partnered with another local church, Shady Grove Baptist Church, which became a recipient of the Farmers to Families Food Grant. While our backpack program provides shelf-stable food, this grant makes it possible for our middle school families to receive fresh food boxes that include fruits, vegetables, eggs, cheese, milk, and meat on a weekly basis.

Mercy and Truth Ministries is a non-profit organization that provides character education. EMS engaged in a partnership with them to deliver Character Under Construction lessons. These lessons are pre-recorded and students view them with enhancement teachers weekly. Using lessons developed from historical individuals and civilizations, the classes are structured to effectively teach young people character, morals, and ethics. All age groups learn character traits and strong values that will make a lasting difference in their lives.

We will have a new event entitled Explore Surry Community College Day. SCC departments will set up informational stations on our track and small groups of students will visit the booths this spring. This is an adaptation of the field trip we typically take to our local community college each spring.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

EMS consists of 93% highly qualified teachers. Of those 25% are Nationally Board Certified Teachers (NBCT) and 20% have advanced degrees. EMS teachers are exceptional educators who speak with one voice and are team-focused, student and family-centered, and collaborative. Teachers are supplied the resources, autonomy, and flexibility to make decisions they need to ensure student success.

In preparation for the challenges of remote learning, teachers were furnished with mobile carts, mobile whiteboards, new laptops, new cameras for desktop computers, and audio amplifiers. In addition to technology resources, opportunities were given for teachers to select needed professional development to prepare them for teaching through remote learning. Self-paced professional development relevant for remote learning gave teachers voice and choice. It was not one size fits all. Protected planning time was held sacred so teachers could work together in grade-level PLCs to prepare and practice remote learning. The professional development allowed our teachers to reimagine teaching and learning. Through the collaboration of the teachers' knowledge and experience and their combined passion and purposefulness, they figured out how to transition through the turbulent waters.

After daily classroom walkthroughs, based on the needs she observed, the principal gave five-minute PD sessions in flipped faculty meeting documents to iron out the small issues.

Their dedication to learning new ways of teaching did not go unrewarded. We Can Make It Wednesdays was initiated for teachers to have duty-free lunch and goodies each week. They quite often found treats from the principal in their mailboxes and handwritten notes on their desks. Every three weeks, a middle school teacher is highlighted on the local radio station and the principal submits weekly shoutouts about teachers who appear in the Super "Tuesday Talk" -- an email that goes out weekly from the superintendent.

To show students that teachers are valued at EMS, plaques are placed outside their classroom doors indicating where they attended school and the degree they received and if they are a NBCT. Teachers are also given recognition when their students are proficient or show growth in tested areas.

Teachers are taken on special faculty field trips with the intention of providing them time outside of school to practice self-care. Boxed lunches are served, activities are six feet apart, door prizes are given away, and opportunities for socialization and hiking/exercise are offered.

4. School Leadership:

The school's leadership philosophy is the driving force behind Elkin Middle School's success. The manner in which the administration, students, staff, and parents connect with one another creates an environment for

powerful interactions. The school principal has an open door policy that reminds all stakeholders they are important and valued members of the school community. Leadership is open to questions, complaints, suggestions, feedback, and discussion. As a result, trusting relationships are established. Positive relationships influence classroom discipline, collaborative teaching and learning, and the motivation and support each person feels.

The principal facilitates a belief that each person in the building has a shared responsibility for learning. The principal, grade level chairpersons, and the school improvement team members serve as the voices for the school and help increase transparency. Input is always collected from staff, then shared, evaluated and executed through these channels.

The school improvement team is tasked with analyzing summative test data; creating a school improvement plan with goals, strategies, and outcomes for the year; and implementing new initiatives to promote student success. Professional learning communities, focusing on formative assessment data, re-teaching, and re-assessment strategies, are led by the grade level chairs. Ongoing monitoring of student progress is a priority for each team and they meet regularly to discuss it. Each individual and group is best suited to make decisions and help lead the school through distributed leadership. The school culture is positively impacted by the roles assigned to staff. This level of involvement contributes to the achievement of all students and the long-standing tradition of excellence.

The uncertainty of operating school in a pandemic year created a shift in mindset, relationships, attitude, focus, perspective, and skillset. All school staff contributed and took ownership of strengthening the instructional program, the communication between home and school, as well as the social and emotional well-being of the students. The principal included not only her immediate staff but also utilized the efforts of the district chief academic officer, chief technology officer, director of maintenance, transportation coordinator, and superintendent to ensure all aspects of teaching and learning in a fully remote or hybrid learning environment were addressed.

Maintaining safety first, instituting a robust remote instruction plan second, and deploying student technology and key resources for teachers, Plan C, then Plan B, and, eventually, Plan A came to fruition. Moving through the reopening phases incrementally reinforces continuous improvement efforts from the whole school.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

Elkin Middle School celebrates diversity by valuing students of all ethnic backgrounds, genders, and socio-economic situations. We believe in providing equitable opportunities for all students and make a concerted effort to provide these opportunities. Our racial demographic is predominantly white, with a smaller percentage of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC). The largest minority group is comprised of Latin-X students. Our demographic is changing to include more students of color every year. With this in mind, we have been implementing more programs to ensure our students from culturally different backgrounds are valued and feel radically included. Our teachers are culturally responsive in providing a safe space for BIPOC and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) students as well. Students are given what they need to succeed and individual needs are met in a variety of ways. Teachers at EMS create responsive classroom management every day for all students regardless of student background. Students thrive in a consistent environment and are encouraged to be thoughtful, thorough, and confident in their work. Teachers are calm and supportive so students feel safe to respond successfully without fear of ridicule or failure.

We have always been aware of the need to be culturally responsive; however, in light of global events of the past few years, we are placing an emphasis on global education to teach our students their world is not “the whole world.” Our efforts have thus far been very successful and we are seeing families become more involved because our atmosphere is one that promotes trust and

respect. We are holding family informational meetings in Spanish, which is the native language of our largest minority population. These families have expressed their gratitude for our efforts and are allowing us to build and maintain quality relationships with them as a result. Our school is providing global virtual field trips on Fridays to help students understand and be proud of their ancestry and heritage. Our ELA, social studies, music, and art departments have created lessons that teach world cultures and subcultures within our own country. These lessons have embedded social-emotional skills that have addressed racial inequity and the treatment of others the students might deem different. We have created these lessons to challenge preconceived ideas about specific groups and hidden biases. Our tangible support has in large part been due to the fact that we now have a full-time social worker. This has allowed us to address the needs of all of our students in the following ways: providing food, housing, and clothing as well as emotional support for the students and their families. We are committed to feeding the body, mind, and soul of every student.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

“We cannot control the direction of the wind, but we can adjust our sails.” Little did we know that motto would become a daily action due to COVID. We chose collaboration with parents/guardians to ensure student success in all learning settings as one of our school goals. We developed a plan of action knowing the key strategy to accomplish this goal was to maintain open and consistent communication with families. We knew we were successful when visitors from our state department told us we had one of the most robust parent engagement programs their team had seen. They believed it was an “intentional roadmap for success and an excellent parent resource site.”

Shortly after we “set sail” in the new school year, it seemed communication was more important than ever. To make this a successful year in a very unprecedented year, we knew we had to listen. We decided to hold an All Hands on Deck meeting. Parents were asked how we could support them and what topics we needed to address. Parents wanted to know more about PowerSchool, Google Classroom, Canvas, how to help maintain a schedule and routine, and how to help with their child’s mental health. Due to the overwhelming response from parents, English and Spanish versions of a Parent Resource Site were created. The Parent Resource Site made the topics discussed easily accessible for parents.

The Weekly Learning Plan, seen as a roadmap for success for communication between teachers, parents, and students, establishes a purpose for learning and identifies detailed weekly learning targets and daily assignments for both face-to-face and remote students. The Weekly Learning Plan is emailed to students/parents, posted on the EMS website, and added to Google Classroom. Hard copies are available. The learning plan is also used to communicate changes in schedules, such as remote learning days, early release days, lunch menus, and weekly events.

Students learn best when adults communicate well. Parents receive messages via phone, email, and text. The Buckin’ Elk Bi-Weekly Newsletter started back in the spring of 2020 when schools were closed and students were 100% remote. While the newsletter has evolved over the past year, the intent has remained the same - to inform parents about school activities, policies, news, schedule changes, updates, events, and opportunities for student engagement and support. Good communication increased parent involvement, a benefit we intend to maintain.

Developing rapport creates a climate of trust and respect. All staff have good communication with parents by simply making phone calls or sending emails. It sounds simple, yet it is one of the most tried and true strategies to ensure student success. Phone calls and emails are used daily to report on social, emotional, and academic status as well as attendance. The principal models this for her staff as she regularly calls parents after her daily visits to classrooms. Accounting for students' attendance and/or simply making a home wellness check is an important priority.