

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

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

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

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

School Mailing Address 4915 Barbee Road  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Durham State NC Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 27713-1603

County Durham

Telephone (919) 560-3964 Fax (919) 560-2103

Web site/URL http://www.pearsonstown.dpsnc.net E-mail Rodriguez\_Teal@dpsnc.net

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent\* Dr. Pascal Mubenga E-mail Pascal\_Mubenga@dpsnc.net  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Durham Public School District Tel. (919) 560-2000

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 Bettina Umstead  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

The original signed cover sheet only should be converted to a PDF file and uploaded via the online portal.

*\*Non-public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, leave blank.*

## **PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION**

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The electronic signature on the first page of this application (cover page) certify that each of the statements below, concerning the school’s eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education and National Blue Ribbon Schools requirements, are true and correct.

1. All nominated public schools must meet the state’s performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
2. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2021 in order to meet all eligibility requirements. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
3. The school configuration must include one or more of grades K-12. Schools located on the same campus (physical location and mailing address) must apply as an entire school (i.e. K-8; 6-12; K-12 school). Two (or more) schools located on separate campuses, must apply individually even if they have the same principal. A single school located on multiple campuses with one principal must apply as an entire school.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2015 and grades participating in statewide assessments must have been part of the school for at least the three years prior to September 2019.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 or 2020.
6. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. If irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state, the U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school’s application and/or rescind a school’s award.
7. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as “persistently dangerous” within the last two years.
8. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
9. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
10. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district, as a whole, has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution’s equal protection clause.
11. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

## PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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Data should be provided for the current school year (2020-2021) unless otherwise stated.

**DISTRICT** (Question 1 is not applicable to non-public schools.)

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 29 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 9 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 11 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 49 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	20	5	25
K	51	57	108
1	77	48	125
2	61	57	118
3	55	70	125
4	72	59	131
5	74	57	131
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
<b>Total Students</b>	410	353	763

\*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):
- 0.1 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 4.1 % Asian
  - 35.6 % Black or African American
  - 9.6 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0.3 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 41.6 % White
  - 8.7 % Two or more races
  - 100 % Total**

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

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

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

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

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	0
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	0
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	0
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	0
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	<.01
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	<1

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

Spanish

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 20 %

Total number students who qualify: 156

8. Students receiving special education services: 6 %

46 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>35</u> Autism                 | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>7</u> Other Health Impaired                 |
| <u>18</u> Developmental Delay    | <u>28</u> Specific Learning Disability         |
| <u>1</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>26</u> Speech or Language Impairment        |
| <u>3</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: 11

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

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	3
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	36
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	0
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 0:1

12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

<b>Required Information</b>	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016
Daily student attendance	97%	98%	98%	98%	98%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

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

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

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

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

Yes  No

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

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

Pearsonstown will provide a safe environment where learning is of primary importance and children can reach their greatest potential. We believe that this can be accomplished with a strong home school partnership. Coupled with quality and caring adults students will be able to gain the educational and social qualities needed to be a productive citizen.

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.

Due to the Covid pandemic totally closing schools in March 2020, Pearsonstown opened the 2020-21 school year virtually. Our school mascot is the Panda and we coined our virtual space the "Panda Virtual World". In March of this year, the Durham Public Schools Board of Education voted to allow students to return to in person instruction on March 15th. Parents were given the opportunity to complete a survey to indicate their preferred learning preference of either remaining virtual or attending school for face to face instruction. As of March 15th, we have opened school for those students whose parents elected to send them back for face to face instruction. We are operating on a hybrid model where teachers are facilitating instruction virtually and face to face inside their individual classrooms. We are in school four days a week (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday). Wednesday is utilized as a wellness day for the entire district and both teachers and students are out of school and free to participate in a variety of wellness activities to ease any anxieties that are directly related to the stress of the pandemic and to strengthen their mind, body, and spirit. We have a total of approximately 763 students enrolled at Pearsonstown this year and 54% of our student population continues to remain in the virtual space and 46% are in school for face to face instruction. Based on our parent survey data prior to restarting school in March, our parents wanted to ensure that their children would remain with their assigned teacher and based on the teacher's commitment to their students and parents, students were able to maintain seats with their original teacher for the remainder of the year. The students have successfully

transitioned back to the building and the teachers are handling teaching in both the virtual and face to face world remarkably well.

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

Pearsonstown Elementary School is one of the magnet choices offered in Durham Public Schools. We are considered a magnet school based solely on our year-round calendar option and we are 100% lottery based. Parents have to complete a lottery application for their children to attend school at Pearsonstown. Once they are admitted, they are able to maintain their placement up and through the 5th grade. If they withdraw from school they will lose their seat and it will be offered to a family on the lottery waiting list.

## **PART III - SUMMARY**

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"You Just Can't Hide That Pearsonstown Pride" is the motto that is often repeated and heard within the halls of our school and it serves as the mantra that continues to keep excellence and high expectations at the forefront of everything we do. "Pearsonstown Pride" are not just words, we take pride and hold ourselves to a very high standard. P.R.I.D.E. is an acronym for (Practicing Safe Behavior, Respecting Ourselves and Others, Including Everyone, Doing Our Best Work Brilliantly, and Extending a Helping Hand). As you can see, Pearsonstown Pride is not just represented daily in our quest to achieve academically, it is also in our strong home school bond, our unmatched parent and community support, and how we interact with each other inside the Panda Nation. During our daily morning announcements and every Sunday evening community call, everyone is reminded of what Pearsonstown Pride is and how it is the common thread of our deep bond with each other.

Pearsonstown Elementary is located in the growing southwest corridor of Durham, NC. Because we are one of three elementary year round magnet schools, we pull students from a wide attendance zone to give parents a year-round option for their children. The students population at Pearsonstown is very diverse and is representative of the community that it serves. Many of the students come from two parent households and are found to be highly motivated and educated. A large percentage of our parents work in the Research Triangle Park, and in the medical profession at Duke and University of North Carolina Hospitals. The majority of students entering Kindergarten are already reading, have a sense of numbers, and are recognizing shapes and colors. We have also encountered students who are exceptionally bright and they are supported through our Academically Gifted Program which supports students in all grades K-5.

The Pearsonstown Elementary School community is committed to creating a continuous year-round learning environment that is holistic and hands-on in its approach. We inspire students to pledge their hearts to a greater understanding of the world; their hands to quality work and service; and their heads to lifelong learning. Pearsonstown students are therefore empowered to become critical thinkers, self-directed lifelong learners, quality producers, collaborative workers, community contributors, and responsible citizens. Because we believe that all children learn in different ways and at different rates, we strive to offer a variety of student-centered delivery options to meet the needs of all our students. Teachers strive to create a productive, developmentally appropriate, learning environment by providing diverse learning opportunities which promote student learning and ensure student success. This approach allows us to address individual student needs, encourage cooperative learning, and the freedom to express ideas and opinions. We also encourage creative expression as well and are totally encouraging students to be involved in participating in programming with the school and community. It is important for us to provide an integrated approach that shows students that learning does not take place in isolation, gives them a better understanding of how each subject relates to the real world, and helps them see the connections between what they are learning.

We have a very successful intervention and enrichment model that has been designed to ensure that we are not leaving any students at an academic disadvantage. This program is called Targeted Academic Grouping (TAG) and it has been integrated into our daily schedule where students interact with instruction within flexible grouping cohorts based on their mastery of standards being taught. We do weekly and bi-weekly informal assessments called "Quick Checks" to ensure we are not losing students throughout the quarter. Academic pacing is important but ensuring that students are grasping the concepts is what allows us to maintain a constant pulse on where our students are academically. We also offer Before and Afterschool Tutoring in our PRIDE Academy to assist students and offer a more targeted approach to assist in their personal academic achievement.

We also have a wonderful Student Services Division that totally focuses on the social and emotional development of our students. They follow the curriculum "Move this World" which gives students strategies to cope with anxieties, and depression to become better at dealing with issues that can hinder their well being. Panorama is a data collection system that is used to help develop social and emotional programming around the needs of students in school.

We also provide monthly mentoring support for our students of color through programming called Brother



to Brother and Sister to Sister. Both mentoring programs are designed to support the academic, social, and emotional needs of our students of color. Many of our students lack the confidence and self-esteem to become successful students and this program not only allows them to receive academic help but it also provides them a mentor to help them through issues that may directly impact their success. These two programs have been widely heralded as successful and adult professionals are eager to share their experiences to help them become successful.

We have increasingly grown as a staff to develop laser-like focus on the "main thing" which is student achievement. Through methodical and strategic instructional planning from our common grade alike PLC planning, to our MTSS focus, our daily intervention practices and our before and after-school tutoring, we have been able to sustain and exceed growth in all academic areas. In 2019, we attained the highest growth index in school history at 94.3%. Our overall performance school grade was 82 (B); which was only 3 points shy of 85 (A). We have outpaced Durham Public Schools as well as the state in most academic areas for the last several years. This growth is attributed to our strong commitment in our academic program, and a trust yielded to us from our parents. We feel as long as we keep putting the best interest of our students first, we will continue to excel.

We have had to pivot quite a bit based on our need to educate our students during this pandemic period. Since schools closed in March 2020, we are now 1:1 with our technology support for students, we are now able to instruct and function in both the virtual and face to face space simultaneously, and we have adjusted our master schedule to ensure students in both spaces have the same instructional support and experience. Having to function in this capacity has strengthened our resolve and resilience in providing the best learning experiences possible under any circumstance. I am so proud to be a "Pearsontown Panda"!

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

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

Pearson Elementary School follows the North Carolina Standard Course of Study. Our general curriculum consists of learning objectives (standards) in the areas of Reading, Math, Science, and Social Studies. We also have enhancements courses in the area of Art, Music, PE, Technology, Creative Writing, and Foreign Language. Durham Public Schools provides each school a grade level sequenced pacing guide which standards are taught in such a way that content knowledge builds to create optimum learning experiences and outcomes for students. Students are assessed formally and informally throughout the nine week grading period and given a summative assessment at the end of each quarter to determine mastery or the need for intervention.

Beginning last year, Durham Public Schools has undergone major curriculum adoptions in the content areas of Reading and Math and has also adjusted our instructional platform to provide support both instructionally and technically for our students learning virtually. These changes have helped us learn how to mitigate the many factors that would have further contributed to the learning loss of students over the course of this pandemic. We have been able to successfully recover from being distanced from the classroom to providing a sustainable approach to both teaching and learning for our students and a strategic alignment of professional development that has helped teachers and other instructional support staff maneuver through this new era of facilitating instruction and engaging students.

At the beginning of the 2020-21 school year we were 100% virtual and we had to figure out a way to come up with a schedule that would allow us to accommodate the learning needs of all our students and also provide them the support needed to help them with navigating our district's new learning management system called "Canvas". We created a virtual schedule that consisted of 3 days of instruction (M, T, and Thurs), one day for social and emotional support (Wellness Wednesday) and a day remediation, small group enrichment, and assessments (Final Friday). This schedule allowed us to create varied opportunities for us to work with students in whole or isolated groups to leverage time for instruction.

Canvas was the learning management system, adopted by the district, to allow teachers to use technology to deliver instruction via zoom, post lessons, assignments, and activities for both synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities so students don't fall behind, and offer assessments that can be taken and assessed both in the virtual space. The Canvas Learning Management System is very interactive and allows students and parents access to the lessons and curriculum standards through the use of their chrome book. Each student would log in each day to their assigned links and complete the instructional activities designed by their teacher. Students are also able to access their Specials classes to ensure they were exposed to those curricula as well.

As we transitioned to having half of our students returning to face to face learning in the building on March 15th, we were able to utilize what was learned in the development of our new schedule and learning management system to transition into a hybrid learning model. In this model both virtual and face to face students are interacting with the platforms in real time so that they are still maintaining their learning momentum as a classroom community with little disruption. We will continue to use this model for the remainder of the year and when we return on our year-round schedule in July, the plan is that we will be back on our regular school schedule with all students return to the building full time.

Curriculum Adoptions:

The core curriculum adoptions used at Pearson Elementary include American Reading Company's ARC Core, Great Minds Eureka Mathematics. These programs were adopted because they provide strong alignment according to the Ed Reports Gateway criteria. Both ARC and Eureka are rated all green in alignment by Ed Reports.

Additionally, the school utilizes Science A-Z, Mystery Science, and Social Studies Weekly to support science and social studies content. All curriculum adoptions are aligned to the North Carolina Standard NBR 2021

Course of Study and provide students with opportunities to learn and master grade level skills. The curriculums did not need to be adjusted for the 2020-2021 school year because they all have digital platforms available to support both virtual and in-person learning. Therefore, students were able to access resources digitally and received consumable materials in physical form (for example Eureka practice books and physical novels to align with ARC literacy labs). This approach allowed for ongoing support for learners to learn digitally and practice through traditional models. This was also critical as it allowed students to have continuity in programs as students transitioned back to in person learning.

Our instructional approaches are rooted in the High Impact Teaching Strategies (HITS) developed based on the research of John Hattie and Robert Marzano and esteemed educational researchers. There are 10 HITS that provide a positive effect size to impact student learning. This year Pearisontown has focused on Setting Goals, Explicit Teaching, and Feedback. Although instructional decisions looked different for remote education in 2020-2021, compared to previous in-person learning models, the overall focus on high quality instruction remained. The difference was how explicit teaching looked in a remote setting. For example, the school employed Canvas as a digital learning management system (LMS) to provide students with concrete directions for independent learning tasks. Teachers met synchronously with students in zoom classrooms, but maintained a focus on explicit teaching and providing clear directions and worked examples and supported scaffolding for students practicing the individual skills. Teachers provided feedback to students through Canvas.

We also leveraged technology as a 1:1 school. Each student has an individual chrome book for their instructional needs. In the 2020-2021 school year remote instruction focused on building students academic skills while supporting them socially and emotionally through the pandemic. In addition to the core instruction in math, literacy, science, and social studies, teachers specifically integrated SEL content into their remote instruction. This included activities such as morning meetings and Wellness Wednesdays. Formative Assessments given at Pearisontown include the IRLA (Independent Reading Level Assessment) which provides teachers with individual information in order to successfully set reading goals with each student. Pearisontown has a 100% conference rate for its students using the ARC conferring model based on the IRLA. In math, students are assessed using module assessments from Eureka. These assessments check for understanding throughout and at the end of a module to provide ongoing feedback to teachers about their students' progress. In science, there are formative checkpoints available via Mastery connect to support ongoing knowledge of student growth. Additionally, students take an iReady assessment three times during the year to provide additional data points, screening diagnostics, and information on each child's reading and math skills.

In order to respond to students' needs, our assessments became more flexible during the 2020-2021 school year. Providing the individualized assessments in reading allowed students to show their own knowledge in real time as they grew throughout the year. Likewise, iReady data was analyzed to better understand the needs of individual students as well as trends at the school level. Grace was given to students who experienced hardships and teachers continued to monitor academic progress while focusing on supporting social and emotional health alongside academic growth.

Summative Assessments are also an important tool used at Pearisontown during this time. Statewide assessments include the End of Grade tests for students in 3-5th grade. There are also K-2 quarterly math assessments that provide summative information for teachers about students' mathematical content knowledge. K-2 math summative assessments were slightly modified to allow for remote learning students to show their knowledge via tools they already knew from instruction. The assessments were given using SeeSaw/Google Slides and the content of the assessments was modified to allow for ease of 1:1 testing. The state did not make changes to their End of Grade assessments for 3-5th graders.

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

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

Pearsonstown does offer Pre-K programming for our three and four year old students. The core curriculum that is appropriately used for the Pre-K students are Creative Curriculum and Letterland. These two areas focus on the development of the whole child and it strives to be creative, responsive, supportive, comprehensive and developmentally appropriate. The Creative Curriculum program focuses on 9 areas of development and learning; social emotional, physical, language, cognitive, literacy, mathematics, science and technology, social studies, and the arts. On the other hand, Letterland is a phonics based program that is used to teach reading, writing, and spelling to students by way of child friendly pictograms. Both programs work seamlessly and aids in the preparation for entering Kindergarten. Both programs are also aligned to the NC Foundation Standards and provide a great leap into the social and emotional learning for students to matriculate into and through their Kindergarten experience. The only adaptations we have had to make deals with class size, the removal of items that couldn't be sanitized, and the mitigation of 3 and 4 year old students wearing masks while in school.

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

Pearsonstown has a wonderful and committed group of specialists that work with our students on a daily basis to provide them enhanced instruction and experiences to support classroom instruction. We have six "Specials" classes that students rotate through during the nine week period. These classes include Art, Music, PE, Creative Writing, Media and Technology, Lexia and Dreambox Learning Lab, and Foreign Language. Our Specials Teachers in Art, Music, PE, and Technology follow and create lessons aligned with their subject area based on the North Carolina standards. During the pandemic, our wonderful Specials Teachers not only held zoom classes, they created club opportunities for students through zoom links and provided extra curricular experiences to stretch their learning and make this time away from school fun.

Our art program follows the NC standards and focuses instruction in three areas...visual literacy, contextual relevance, and critical response. These standards are met through teaching genres, art vocabulary, writing art narrations, patterns, tessellations, and measurements. Students are exposed to different forms of art and produce products related to which standards are being taught. Multiple manipulatives such as clay, pastels, chalk, paint, colored and led pencils, and colored construction paper are all used to teach art concepts. The hallways of Pearsonstown are used as blank canvases to display artwork created by different classes of students and our school's art club. Our students also compete and participate in our school-wide art shows and gallery walks, and are represented in our district, local county, and university art exhibitions and showcases.

Music always permeates the hallways at Pearsonstown. Whether it is in the music room or within an individual classroom, music has an impact on our schoolwide instructional program. Our students are tuned in and engaged in a variety of experiences from singing, playing instruments, learning music theory and genres, as well as performing. We always have a large contingency of students performing in our district's choral performance called "Evening of Entertainment". Our music teacher has years of experience and really pushes our students to take their music education seriously. Music has a way of sharing cultural differences and how cultures are connected. Students are exposed to playing bongos, the tambourine, bells, and the piccolo. These experiences allow our children to take an imaginary trip to the different countries where these instruments have impacted civilization at large. School holiday performances coupled with partnering with our middle and high school programs allow students to see the continuation of their music education.

Pearsonstown physical education program also follows the NC standards but we also exercise creativity when it comes to how kids are instructed. Students are encouraged and taught to move and exercise through the concepts of motor skills, movement concepts, health related fitness, and personal and social responsibility. Unlike most elementary schools, we have a full size gym where students can participate in a variety of activities including basketball, relay races, dodge ball, team tag, and other activities associated with movement. Our campus also has a baseball field and an outdoor track that is used on a regular basis for students to participate in softball and kick ball competitions as well as completing their walking challenges and competitions. Our PE teacher also coordinates and plans our annual field day activities as well as an integral planner for our yearly PTA Booster-Thon fundraiser. The themes of sportsmanship of teamwork are strongly emphasized in the coordination and planning of the class lessons and activities.

Our Media and Technology specials alternatively rotate between classes throughout the nine week period to give students a wide range of experiences from interacting and manipulating technology to learning how to research topics using print material. Programming such as developing keyboarding skills, spreadsheet design, PowerPoint presentations, investigative research and coding have students engaged in a variety of ways through the use of media and technology. These classes directly support classroom instruction by allowing students to use the 21st Century technology skills to further enhance their learning opportunities outside of the classroom space. Our student news channel, WPTE, and our newspaper, the Panda Press has all originated from these classes. Since we are now 1:1 with technology, these classes help students understand how to navigate and use their chrome books. These staff members also serve as support to troubleshoot any technical issues students may have to ensure there are no lapses in the use of their technology resource.

Over the years, we have been fortunate to be extended extra allotments due to the increases in student enrollment to create specials that directly impact instruction. Our creative writing special supports exposing our students to grade level literature to explore and create writing content, but it also exposes students to the 5 stages of the writing process; prewriting, writing, revision, editing, and publishing. We have a visible writing wall in our main hallway to display our "Published Pandas" writing to share with the entire school community. Our foreign language special occurs on a nine week rotation as well to expose our students to different languages and to peak their interest for further study once they enter middle and high school. Students have currently had the experience of learning Spanish and before school closed due to the Covid pandemic, they were scheduled to be exposed to French and Mandarin. Our Lexia and Dreambox Learning Lab special aligns directly with our reading and math curriculum and reinforces skills to help students grow academically in specific content areas. Our Lexia program supports literacy development and Dreambox supports a deeper understanding of math concepts. Each program levels to the students ability and as they become successful in mastering content, the program automatically adjusts to engage students in more challenging content. The creation of this lab has had a direct impact on student growth and achievement across all grade levels here at Pearsontown.

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

One of the cornerstones attributed to the success and academic growth of the students at Pearsontown can be directly contributed to the intervention and enrichment structure created to support every student at every level of their academic standing. Through our Curriculum Intervention and Enhancement (CI/E) programming, our Academically Gifted students as well as our Exceptional and ELL students receive daily interventions to support their academic needs. Whether we need to challenge our AIG students to perform at an even higher level or to bolster our EC and ELL students to meet and exceed their yearly goals we are providing instructional programming to help meet their needs. For our students who are currently performing at or right below grade level, they are placed in flexible ability groups to support and maintain their academic standing. Students are also supported in this program through our Multi Tiered System of Support (MTSS) program where they are provided individual and small group academic support to reach goals established in their intervention plan. All of this is accomplished through strong PLC collaboration with classroom teachers to dissect student achievement data in real time, and effective and timely parent communication to help support the home /school bond needed to ensure all students are successful.

Pearsontown has one of the largest enrollment of academically gifted students in any elementary school within Durham Public Schools. Our students are identified as early as Kindergarten and are placed in our nurturing program to extend their learning outside of their normal curriculum and engage them in activities that will peak their curiosity and engage them in the methodology of teaching gifted students. Once students matriculate to the 2nd grade, they take the COGAT Assessment to be identified for our academically gifted program. Once they are identified and they enter the 3rd grade, students begin being instructed by our AIG teaching to further enhance their

understanding and exposure to the AIG curriculum.

Exceptional and ELL students are academically supported through their individualized plans designed by their homeroom teachers, their case managers, and their parents to ensure they are growing and accomplishing their outlined goals through the implementation of their IEP. Students who have been assigned these designations experience both in class and pull out support based on their needs and accommodations. IEP teams meet on a regular basis to review student accommodations and check to see if the student is meeting their goals. If goals and accommodations need to be readjusted, the team will make that determination and conduct further testing if needed.

Not only do these students receive their federally mandated instruction based on their needs, they also participate in our CI/E Intervention model to give them an opportunity to learn and interact with their grade alike peers and it also gives them the experience of having their core instruction delivered from their assigned homeroom teacher. In the last 3 years we have done lots of work to increase the growth goals of students in both these categories and I am proud to announce that during our last cycle of state testing in 2018-19 our EC students met their state growth goals. This just fueled our mission to continue to provide the best educational experiences for these children.

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

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

When it was announced that Durham Public Schools and other school districts across North Carolina were going to close schools last March, everyone was sent into a state of confusion and shock because we had never experienced anything like this before. The unknowns of what to do next could not be found in a manual or playbook and there was a sense of helplessness and despair among many educators and parents because we were all thinking about our kids and what we needed to do to protect them from what we were about to experience. Pearsontown has a 98% attendance rate and because our kids love their school so much, we knew we needed to come up with a plan to make sure they still felt connected to their school as it has always been a place of consistency and normalcy that they have grown to know.

As indicated earlier...Pearsontown Pride permeates everything we do and that drive and desire to bring and keep our school community together kicked in so we began to figure out how we could bring all of the foundations of what makes the brick and mortar building so special for our students into an engaging virtual space, and so the Panda Virtual World was born. The connection amongst our school community is so important that we strategically designed the Panda Virtual World around the need to connect with our students and to deliver a strong instructional program to ensure our students continued to thrive academically. This portal allowed students to have access to all things Pearsontown, just in the virtual space. Kids these days are technologically savvy so one of the first things we did to ensure they were engaged is we became a 1:1 school and provided each student a chrome book and hot spot if they needed it. We had a school wide distribution day and turned it into a parade where students and parents had to come to school and pick their laptops and other curriculum material needed for being able to participate virtually. It was so much fun because the kids and parents got to see their teachers and it made for a very emotional moment for everyone involved. This small gesture of that distribution parade developed into a quarterly event where students could visibly connect with their teachers in a safe and socially distanced way and at the same time pick up materials to keep them engaged in classroom instruction.

It was also important for us to provide care for the social and emotional needs of our kids who may have been experiencing some anxiety from school being closed and their inability to connect to the school, their teachers, and their friends. To combat these issues and more, we created a Student Services Department to assist students and parents with any social and emotional needs they encountered. This department not only served our students with technical help surround the use of their laptops, they created spaces for students to join each other socially through virtual "lunch bunch" events, Wellness Wednesday programming to teach students ways to destress and handle anxiety, and to offer assistance to parents who needed help with helping their students adjust to this new way of learning. This department has been extremely helpful in mitigating support in this virtual space.

Along with staying connected to our students and parents, building strong and sustainable relationships among what we like to call our "Panda Nation" was vital as well. Students who matriculate from Kindergarten through Fifth grade are considered "Panda Lifers" meaning they will always be a part of the Pearsontown family. During this time of Covid, it is not unusual for students to connect with their current and former teachers, their favorite Specials Teacher, the School Counselor they have confided in, a Receptionist, or an Administrator that they admire in an informal virtual way. Each staff member has a zoom link that at any time a student wanted to connect, they can email a member of the staff and just have time to reflect, express themselves, and share experiences. These instances are crucial because under normal circumstances, this would be a daily occurrence in the life of a Pearsontown student.

Every Sunday night at 7:00pm, we consistently send out a call announcing any events that may occur in the upcoming week, and to give special acknowledgements to students who have gone above the call of duty to be an engaged student. Teachers consistently find ways to celebrate accomplishments with students inside their zoom spaces and continue to keep them encouraged and to aspire to have pride in their work and to perform brilliantly in everything they do. I have heard from many parents that when the call comes in on Sunday night that their entire family listens and that they repeat our motto of "You Just Can't Hide That

Pearsonstown Pride" together. This to me is a strong indication of our connectivity to each other and a bond that far exceeds any normal home school relationship. We are Panda Strong and we are never afraid to show it!

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

Here at Pearsonstown, we are known to have consistent and ongoing partnership with our parents, community partners, volunteers, and institutions of higher learning. In my opinion, we have the best community support systems across this district because we make them truly feel as if they are a part of our Panda Nation. Our families and community partners are uniquely involved in everything we do and are extremely supportive of our instructional programming and any extra curricular events that we sponsor. During this Covid period, it has been extremely important to keep communication timely and consistent throughout this period. This communication allows us to remain as one and also gives us the ability to pivot and change direction at any given time. Each Sunday evening, our weekly call s goes out to communicate any and all events related to school happenings which is inclusive of but not limited to parent meetings, report card distribution, celebrations, cancellations. We also post announcements on our web page and update our social media platforms regularly so that everyone has access to information in real time. These communication practices have also become very valuable as we are able to immediately communicate any updates coming from the school board or the district Superintendent to ensure that our parents are notified and informed and can be immediately engaged if needed.

In my humble opinion, Pearsonstown Elementary School has the best PTA organization in the entire district. The parents are entrenched and engaged with not only providing support for teachers and students both physically and monetarily, they are also responsible for raising thousands of dollars to fund programs and to purchase needed items for the school such as playground equipment, technology needs, books for the media center, and funding special projects for teachers. Every year, for the past 12 years, the PTA holds one fundraiser for the school called Boosterthon. Through this one fundraiser, they consistently raise upwards of 75k to fund any and all programming in their yearly strategic budget. Coupled with their network of professionals within their career fields, each year they more than exceed their fiscal budgetary goals.

Pearsonstown has an extensive network of business and community partners that support the school. These partners are integral in ensuring that the school has access to the outside resources that enable us to thrive, and keep our students exposed to the latest trends technology, business, hobbies, and culture. Our business and community partners have sponsored such events as our annual Multi-Cultural Fair, Career Days, Chess Clubs, and the Martial Arts. We have a before and afterschool program where our partners can come in and showcase community initiatives for our students to get involved with such as the Boy Scouts, the Girl Scouts, Recreational programs and teams such as basketball, baseball, Girls on the Run, soccer, tennis and golf. Having the connections to bring these resources into Pearsonstown only allows us to further broaden the students experiences beyond the walls of the school. Here in Durham, North Carolina we are surrounded by several high ranking institutions of higher learning which include North Carolina Central University, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Duke University, and North Carolina State University. These institutions provide Pearsonstown students academic support with student tutors and professional teacher training and degree programming for the teaching staff. Having these incredible invaluable connections with the local universities, allows our students to not only to see college as a future choice, it also exposes them to having access to some of the greatest college sports teams and players in the world.

Pearsonstown has two widely recognized mentoring programs that are specifically designed to assist our marginalized students who may need an encouraging word from time to time or someone who understands their world enough to help them understand how to overcome life's obstacles. The Brother to Brother and Sister to Sister Mentoring Programs are designed to help our black and brown kids navigate school successfully while building their self-esteem to be able to accomplish their dreams through hard work, self-discipline, perseverance, responsibility, and integrity. Each student in these programs are provided and guided by mentors who currently offer guidance virtually in our bi-monthly zoom room chats, and facilitate discussions on character traits and current events of the world that impacts them.

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



Creating, maintaining, and sustaining a professional culture here at Pearsonstown has always been a key element of ensuring the success of our ability to attract highly qualified and conscientious educators. The goal is to always create an environment where educators can thrive and showcase their talent in educating my young Pandas. The best marketing strategy for Pearsonstown over the last several years is the "word of mouth" communications from the staff to their other colleagues around the district regarding their love of being a part of the Panda Nation. As the leader of this great school, I constantly challenge my staff to be better than they were the previous day. I don't expect perfection but I do expect they give their most brilliant effort to ensure student success.

When the culture is right, and teachers and staff feel good about what they are doing, it automatically extends to the students. The focus is to always make sure the educators at Pearsonstown feel supported and respected in the jobs they are responsible for. It is also important that the Pearsonstown staff feel as if they are listened to and that they have a voice in the instructional programming of the school. I consider all of my staff experts in what they do and when we are methodically strategizing on what our next focus is, I expect them to bring their best selves to the conversation. While being seen as professional and acting professionally are totally different, there is a high level of respect for everyone that chooses to be here. Just as I ask the staff to extend "grace and mercy" to the students, I also do the same for them because they have the same anxieties and frustrations regarding how their lives have changed due to Covid. It is often stated in our collective meetings that I would not want to go through this time with any other team of people and that as long as we remain family, we will get through this and remain Panda Strong. During Covid it has been a challenge to maintain that connectivity virtually among colleagues because they are so used to being in close proximity with each other to encourage and uplift aging each other in their respective PLC groups to take on challenges and anything else they need to accomplish. I am so very proud of my team and any chance I get to tell them or show them I do.

Our professional culture is quantitatively measured every year through the Teacher Working Conditions Survey administered by our school district and the state of North Carolina. Both certified and classified staff have an opportunity to share their unbiased opinion regarding aspects of their work environment and how they feel existing in that space. The survey measures staff responses to questions regarding leadership, access to supplies and materials, professional development, leadership opportunities, how student discipline is handled, and if this school is a good place to work. The overwhelming majority of the staff responses score well into the 90% range with the highest scores in Leadership and the environment being an excellent place to work and grow professionally. We have an extremely low teacher turnover rate where our teacher experience ranges from 5 years up to 41 years. Most teachers remain here consistently which keeps our program thriving. If openings occur, it is because of someone being promoted, going back to school to attain a new teaching credential, or retirement. All of these speak directly to the culture and how the Pearsonstown staff is regarded professionally.

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

The philosophy which best symbolizes the approach to our leadership style has to be attributed to servant leadership and what that looks like. It is extremely important that the staff see members of the leadership team not as benefactors of the work being done, but as supporters and allies of work needed to move the school progressively forward. Being a servant leader is more than "walking the walk" but more of "talking the walk". Staff members are intrinsically motivated when they see those in leadership willingly doing things to not only understand their point of view but also standing in their shoes to feel the same experiences they feel. It is not uncommon to see members of the Pearsonstown Leadership Team. covering classes, teaching lessons, cleaning cafeteria tables, mopping floors, or making copies for teachers. This gives the sense everyone is all in this together and it creates a bond among the school family that is more revered than rebuked.

Within the ranks of the administrative leadership team there exists several sub-committees with roles and designated responsibilities for each. Currently there are five members of the executive leadership team which consists of two Assistant Principals, a Teaching and Learning Coach, an AIG Facilitator, an EC Facilitator, and a Student Services Coordinator. The sub-committees are opportunities for teachers to participate in a leadership capacity as well. The Grade and Department Chair Committee, School

Improvement Team, and PTA Representative committees allow teachers to fully engulf themselves in the leadership experience at the school. Employing the practice of Distributive Leadership, each leader has their role and the responsibility to carry out the goals and directives prescribed to their committee. Whether creating or implementing school policy, researching best practices for teaching and learning, to guiding PLC discussions to ensure the instructional integrity of lessons and assessments, the leadership team is galvanized to cover all areas to keep Pearsonstown moving in a positive direction.

During Covid, we have had to restructure our approach to leadership because of how the pandemic caused us to shift. The new structure morphed into two specific teams; one that specifically dealt with instruction and another which dealt with instituting school-wide Covid safety protocols. These two committees not only had to work together simultaneously to make sure we were able to maintain the instructional integrity of our new Panda Virtual World learning model, but we were preparing to bring kids back to a safe and socially distanced classroom space with new rules and procedures to follow. Both committees were led by the two Assistant Principals and they did an outstanding job in completing all the tasks needed for us to open up virtually in August 2020 and to bring students back to the building in March 2021.

All of our roles have drastically changed since last March in more ways than one. The most significant change that we had to make is to become a much more savvy leader in the area of technology. We had to lean heavily on each other because some of us were more versed in the manipulation of technology and we had to shift our thinking on how we were going to use it. While we are still in the learning phase, we are now in a much better place with conferencing using zoom, organizing our instructional and meeting links, electronic lesson planning and development, and navigating instruction and assessment protocols using the district adopted Canvas learning management system. Leadership has been the one constant key element that has kept us focused on the "main thing" and that is ensuring that our students have the best educational experiences possible

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

Applying the principles of culturally responsive teaching and equity is always through the lens of instruction and how it impacts students is extremely important in this day and time. In the current climate of the world today, what is seen and heard in the media, and the free access to social media platforms, there are so many things that can cause students to feel disconnected with their identities of who they are and how the world perceives them. It is vitally important that the educators at Pearsonstown recognize and highlight these differences among our diverse student population so that they can strive for greatness in a safe and fulfilling environment.

One of the things we do here at Pearsonstown is that we do our best to recruit and hire staff that are representative of our student population. Caring relationships with adults are vitally important to the academic and emotional growth of students, but when they can identify and connect with a staff member that has the same cultural and ethnic background that experience becomes more relevant to their daily existence within the school setting. Language barriers are always a struggle with some students and the ability to communicate with their parents who speak another language is always a struggle. We are fortunate that we have staff members and parent volunteers who are fluent in a few languages and are able to assist when needed. By reminding ourselves that everyone that enters our doors is important, finding ways to communicate is not a challenge or an issue it is a courtesy we are glad to extend.

We have a Pearsonstown Equity and Diversity Team that participates in district training in regards to ensuring we are keeping our eyes on opportunities to continue to improve on our culturally responsive teaching strategies and our equity practices. This team along with the PTA have been charged to provide specific trainings and workshop opportunities to our staff and parents as we continue to grow in this area together. It has not always been easy and some of the philosophical and ideological obstacles we encountered were more challenging than others, but we have taken

the stance as a school to commit to ensuring that everyone is respected and treated with the dignity they deserve. We have had several virtual town hall meetings where the conversations and discussions were not always the best but we knew we had to have them to press forward through this pandemic. Although the climate in our society today will show that we are more divided than we are together, our goal is to make sure we do our best to eliminate biases to maintain the sanctity of our Panda Strong school community.

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

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The one practice that I feel that has totally transformed Pearsonstown Elementary from being a good school to becoming a great school has been our work around data analysis and how we respond to it. Data gives a mirror image that quantifies how the work we do around lesson development and instructional facilitation and assessment translates to successful student outcomes. Mastering and understanding the various data sets simultaneously from the global school perspective down to the level of the classroom and student allows us to strategically and methodically change the achievement trajectory of student groups and eventually the school.

Immersing yourself in data can be a complicated task if you don't know what you are looking for. Understanding the trends, and applying research based and common sense strategies to change the course of those trends is what is needed to move the academic needle of a school towards a position of growth. The best way we have found to analyze data is to break it down based on mastery of standards within a PLC setting. This type of group dynamic allows us to have discussions about the standard itself, how it was taught, and the difference in the learning outcomes of students. Data analysis on informal assessments allows for quick and immediate opportunities for student intervention to keep students on pace and not lose momentum in the learning moment. During this Covid period, the impact of learning loss was prevalent for all of our students and we wanted to change that. All of our students come from different home environments with different priorities around education so we had to pay close attention to trends in our assessment data and even change our curriculum pacing guide to ensure we were not leaving any kids behind.

Teachers and even administrators tend to shy away from data analysis because many are scared and ashamed of what they don't know and the reality of what it says about their teaching and the school environment. Our goal is to always make sure our PLC data discussions are safe places so the opportunity to discuss student achievement data is not seen as an indictment of what someone doesn't know or what they have failed to do. We use it as a teachable moment to show how one can improve their teacher practices so their students can experience success and a better outcome. This works well for the confidence of both the student and teacher.

Examining all the data sets a school has to offer allows for a holistic view of what the school could aspire to be. Once everyone is of the same mindset, and focused on accomplishing the goal of the team, everybody wins and when we do, our Pearsonstown Pride shines brighter than ever and it is hard to hide it.