

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

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

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

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

School Mailing Address 7800 High Street  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Lincoln State NE Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 68506-3661

County Lancaster County

Telephone (402) 436-1220 Fax (402) 458-3292

Web site/URL https://lux.lps.org E-mail ddohmen@lps.org

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

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

Name of Superintendent\* Dr. Steve Joel E-mail sjoel@lps.org  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Lincoln Public School District Tel. (402) 436-1000

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 Connie Duncan  
(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.)

- Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
  - 39 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 12 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 6 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools

57 TOTAL

**SCHOOL** (To be completed by all schools. Only include demographic data for the nominated school, not the district.)

- 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

- 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	150	123	273
7	127	162	289
8	134	131	265
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	411	416	827

\*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
  - 3.9 % Asian
  - 2.3 % Black or African American
  - 7.8 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0.4 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 79.1 % White
  - 6.4 % 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: 4%

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	16
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	17
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	33
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	812
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.04
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	4

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

Arabic

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 0 %

1 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 21 %

Total number students who qualify: 171

8. Students receiving special education services: 13 %

106 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.

18 Autism

5 Multiple Disabilities

0 Deafness

0 Orthopedic Impairment

1 Deaf-Blindness

14 Other Health Impaired

0 Developmental Delay

27 Specific Learning Disability

8 Emotional Disturbance

22 Speech or Language Impairment

1 Hearing Impairment

1 Traumatic Brain Injury

7 Intellectual Disability

2 Visual Impairment Including Blindness

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 7

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	2
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	31
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	24
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	13
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	12

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 27:1

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%	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.

<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.

Lux promotes academics, fosters creativity, develops interpersonal and intrapersonal success, encourages responsibility, affirms diversity, and encourages the pursuit of lifelong learning.

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 grade levels have been operating on a hybrid model (in-person and Zoom) of synchronous learning throughout the entire 2020-2021 school year. With few exceptions, like Skilled & Technical Sciences, every teacher was responsible for simultaneously instructing students in the classroom and via Zoom. The majority of Lux students opted for in-person learning throughout the year, with our peak number of Zoom learners approaching 260 through the winter months. As the COVID situation has improved, our Zoom numbers have fallen to a current low of 83 students.

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

## **PART III - SUMMARY**

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Lux Middle School was built in 1996 on the eastern edge of Lincoln, Nebraska, an area with strong ties to education. A large number of students come from families of business owners, university educators, attorneys, or medical professionals. In 2016, a new middle school was built south of Lux. Though this caused a decrease in student population and adjustments to the attendance area, Lux has experienced an increase in students representing a broader range of backgrounds. Despite these changes, the vision of Lux has remained constant. Lux is a dynamic school that promotes high standards for all students, strives to ensure all students are ready to continue their educational journey (no matter the next step), encourages positive citizenship, and emphasizes inclusivity of students from all backgrounds. Most importantly, Lux seeks to help all students reach their full potential.

A key component in this commitment is a dedication to best practices with regard to instructional practices and teaching strategies. Because of Lux's exemplary character, most teachers remain at Lux, many for much of their career. This lack of teacher turnover contributes to a consistent and positive community, as well as continued excellence.

Essential to this quest for excellence is a community where strong personal relationships can be formed between staff and students. This begins with the manner in which students are organized. Averaging 850 students in three grades (6th through 8th), Lux students are divided into two teams per grade: a grade of 300 students would be divided into two teams of 150. Each grade level also has a counselor and administrator who advance with students as they progress through Lux. This three-year relationship with individual students builds consistency and trust, which is advantageous to their success and the Lux community.

One of the philosophies Lux adheres to is, "All Means All." This means Lux serves and helps "all" students reach their full potential. To ensure this happens, Lux has a wide variety of classes and supports in place to meet the needs of "all" students. Twenty-nine percent of Lux students are gifted and four percent are highly gifted. Therefore, Lux has three to four of its 10 sections per grade level dedicated to differentiated classes, and more than 10 mentors serve highly gifted students. As evidence to this need for differentiated course work, the state average for students who are proficient on its Norm Referenced Test is approximately 65-70%, while Lux has approximately 90-94% who are proficient; approximately 70% or higher score in the highest percentile.

While Lux is proud of the school's high achieving students, it is important to staff that all students reach their potential. Lux typically has 12% of students qualify for Special Education services and 21% of students qualify for Free and Reduced Lunch. Lux offers a variety of classes to ensure success for students who qualify for these services or any student who may need support as they advance their academic journey. These classes include reading and math intervention courses to strengthen specific academic areas, skills courses to improve time management and organization, interventions and strategies courses to focus on missing academic skills, and life skills courses. Some teachers open their classrooms on a rotating basis for after-school study hall or Algebra Lab. Lux partners with the local high school to offer tutoring to students who need support. The Individual Success Program (ISP) is also integrated into the Lux community. ISP serves students who have an IQ of 75 or lower and display severe behavior concerns. ISP staff work tirelessly to ensure these students have success academically and socially.

Lux provides a wide variety of avenues for students to contribute to the Lux community and further their academic and social potential. More than 40% of Lux students perform in vocal music, instrumental music, or drama groups. Lux has Science Bowl and MathCounts Teams that have competed nationally. Other activities for students with a strong interest in academia are: Spelling Bee, Geography Bee, book clubs, debate club, and Makerspace club, which includes robotics and coding. For those students who desire to explore or strengthen athletic skills, Lux offers an intramural program that includes five sports. Student Council meets weekly to promote community and service. Other programs such as Dream Equal, Native American Students, and a gaming club help Lux students connect with like-minded peers and provide opportunities for students to receive guidance from professionals. These programs cultivate a community of respect and trust.

With the recent challenges of the pandemic, Lux worked to stay effective and serve the community as it has in the past. Schoolwide, Lux adopted a philosophy of whatever-it-takes flexibility and responsiveness to the needs of the community. Teachers mastered the complexities of instructing students in the classroom and remotely. Parent-Teacher Conferences and tutoring were moved to the Zoom platform. Perhaps most important was the creation of in-person and zoom community groups to ensure all students' social and mental health needs were met.

Solid relationships, academic excellence, and extracurricular opportunities have created, and continue to build, a strong community for Lux. That community has made Lux a successful school that reaches all students, in the past and in the current pandemic. It is that community, known and trusted by all stakeholders, that will continue to ensure Lux prepares each student for their future.



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

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

#### 1. Core Curriculum

##### 1a. Reading/English Language Arts:

Reading and English Language Arts provide students at each grade level the opportunity to experience multicultural literature and express themselves through writing. The scope/sequence builds from one grade to the next. English encourages students to interact with quality novels through literature circles. These are typically tied to unit themes, as are the writing outcomes for each quarter. Teachers are encouraged to use personal skills and strategies to reach the students as they foster a love for literature and writing.

Each grade level has a standard and differentiated English course. Differentiation is accomplished by compacting, where appropriate, in order to pursue a higher-level understanding of other concepts. In addition, we offer Contemporary Communications in 7th grade and reading at all three levels. However, students must qualify for this reading intervention, which is based on their Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) score.

The pandemic classroom has been a challenging adjustment. Meeting the needs of a hybrid classroom has prompted the expansion of each teacher's repertoire of options. Students have experienced online reviews in the form of Pear Deck and Kahoot; they have Zoomed with each other for literature circle discussions. Teachers have had visitors Zoom into their classroom when COVID protocols limited their attendance in-person. Through it all, teachers have learned that they can accomplish whatever they set out to achieve. It may take some creativity and extra time, but teachers really have not missed a step.

##### 1b. Mathematics

At Lux, mathematics instruction is based on Lincoln Public Schools goals. Teachers want students to become mathematical problem solvers, value the quantitative nature of our world, and gain mathematical skills with an understanding of fundamental mathematical concepts.

Math intervention classes are provided for students needing additional time and support to develop missing skills. A differentiated class with a distinct curriculum is offered at each grade level. Unique to our district, Lux offers Algebra to seventh graders who need more than the differentiated curriculum. These students take Geometry as eighth graders, which gives them the option for more advanced mathematics classes in high school, even gaining college credit.

Problem-based learning coupled with cooperative teams are strategies incorporated in the upper-level mathematics classrooms. Sequentially organized problems promote discovery of concepts. Students are assigned roles to make sure everyone contributes and learns, while the teacher facilitates their process of understanding.

All levels use formative and summative assessments as means to improve instruction. A retention assessment is given for each objective so students can show progress in their understanding. This also places an importance on remembering their mathematical learning.

Professional learning teams allow teachers to discuss teaching strategies to maximize learning. During the pandemic this was even more important as these strategies needed to be adjusted. In response, teachers provided videos of instruction, online assessments, and utilized breakout rooms so students could continue to work as teams.

##### 1c. Science

Science instruction at Lux is based on the Nebraska College and Career Ready Standards for Science. These NBRS 2021

standards have three main components: Disciplinary Core Ideas (DCI), Crosscutting Concepts (CCC), and Science and Engineering Practices (SEP). DCIs are the focused, limited set of science ideas that students should know, for example Newton's Laws or the water cycle. CCCs, such as finding patterns or making models, are used to organize and make sense of core ideas. Engaging in the practices of science and engineering helps students understand various approaches used to investigate natural phenomena and develop solutions to challenges.

Integration of the three components establishes a foundation upon which students can continue to learn and apply scientific knowledge and skills within the education arena and beyond. All components are taught, learned, and assessed simultaneously. Differentiated classes with these same emphases are provided at the 7th and 8th grade level. Essentially, Lux focuses on giving all students the opportunity to learn science by doing science.

Since the pandemic started and a hybrid learning model has been in effect, science teachers at Lux have worked to create equitable learning for all students. Online science and engineering simulations, and interactives paired with thoughtful questioning, enabled all students to "do science," whether in person or remote.

#### 1d. Social studies/history/civic learning and engagement

The Lincoln Public Schools and Nebraska State Standards guide Lux's social studies instruction. The objective is to engage all students with the knowledge and skills necessary to be informed and active citizens, while also contributing to a diverse and interdependent world. In grades 6 and 7, students complete a chronological study of world history from the establishment of early farming communities through European encounters with the Americas. In grade 8, students continue a chronological study focusing on American History. Differentiated classes of the same topics are provided at all grade levels. The goal is to balance learning content with developing critical thinking skills through the use of historical inquiries and District Common Assessments (DCAs). The curriculum is digital and accessible to all students, so only minor modifications were needed when adjusting to remote learning.

Students have many opportunities to actively engage in social studies, history, and civic learning during their time at Lux, such as: an annual Patriot Day celebration when first responders from the community are invited to have lunch with students and, during election years, the district conducts Student Vote at each school.

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

While students are in middle school, Lux teachers and staff are already working to prepare them for college and career paths. The focus of the middle school course work functions as a stepping stone along students' educational journeys, whether that be toward one of Lincoln Public Schools' high schools or one of the focus programs.

At Lux, there is an emphasis on rigor within the curriculum, especially in the courses offered toward high school credit. Students may begin meeting high school requirements while in 8th grade: Algebra, Geometry, Spanish I, French I, and Chinese I. Students engage in activities that not only provide foundational practice in real-life skills, such as time management and organization, but also address the development of critical and independent thinking.

As students move on to high school, they have the opportunity to take differentiated and Advanced Placement course work, and the Lux differentiated curriculum in English, science, social studies, and math, as well as computer science, are preparatory steps for those accelerated focuses. The world language courses, too, are a step in preparing students to tackle the challenge of advanced language offerings in high school. Lux also offers courses in Skilled and Technical Sciences (STS), as well as Healthy Living/Family and Consumer Science (FCS), that help students learn skills as a first step toward upper-level course work at The Career Academy, a joint venture between Lincoln Public Schools and Southeast Community College to provide academic and real world experiences to high school juniors and seniors. In addition to these, Lux

courses in the area of business contribute to the development of career interests. Alongside the in-class course work, the Lux counseling department encourages students to explore learning and career opportunities, for example using Career Cruising activities to help students begin thinking in terms of strengths and interests in regard to their careers. The counseling department also helps coordinate 8th grade field trips to a local university and community college, helping students begin to think about the college experience and the high school classes they should choose for their intended path.

Outside of the classroom, Lux provides community-minded opportunities via public action programs and drives generated in the Student Council, as well as school participation in Student Vote. These opportunities, along with classroom instruction, encourage students to work toward goals that move them onward to continuing education, careers, and active citizenship within their communities.

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

**2. Other Curriculum Areas:**

Keeping with the mission of engaging students and building community, Lux has a variety of Academic Connection opportunities that it offers to the student population. At each grade level most students have at least two class periods in their day to explore a course that might interest them, outside of the Lux Middle School core curriculum.

If students have an interest in music, there are several ways to either explore the interest or develop skills they brought to Lux. Lux offers general music classes in both sixth and seventh grades, while specialized musicians can sign up for band, orchestra or morning ensemble groups in all three grade levels. Eighth graders have an additional vocal option, D’Lux Singers, a show choir that also meets during the day as an Academic Connection class. Before-school ensemble groups, such as Jazz Band or choirs, are performance-based and prepare for concerts to be presented either to parents or at school assemblies.

Lux students who are interested in Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) can take classes in all three grade levels that focus on skills for life. FCS classes include focuses upon basic nutrition, cooking and baking skills, careers, family, interior design, and individual sewing projects. In Physical Education, students learn the qualities of sharing, team spirit, leadership, sportsmanship and love of fitness. Health Education is focused on areas of mental health, growth development, drugs and alcohol, disease prevention, nutrition, and Second Step social emotional curriculum.

The Skilled and Technical Sciences (STS) curriculum focuses on the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), offering courses in sixth, seventh and eighth grades. STS students learn techniques used in industry, with a focus on computer-aided design, computer numerical design, 3D printing, small engines, design process, engineering, manufacturing research & development, and how to use various tools. STS students have the opportunity to explore a variety of STEM-related projects and associated careers while developing the corresponding skill sets and knowledge base.

Lux has computer classes that range from introductory keyboarding and basic software programs, to coding and working with robotics. Students interested in Art can participate in classes that teach simple sketch design, work with clay to make pottery, or discover digital art design. Students explore cultures through World Language classes in sixth and seventh grade that may lead to an interest in taking Spanish, French or Chinese for high school credit in eighth grade. Eighth graders can also register for a business class that covers everything from balancing a checkbook to marketing a new small business.

Because of the hands-on nature of Academic Connection classes, the primary COVID impact on learning has been limiting germ spread. The connection team has implemented many strategies to ensure the safety of students, including wearing masks, masking wind instruments, social distancing, and sanitizing chairs, desks and music stands in between each class period. Further, classes requiring substantial use of equipment not

readily available at home, such as all STS classes and an 8th grade cooking/sewing class, were not available to remote students.

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

Lux has a wide range of supports for students who struggle academically, and best practices with instruction lead the way. Teachers employ a variety of instructional strategies to meet the needs of a wide variety of learning styles. Objectives are posted and guide instruction for each lesson, while multiple opportunities to respond are given during lessons. Both techniques are best practices with regard to instruction.

When students struggle to make adequate academic progress, Lux teachers create supports specific to the student. Teachers monitor missing work, attendance and overall grades. They help students organize, sign a student's planner as a communication tool in regard to work or progress, or use additional time to reteach specific material. Lux has an Academic Support room for students who need such things as extra time to complete an assignment or having a test read aloud to them. Lux has also teamed with a local high school to offer tutoring to students via Zoom. These supports are in place for all students.

When teachers see that a student continues to struggle despite these strategies, they connect the student with our Student Assistance Team (SAT) Coordinator. The SAT Coordinator contacts parents and works with teachers to identify specific interventions and to examine data to determine if more support is needed. In the SAT process, for example, the team might suggest a student participate in reading or math intervention classes where teachers assess and teach or reteach missing skills. Separate skills classes offer extra focus to help students with time management or organization. All these interventions are available for any student who may be struggling.

For students showing a deeper understanding of curriculum and needing an enriched curriculum, Lux offers differentiated classes. Students can be enrolled in differentiated social studies, science, math and English/language arts. If students are verified as highly gifted through testing, they may qualify to work with a mentor in a specific subject area. For students having accelerated beyond their typical grade-level math course work, Lux provides opportunities for students to be enrolled in above-grade level math classes, for instance, 6th graders enrolled in Geometry, normally a 9th or 10th grade class. Lux offers several academic clubs to enhance learning, and these clubs are open to all students. Even more specifically, Lux has a Science Bowl Team, MathCounts Team, Technology Club, and Debate Club. The science and math teams regularly compete at the state and national level.

One Tier 3 support that Lux uses to help students with very targeted needs is our Individual Success Program (ISP). This is a district program housed at Lux that serves students with low cognitive abilities and severe behavior problems. ISP develops specialized plans to help students grow. In addition to ISP, Lux offers life skills classes and an adaptive P.E. class. Lux addresses other distinct student needs through the support of our Speech/Language Pathologists, Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, and Vision and Hearing specialists who serve students in our building.

Throughout the pandemic, in-person students continued with the same supports as always. Remote students had the same class opportunities via Zoom, and teachers practiced extra vigilance on progress. If a student began to struggle, communication home was increased through emails, phone calls from teachers and administrators, and connections to technical support.

Teams of teachers work together to coordinate these supports, communicate academic

opportunities to parents, and get students involved in appropriate interventions to meet individual needs. All of these processes help Lux develop a community of lifelong learners.

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

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

At Lux, the staff works hard to engage students both in and out of the classroom. There is a focus upon adolescent development, and it is addressed not only through academic rigor, but also through the manner in which social/emotional needs are met. This attention to both helps Lux students develop into lifelong learners, and supports them long after they leave Lux hallways.

Instructional strategies greatly influence the level of student engagement in learning. Over the last few years, Lux staff has focused on research-based strategies with the hope of engaging students and increasing student achievement. These strategies include utilizing circulation, posting objectives that drive instruction, and planning opportunities for students to respond to instruction. The staff has made a conscious effort to grow in all three areas by participating in staff development and measuring the impact they are having on their students' success. A typical staff meeting is filled with a presentation of research, a small group discussion regarding application of strategies, or deliberate time to share how various strategies have been effective. Administrative walkthroughs and peer observations are set up to give feedback in these three areas. Teachers also incorporate technology into lessons, using tools like Kahoot and Quizlet to make learning fun and keep students engaged. These structures have made a noticeable impact on student engagement at Lux.

To support and engage students' social/emotional development, teachers do frequent check-ins and spend time doing extra triage with students who are struggling. Staff members write postcards to students to further develop relationships and encourage students to participate in a vast array of extracurricular activities. These activities include music-related interests, such as morning choirs, jazz band, or orchestra, and sports-related interests, such as intramural sports including volleyball, basketball and track. Also included are academic-related interests, such as competitive academic groups like MathCounts or Science Bowl. The Student Council leads community service projects and student events, for example dances and 6th Grade Fun Nights. The staff works hard to encourage students to be engaged in school and involved in the Lux community through participating in a school activity.

The most significant impact on engagement due to COVID was an increase in communication home. In-person interactions remained much the same, but additional emails, phone calls and conferences were necessary for some struggling remote students. Often, access to reliable technology was a concern, but Lux staff strived to clarify remote expectations (daily check-ins, cameras on while in class) and to encourage parent support. As in other areas, Lux found that building relationships with families was critical to ongoing engagement.

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

Lux is family; family is Lux. Schools cannot operate in isolation from their community, and Lux prides itself on partnerships with families and the community. Together with its community, Lux strives to achieve lifelong learning, united vision, and excellence in academic achievement. The school's success is linked to involved and supportive parents, who have high expectations of their children and their school.

Establishing a connection between school and families begins with a multimodal approach to communication. Lux uses: Monday parent emails, which provide essential information for the week; an up-to-date website; a Facebook presence for both school and booster parent groups; and Twitter. All communications are vetted for accuracy and appropriateness. In addition, there is a website just for parents, allowing them to connect and support Lux.

One way parents supported Lux during COVID was raising funds to convert two water fountains, closed to reduce germ spread, to water bottle filling stations. Additionally, the parent group invested a large amount of time and creativity encouraging staff through fun gifts and treats.

Reciprocally, Lux supports families in need beyond the classroom. Through partnerships with the local Food

Bank and retail stores, Lux has provided families with food, clothing and other essentials. When the need is beyond physical, Lux works in tandem with mental health organizations to give students and families guidance.

Celebrating families is part of Lux culture. Each year, 6th graders become biographical authors for their family or immediate circle of friends. Students choose a person about whom they would like to know more and celebrate that person's accomplishments. The stories, photos, and anecdotes become a bound book, and families gather for a touching book-giving ceremony.

Another project that has become an ongoing tradition is People of Prominence (POP). Students research, write scripts, and emulate a prominent American. Families become involved with rehearsing, costuming, and attending the performance. On POP night, students place collection canisters in front of their performance areas, and money placed in these bins "starts" their presentation. The money gathered supports community projects in Lincoln.

Finally, a beloved project for which Lux is known is the Veterans Day Celebration. Any Lux student may submit the name of a family or friend who is a service member, and the names are used to create a wall of honor. A special ceremony is held with military colors presented and a keynote address. When the colors are retired, breakout sessions of stories, memories, and information are given by our military personnel. The awe and respect from students fuel the pride of presenters.

While COVID challenged the continuity of these special celebrations, creativity and technology closed the gap. POP performances and biography book-givings were pre-recorded, while the Veterans ceremony rose to new heights. Many veterans pre-recorded their stories to share with students, but Zoom also enabled the attendance of special guest speakers, former U.S. Senator Bob Kerrey & former Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel, both Nebraska natives.

For Lux students, this circle of community with families and organizations models the value of building relationships and the nature of life-long learning.

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

At Lux, the professional culture is molded by standards of excellence, feelings of acceptance, communication, and positive relationships. Professional support starts in staff meetings. Over the last several years, a part of staff meetings has been devoted to helping teachers understand the components of their appraisal process (based on Charlotte Danielson's Four Domains). In addition, staff meetings provide ongoing training in regard to schoolwide behavior and academic support systems, as well as addressing the annual instructional focus such as learning objectives, circulation, and opportunities to respond. The Induction Committee serves an important role in acclimating new staff to instructional focuses and specifics of schoolwide systems. Often, new teachers are matched with a mentor for collaboration and encouragement.

There are myriad teams at Lux that collaborate, providing a positive connection between professional growth and support. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are formed around common curriculum content and typically meet monthly. Teachers discuss how students are progressing and collaborate on various instructional strategies to help struggling students and challenge proficient learners. Discussions that occur in grade-level team meetings are guided by a multi-tiered support system. This helps determine the need for professional collaboration within or outside of Lux. Additionally, staff-led committees support Lux in regard to topics ranging from school improvement goals to nourishing a sense of community.

Through the pandemic, the Lux Cares committee has connected staff with emails communicating personal celebrations and concerns. The focus of staff meetings shifted to promote individual well-being due to pressures created by the pandemic. Genuine concern for self-care and risk of burnout was conveyed by Lux leadership, which further cultivated a sense of grace and empathy among staff members. In addition, staff members were encouraged to utilize the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) if they needed support during this stressful time. To acknowledge the hard work of staff, a casual dress day, "Workout Wednesday," was

initiated and has continued throughout the year.

While time for instruction was reduced due to sanitizing protocols, the need for plan time was acknowledged and increased. Administration listened to this concern and responded. The number of team meetings was reduced, administration assumed responsibilities for supervision roles previously held by teachers, and schedules were adjusted, resulting in more instructional time. Appraisals and the instructional focus were temporarily suspended, allowing teachers to focus their time on the demands of a hybrid learning model. While the pandemic stretched staff both professional and personally, the support of the Lux community enabled each individual to persevere.

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

Leadership is vital to the success of any organization. At Lux, leadership has two components. The first component is guidance: leadership is the ability to guide others on a determined course to achieve goals. The second component is teamwork. Teamwork is vital in all decision-making at Lux, creating an environment where stakeholders are invested in decisions.

With a team approach, there are several positive outcomes; the first is empowerment. When others participate in leadership, they feel empowered and part of the process. There is buy-in, and staff strives to achieve goals. This team approach builds a sense of community at Lux, the idea that “everyone is in this together.” It also shapes the hierarchy of the school. Lux has four administrators who direct three counselors and seven team leaders. These team leaders help create and disseminate information to staff, ensuring that all are on the same page and share focus and knowledge of processes. This philosophy encourages collaboration, coordination, multiple perspectives, and discussion. Lux uses “The Seven Norms of Collaboration” at every meeting, striving for strength in decision making, trust, and respect. However, not all decisions are made using this system. There are obviously decisions not best deliberated as a whole, but when it comes to school direction, instructional practice or school improvement goals, shared leadership is key.

Lux utilizes several committees to help accomplish goals and ensure the school vision becomes reality. There is a Student Services Team consisting of administrators, counselors, a school psychologist, a social worker, and a nurse who meet weekly to discuss the direction of the school and advocate for students. The School Improvement Team sets and executes a plan to ensure the school’s goals are met. The Equity Committee works to ensure all students have a voice and informs best practices with regard to equity. The Instructional Committee strives to keep instructional strategies current, providing all students the best possible educational experience. The Induction Committee helps new staff members become well-versed in the practices and approaches utilized at Lux. The Social Committee and the Lux Cares Committee foster a positive culture at Lux where everyone cares for one another and celebrates the successes achieved as a community. Other committees, such as the Technology Committee, the One Book-One Lux Committee, and the Student Council, are further examples of shared leadership and teamwork, ensuring the Lux community continues to grow.

Finally, the leadership at Lux works to coordinate all teams into one concerted effort toward a common goal. Meetings are scheduled to plan and organize. Committees are formed to carry out the task. Staff meetings, professional development, Professional Learning Communities, appraisals, and conversations all support the vision, goals and work. This is all done in a united manner to ensure Lux has a positive impact on all stakeholders. This team approach is the most important factor in making Lux an effective organization.

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

The ideas of ensuring equity, cultural awareness, and respect in the classroom are not new to Lux Middle School. From the pre-service staff development sessions at the school’s opening 25 years ago until today, these topics have been at the center of discussions regarding core values, mission, vision, beliefs, and goals.



Since Lux opened, the school has had a Multicultural Committee responsible for attending monthly meetings with district officials and other Lincoln Public Schools representatives. The Lux Multicultural Committee also meets regularly at the building level to discuss current events related to multicultural education, plan activities and prepare information to be presented at staff meetings, and incorporate equitable themes and practices into classroom materials, management, and strategies.

The committee work has evolved over time, and more recently, has become known as the Equity Council. Currently, the Equity Council meets monthly with LPS support staff and members from other LPS schools. The committee has planned and presented at every staff meeting this year, provided professional development in the form of a book study (in which more than 25 staff members participated), and routinely provides staff with information from the current literature and research on the topics of equitable practices, diversity, bias training, and reflective application exercises, an example being the use of the article “Speak Up at School” from the Midwest Plains Equity Center. Through Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), Lux continues to examine and monitor data in the areas of student access, achievement, and behavioral responses, ensuring staff learning shapes the classroom.

Lux strives to put these efforts into practice in many ways. Currently Lux is working with a nearby high school to create a forum where student and family voices are heard in a collaborative and productive manner addressing issues surrounding equitable practices. The Lux library has focused on diversifying its collection, purchasing books to reflect the wide range of cultures representing students and staff in the building. Lux also shares bilingual liaisons and a Native American advocate with the district, and annually gathers a number of students for Native American and Latino Youth conferences at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Other student opportunities include Dream Equal, a student club promoting gender equity.

When equity issues arise along economic-related issues, the Lux counselors and social worker meet with families to identify specific concerns and work with community partners to address those issues. In the past, Lux has provided clothing, food, bus passes and other necessities to students.

In addressing equity of any type, Lux strives to educate staff and students, removing barriers to learning and success at all levels.

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

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Crises are times of challenge and realization. While the pandemic offered schools the opportunity for innovation and growth, Lux discovered the ONE THING that most determined success this year began long before the novel virus existed: Lux cultivated trust.

In March 2020, the world entered a health crisis of unprecedented proportions and, overnight, schools had to change the way they taught students. In the midst of ever-changing news and shifting priorities, Lux staff, students and families could have believed they weren't being told everything or weren't being given all of the available resources. They could have believed they were on their own. They didn't.

While Lux was not anxiety-free, the prevailing mood was of calm confidence. Administrators were transparent with the "it is what it is, until it isn't" nature of planning. Staff helped each other, and students, navigate Zoom and remote resources. Communication to all levels across multiple platforms connected everyone. Learning looked different, but it continued. Trust made this possible, allowing individuals to think the best of others, exercise patience, and be flexible.

At Lux, trust is a circle of collaboration, communication and connection. Staff teams meet weekly to update student progress, share concerns, and strategize solutions. Administrators join these meetings as support and channels for additional resources. Communication is frequent and multi-faceted, ranging from weekly parent updates and social media posts to individual encouraging notes from teachers to students.

Additionally, Lux creates opportunities for connections. Monthly Taco Tuesday lunches and seasonal social gatherings bring staff together. Students enjoy fun nights, dances, and multiple clubs. Families connect with school via conferences, booster membership, concerts, and other special programs.

These practices established trust that stayed firm even though techniques for continued trust-building changed. When COVID closed the building, staff created a Google Classroom to stay in touch with each other. In May, Lux set up a drive-through graduation for 8th graders and, over the summer, recorded a virtual open house for incoming 6th graders. The first day of school was set aside for 6th graders only, to help them acclimate. Teachers wore pins with pictures of their full faces so students could see and feel like they knew them. Collaboration and communication expanded to phone calls checking on unengaged remote students and finding solutions to connectivity issues. Conferences were virtual.

During a time of rampant uncertainty, trust made Lux a safe place of near-normalcy. It was a place where staff already knew they were supported, families already knew they were heard, and students already knew they were highly valued. This trust proved vital to the stability of learning throughout the pandemic, giving staff, students, and families the confidence to face and overcome obstacles together.