

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

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

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

Official School Name Carl A Swanson Elementary School
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 410 South 86th Street
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Omaha State NE Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 68114-4605

County Douglas County

Telephone (402) 390-6485 Fax (402) 390-2159

Web site/URL https://www.westside66.org/Domain/18 E-mail harr.jennifer@westside66.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. Mike Lucas E-mail lucas.mike@westside66.net
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Westside Community School District Tel. (402) 390-2100

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

Date _____

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board President/Chairperson Mr. Douglas Krenzer
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

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

Date _____

(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

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

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

PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION

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

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

PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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

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

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 10 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 1 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 12 TOTAL

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

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located. If unsure, refer to NCES database for correct category: <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/> (Find your school and check “Locale”)

- Urban (city or town)
 Suburban
 Rural

3. Number of students as of October 1, 2020 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent at the school. Include all students enrolled, in-person, participating in a hybrid model, or online only. If online schooling or other COVID-19 school issues make this difficult to obtain, provide the most accurate and up-to-date information available:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	17	22	39
1	18	25	43
2	27	15	42
3	25	19	44
4	22	22	44
5	24	25	49
6	25	23	48
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	158	151	309

*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):
- 0.4 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 3.6 % Asian
 - 10 % Black or African American
 - 9.2 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0.2 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 68.4 % White
 - 8.2 % Two or more races
 - 100 % Total**

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

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2019 - 2020 school year: 7%

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

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

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	12
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	10
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	22
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	309
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.07
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	7

6. Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):
Bengali, Chinese, Ewe, Hindi, Italian, Korean, Nepali, Polish, Somali, Spanish, Togalog, Tamil, Telugu, Thai, Ukrainian, Urdu

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 9 %
28 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 20 %
 Total number students who qualify: 63

8. Students receiving special education services: 10 %

31 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>7</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>4</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>4</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay | <u>3</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>2</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>10</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>0</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 6

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

	Number of Staff
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	42
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	9
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	3
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	2

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 7:1

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

Required Information	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016
Daily student attendance	96%	98%	96%	97%	96%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

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

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

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

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

Yes No

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

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

Swanson's mission, as a dynamic community alliance and model of innovative education, is to support and empower all learners to achieve academic excellence.

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.

Swanson Elementary followed the protocols established by the Westside Community School District. The District developed a Pandemic Plan that is comprised of three status levels, including “Green” Status (100% of students in school with extensive social distancing and other precautions in place); “Yellow” Status (less than 100% in school with extensive social distancing and other safety precautions in place); and “Red” Status (no students on campus with extended learning for all students).

Westside was among the first districts in the state to make the shift to remote learning for all students when the pandemic began to spread back in March of 2020. The 2020-21 year started with the District, and by extension Swanson, in Yellow mode with hybrid options and remote learning available to families seeking this option. At Swanson, approximately one-third of the students were extended campus learners. Beginning in November, the shift to “Green” Status with all students back in school with extensive safety and social distancing measures enacted.

When Swanson started in Yellow mode, there were a lot of hesitations among teachers regarding technology glitches, tech problems, and the live web-ex videos. Despite these challenges, Swanson teachers in every grade level continued to follow the curriculum map, develop instructional videos, and upload the videos into students’ daily agenda. Regardless of the situation, some which remain

extremely challenging, Swanson teachers and staff maintained their commitment to high-quality education.

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

Carl A. Swanson Elementary School is located in Omaha, Nebraska, one of ten elementary schools within the Westside Community Schools District. Situated in the heart of Omaha (Nebraska's largest and most diverse city) and nestled in one of the area's most established and affluent neighborhoods, Swanson Elementary serves approximately 300 students annually. Founded in 1959, Swanson has prided itself on delivering high-quality education centered on the ideals of community, innovation and excellence.

Swanson's enrollment reflects the broad diversity found within its Omaha community, with 68% Caucasian, 10% African-American/Black, 9% Hispanic, 4% Asian and 8% Two or More Races. In recent years, Swanson has experienced a steady increase in the percentage of low-income students with 21% of its students qualifying for free/reduced lunch. In addition, Swanson has the highest percentage (9%) of English Language Learner (ELL) students in the District, several of whom are from Indian and Asian families with parents working at nearby Nebraska Medicine or one of Omaha's tech companies.

Amidst the demographic and other shifts which have occurred since its founding, Swanson's commitment to excellence is as strong today as it was when they first opened their doors in 1959. In a district and a school with the highest expectations, Swanson has maintained a school culture that has welcomed all students while holding itself and each of its students to high standards.

Guiding Swanson's commitment to excellence is an emphasis on evidence-based practices that ensure all students, regardless of background or status, learn at the highest levels. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are instituted schoolwide to provide a standardized and collaborative approach to monitor and maximize learning. Further, personalization is incorporated throughout the school to engage students, maximize learning, and recognize the individuality in students, even at a young age.

As a testament to the effectiveness of these approaches, Swanson students far outpace their peers at the state level on standardized assessments with 81% proficient in English Language Arts (ELA) and 78% proficient in Math (compared to 52% in ELA and 52% in math statewide). Perhaps most impressive is the performance of traditionally underrepresented student groups on these tests. Swanson's free and reduced lunch population achieved a proficiency rate of 59% in ELA and 55% in Math. For ELL students attending Swanson, 64% were proficient in ELA and 73% in Math. These high rates also extend to non-white students attending Swanson with 70% of nonwhite students proficient in ELA and 65% in Math. These rates for Swanson's traditionally underrepresented student populations exceed the rate for all Nebraska students.

In a community with high standards, large income gaps, and a confluence of political and cultural beliefs, Swanson has excelled at creating an inclusive and welcoming environment for students. Where many schools, particularly those with large numbers of affluent families, may experience a stigma between the haves and have-nots, Swanson is proud to serve a community that has embraced the concept of "it takes a village" to raise a child.

Swanson has implemented a variety of creative initiatives to ensure students have a disposition and environment that fosters learning. Through STEAM Nights, students present their STEM and arts-related projects to their classmates. A Circle of Friends Program pairs students with disabilities with peers who serve as mentors to the students, promoting awareness of differences while supporting inclusivity. Cross-age buddy groups help younger students acclimate within the school by pairing them with older students. In addition, while Swanson participates in an annual Science Fair, this past year, the school partnered with Henry Doorly Zoo and the University of Nebraska at Omaha to participate in the Metropolitan Science and Engineering Council Fair.

Teachers, faculty and staff embrace accountability for student learning which leads to high academic standards. As previously mentioned, Swanson collects a variety of data to measure student learning and track progress toward established measures of effectiveness, whether state standards or internal goals. These data are used by teachers and staff throughout the school year to refine instruction and ensure learning occurs for all students. Should the data show a lack of student progress in any area, the school initiates

interventions to improve instruction, provide reflection or enhance support to the teachers.

The COVID-19 pandemic posed unprecedented challenges to educators worldwide and Swanson was no exception. Following the District's "Pandemic Plan," Swanson worked diligently to ensure all students received a high-quality educational experience regardless of the circumstances. This not only included the delivery of remote instruction, but also SEL to ensure students' social and emotional learning were addressed. Throughout the ongoing pandemic and amidst great turbulence in their own lives, Swanson teachers went above and beyond in their service to students. Not only did they continue to fill out their weekly PLC logs, but they also embraced the new learning environment with creativity, with some teachers performing plan experiments at home to share with their students via remote delivery. Through the challenges of the last year, it became increasingly clear the importance of great instructors and proven instructional practices.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

Swanson 's instructional approach is based in the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) at Work model which provides a framework around continuous learning. This nationally recognized model guides instruction through four critical questions: (1) What do we want all students to know and be able to do? (2) How will we know if they learn it? (3) How will we respond when some students do not learn? and (4) How will we extend the learning for students who are already proficient? Swanson's core curriculum is mapped to standards, with scope and sequence aligned across grade levels. Each grade level maps out indicators to be met during the school year and when. Grade-level teachers meet within collaborative teams (that include the special education case manager) using formative and summative assessment data to determine whether students are meeting their learning goals. IEPs (Individual Education Plans) are developed when students require additional supports and resources.

Teachers provide a variety of supports to ensure quality instruction. Teachers in the primary grades receive direct training in phonologic and phonemic instruction techniques. Feedback, via walkthroughs, is provided to teachers a minimum of four times per year. Walkthroughs are used to initiate conversation and reflection around student engagement and performance. Through Swanson's multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) and gifted and talented programs, support is provided to maximize learning for all students. EduCLIMBER collects data which teachers use for analysis of student learning and to inform the timely delivery of interventions within the MTSS, be it remediation or differentiation.

English Language Arts - Swanson utilizes the Journeys ELA Curriculum which features complex texts that challenge students, smart lesson plans that enable teachers to target the needs of students at various levels, and assessments and accompanying tools to track student progress. From an instructional perspective, learning in English Language Arts is supported through a combination of whole group reading instruction, whole group writing, and small group reading. In the primary grades (K-3), instruction focuses on phonologic and phonemic concepts as well as the science of reading, where students map out the words they are reading. In the later grades (4-6), instruction focuses on developing student's reading comprehension skills. For these students, the comprehension toolkit provides autonomy to learn at their own pace while teachers and assistants administer interventions and help. Swanson places tremendous emphasis on developing students' foundational skills in the early grades to avoid problems in the higher grades and to provide a strong base for success in this area which extends across subjects.

Mathematics – Swanson utilizes Houghton Mifflin Math across grades K-6, a curriculum it adopted beginning with the 2020-21 school year after being piloted by four teachers in 2019-20. Swanson's math instruction focuses on numerical reasoning, problem solving and operational skills that are critical for introduction to pre-algebra in grade 7. Similar to reading, and substantiated through assessment data, mathematics is an area of strong focus within Swanson. Math curriculum is mapped to state standards, with instruction supplemented by various services and supports. Through a partnership with the University of Nebraska at Omaha's Education Department, Swanson teachers are provided professional development opportunities on emerging and best practices in math instruction. Through the school's MTSS, students in need of assistance are provided one-one and group interventions, and a Gifted and Talented teacher provides Tier 2-3 enrichment opportunities (e.g., higher level problem solving and math equations).

Science – Within Science, Swanson uses FOSS (Full Option Science System) which features strategies, experiments and information that leads to a deeper understanding of the physical world. Willow Commons, located within the school building, contains a cork floor and sinks which serve as a laboratory for experiments and investigations. Unique to Swanson is an outdoor classroom which is used as a laboratory.

Social Studies/History/Civics – Swanson's emphasis in Social Studies/History/Civics is designed to facilitate a strong understanding among students of their role in society and the foundations of society. In K-2, curriculum focuses on students and their place in the world. In grades 3-4, the learning centers around local government and Nebraska state history, respectively. In grades 5-6, the curriculum shifts from U.S. history to world history. Several of the classroom discussion in this curricular area focus around current

events with students given the opportunity to share their own perspectives while being exposed to those of their classmates.

During the pandemic, teachers have been challenged to maintain scope and sequence through changes in delivery formats (online, hybrid and in-person) and amidst a very fluid and turbulent situation. Seesaw in Grades K-2 and Google Classroom in Grades 3-6 facilitated the online learning. Despite these dramatic shifts, teachers remained on schedule. The use of formative assessments throughout each lesson is being emphasized (as opposed to closeout formative assessments) to ensure students are progressing and each student's growth is closely monitored. When the data show students lagging in performance, interventions are being administered. Teachers have been extra attentive to student needs and have responded appropriately and proactively.

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

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

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Swanson Elementary is committed to providing its students with a comprehensive educational experience that include both strong instruction in core academic areas and in supplementary subjects such as visual arts, library, and music, providing a well-rounded understanding of these areas and providing a foundation for future learning in these areas.

Swanson utilizes a block schedule consisting of nine 45-minute blocks throughout the school day. In addition to the core subjects, each school day includes two blocks for "specials," which provides these supplementary subject areas with 45 minutes of instruction per week.

Visual arts is based around the demonstration of specific skills or concepts. Instruction includes the use of Art Centers and group projects where students work collaboratively to complete a common assignment. One of the advantages to the use of Art Centers is that it provides students, who may otherwise dislike art, with the opportunity for voice and choice within their arts education. Swanson's art curriculum provides learning opportunities in watercolors and acrylics, pencil sketches, pastels, clay modeling and various textiles, such as weaving and sewing.

PE instruction emphasizes the development of motor skills and physical concepts that can lead to success in specific sports. PE classes also seek to expose students to different sports to expand options for physical activity later in school and life. For instance, PE has included a focus on golf, using larger golf balls, which has provided the students a safe and easier entry into the sport. Further, the skill of developing a disciplined swing will translate into success in other sports such as softball, baseball or hockey.

Swanson has long embraced the role of technology in education and in the lives of its students. The Westside Community Schools District was the first in the state to implement a 1:1 initiative which provided a laptop or ipad to every student within the district. Swanson seeks to support students use of, and facility with, technology. A librarian is available to teach students how to use their ipads effectively and to check out books and other media from the school library. The librarian also provides teachers with assistance on conducting research, citing sources, and navigating databases.

3. Academic Supports:

The Fastbridge Reading Screener is administered to all Swanson students three times per year to determine which students are performing below grade level in reading. The data collected from these assessments are reviewed during MTSS team meetings where students are assigned to various

categories of risk and appropriate interventions (e.g., Early Interventions in Reading, sound partners or corrective reading) are identified. Reading interventions are typically provided by the in-house Reading Coordinator or by the Special Education Case Manager who will also ensure progress monitoring. Depending on the extent of risk, some interventions are provided through the classroom teacher or an education assistant using one-on-one, small group or even whole group interventions. It should be noted that when large groups have been identified as in need of intervention the instruction becomes a point of focus to ensure the content is being delivered with fidelity. For those students who are performing above grade level in reading, extended learning opportunities are administered which include higher-level reading and writing assignments.

In Math, Swanson also uses a Fastbridge Screener, administered three times annually in Grades K-2 and twice annually in Grades 3-6. Similar to Reading, when students show need for additional supports, a variety of potential interventions are available based on where they fall within the risk scale (i.e., high-risk, at-risk, some-risk, or low-risk). Small group interventions are typically used for students in need of reteaching, and i-excel math is used for students in need of remediation or accelerated study. For those students below the 25th percentile, a wide array of adaptations and modifications are used to help students stay on grade level in math. These may include working with the students to read through and scaffold the problems, flexible groupings, and other interventions. As a very last resort, and in rare circumstances, students who continue to struggle may be placed in a different math program.

Teachers provide a variety of supports to ensure quality instruction. Teachers in the primary grades receive direct training in phonologic and phonemic instruction techniques. Feedback, via walkthroughs, is provided to teachers a minimum of four times per year. Walkthroughs are used to initiate conversation and reflection around student engagement and performance. Through Swanson's multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) and gifted and talented programs, support is provided to maximize learning for all students. EduCLIMBER collects data which teachers use for analysis of student learning and to inform the timely delivery of interventions within the MTSS, be it remediation or differentiation.

Swanson is served by a Special Education Case Manager who works closely with students on IEPs to administer supports and interventions and monitor progress. Through collaborative teams, classroom and special education teachers discuss student data, group needs (when possible) identify modifications, adaptations and other interventions.

Students who are placed in ELL receive a variety of language supports, administered through the efforts of a full-time English Language Teacher. As is the case with core subjects, strong emphasis is placed on early grades to help these students receive the instruction and support needed for continued academic growth in the later grades. The English Language Proficiency Assessment is administered annually to students in grades k-6 (formatted to grade level) to measure student competency in reading, writing, speaking and listening. Once students test out of the ELL program (by scoring 4 out of 5 in each category), follow up monitoring is provided to ensure continued progress and ensure interventions are available to the student as needed.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

Swanson well understands the importance of trust in the teacher-student relationship and initiates a variety of strategies to establish strong relationships with its students. Primary among these strategies is communication with students and their families. At the outset of the school year, teachers send postcards to students and their families introducing themselves, welcoming the students to the new school year, and establishing a line of communication with the student/family.

Swanson’s emphasis in the area of relationships was reinforced through a training it participated in shortly before the COVID19 pandemic emerged, which discussed Hattie’s high expectations for learners and the importance of knowing the student. It should also be mentioned that Swanson (and Westside as a whole) has embraced personalization and knowing students is a central strategy in personalized learning.

During the ongoing COVID19 pandemic, teachers proactively sought to engage students. Teachers sent postcards to their extended-learning students at various points throughout the year, including at Valentine’s Day to let the students know they were valued and part of the learning environment. Further during “drop off” days in the pandemic, teachers are making it a point to be present within the parking lot to simply wave at the parents when they pick up/drop off materials.

A key component of engaging students is showing them that they have a voice in the school, and Swanson makes concerted efforts to make the students feel that their contributions and perspective is valued. Such was the case during the design of the new school building (completed in 2019), which featured a lot of windows and light – which were suggestions specifically made by students. These aspects of the new building not only help to create an engaging physical environment, but they also reinforce to students that their voices were heard.

While these strategies are all essential to engaging students, Swanson believes that the primary strategy for engaging is through good instruction. By knowing their students, Swanson teachers are able to tailor activities that appeal to their students, given their background, strengths and interests. It should be noted that while Westside, as a district, has embraced personalized learning as a pedagogical approach, personalization has long held a prominent place within Swanson’s classrooms.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Swanson is proud to embrace its role within its neighborhood, the District and greater Omaha community, and makes strong efforts to partner with parents, neighbors and businesses locally. These initiatives include a partnership between Swanson, several local business and neighborhood residents to revitalize the park as part of the Swanson Arboretum Revitalization Plan. While the park is located on school grounds, it is available for public use when school is not in session. To ensure the park meets its community needs – aesthetically and practically – Swanson has been working with these entities (as well as Keep Omaha Beautiful) to collect input and incorporate feedback from stakeholders into the park’s master design.

Swanson is also pleased to maintain relationships with several entities locally which serve to expand services to students. Swanson partners with the Strategic Air Command Museum and the Durham Western Heritage Museum to provide speakers for assemblies. Through a partnership with Teammates Mentoring Program, students are paired with mentors providing at-risk children with positive role models. Children Behavioral Health provides mental and behavioral health support to students and their families. Through the Assistance League of Omaha coats are provided to Swanson students in need. In addition to these, Swanson has maintained a partnership with Youth Frontiers which provides a Kindness retreat for 4th graders annually.

As was described previously, Swanson is proud to serve students representing a diverse array of ethnic, racial, religious and social backgrounds and seeks to ensure all of its students and their families feel

welcome and included within the Swanson community. When race- or prejudice-related incidents occur within the school, Swanson works with the Anti-Defamation League, among others, to address these events. In addition to these, Swanson is also proud of its partnership with the Rainbow House, a guest house for families who are bringing a child to Children's Hospital and Medical Center for treatment. Through this arrangement, any elementary age sibling of the patient who is staying at the Rainbow House can enroll at Swanson as the Rainbow House is in our school's boundary.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

Swanson has developed a variety of structures and resources to ensure their teachers and staff receive the support they need to succeed in their roles providing high-quality instruction and responsive services to students. Swanson's staff is composed of primary and specialist teachers, special services staff, a reading coordinator, school psychologist, and educational assistants. Each team includes a team leader who helps to set the tone for the team and who communicates with the principal on each team's work and potential issues as they arise. This tiered team structure has worked tremendously to provide staff a voice within the school and to streamline communication between individual staff members and school leadership.

One of the core strategies used by Swanson to support its teachers is establishing high expectations around professional development. All teachers and staff are expected to actively engage in professional development. During the most recent COVID19-impacted year, efforts have been made to streamline professional development. This has included in-house trainings that have focused on the use of data within the PLCs, which has led to noticeable improvement in how teachers are making instructional decisions for students.

While Swanson holds its staff to high standards and great accountability, it also recognizes that creating a professional environment goes beyond just providing professional development and organizational supports. It also includes creating for its teachers and staff an environment where they are valued and feel a sense of belonging. Recently, Swanson adopted a block schedule format. While the shift has had many positive impacts schoolwide, it has isolated some teachers who no longer come into regular contact with their colleagues. To alleviate this voiced concern, Swanson has made intentional efforts to conduct more activities that bring staff together and allow them to learn about one another. Likewise, in the midst of an ongoing pandemic and increasing levels of responsibility and stress, Swanson has made it a priority to maintain staff events and activities that engage its staff. These efforts have resulted in a remarkable 37 absences total during the 2020-21 year (among Swanson's 49 staff members).

The effectiveness of these strategies is ultimately evidenced by the responses on Swanson's annual staff survey where 90% or more regularly state that they enjoy working at Swanson.

4. School Leadership:

Swanson is characterized by high levels of leadership and accountability. Overall leadership within the school is provided by the Principal who has served in this role since 2015. A leadership team is also in place, consisting of the Reading Coordinator, School Psychologist and two team leaders (one intermediate teacher and one special services case manager), which serves to set the professional learning calendar, plan assemblies, activities, icebreakers and set themes for the year.

Among the school's primary leadership strategies is the provision of support, resources and tools for its staff. As mentioned in the previous "Creating a Professional Culture" section, Swanson utilizes a team leader structure which provides a conduit for streamlined communication between school leadership and individual staff members. This ensures the Principal and other school leaders are aware of the specific challenges facing its teachers and other staff, which can lead to the timely administration of support and training to address challenges within the school. Swanson leadership believes that in order to hold its teachers to high standards they must be fully supported in their roles. This includes several difficult conversations between leadership and stakeholders regarding the allocation of resources, with dialogue centering around the question of "what resources will have the greatest impact on students?"

While leadership has generally provided teachers flexibility and space within their roles, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a more hands-on approach from Swanson's leadership to ensure teachers had support during this very fluid and challenging time. This included strong communication between leadership and teachers.

Another critical component of the Principal's role is ensuring that District and state policies are implemented within the school. It is not unusual, in any environment, for changes in policy and protocol to be met with confusion or resistance. To obtain buy-in among teachers and other stakeholders, the principal seeks to tie policy changes to how it can positively impact teachers and students. This strategy has proven highly effectively within Swanson where the entire staff has a strong commitment to its students and their profession.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

Swanson's commitment to providing culturally responsive teaching and learning is driven by the need to serve all of its students. As mentioned, Swanson is among the most diverse schools within Westside Community Schools and the local Omaha area, serving populations from various ethnic, racial and social backgrounds. Within the classroom, teachers proactively address current issues and encourage dialogue among students on topics of importance to the students. Swanson teachers understand that these discussions are not opportunities to share their own beliefs, but to encourage students to engage in honest and respectful conversations where they can feel heard but also gain insights into the beliefs and feelings of other students. It has been mentioned throughout this document that Swanson teachers make every effort to know their students and this knowledge can help teachers to carefully navigate relevant and current topics. Further, teachers are intentional in choosing discussion topics, periodicals and readings that are representative of a diverse world and their diverse classrooms.

In addition to these, Swanson coordinates a variety of extra- and co-curricular activities within the school to create an inclusive and welcoming environment for its students and their families. These efforts are supported at the District level as well as evidenced by one of the District's three primary goals for 2020-21 of growing a district culture that "values, demonstrates, and promotes a sense of belonging and dignity."

Swanson includes "inclusivity libraries" situated in certain classrooms within the building where students can check out materials that explore various cultures particularly those represented by their classmates and teachers. The inclusivity library concept was funded by a grant and initiated by a teacher.

Through a partnership with Special Olympics, Swanson hosts an inclusivity week each year. The school also coordinates inclusion activities throughout the year that pair students in special education with other students in collaborative activities.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Swanson Elementary is proud of its longstanding reputation as a premier elementary school, one in which all students – regardless of situation or background – learn at very high levels. Central to Swanson’s success through the years has been an unwavering focus on delivering high-quality instruction. It is a focus that permeates throughout teachers and other staff who excel in the midst of high expectations from its community and in an environment of tremendous accountability.

To support quality instruction, and as described throughout this application, Swanson embraces evidence-based practices and pedagogy. Swanson’s success in these areas is founded on the key principles of teachers knowing their learners and using data systematically to make instructional decisions that benefit students. Curriculum is specifically mapped out to learning standards which allows Swanson teachers to monitor students progress at all points during the year. Whether a student is struggling or excelling in the classroom, Swanson maintains a variety of resources and services to help students acquire the skills and knowledge to maintain academic progress or to extend their learning.

From policy decisions to the selection of resources to the adoption of learning models, every decision made within Swanson is guided by a single question: how does this help our students learn? It is this singular focus that compels Swanson, its staff and its community to work collaboratively to help students achieve.

Guided by this focus, Swanson initiated a variety of measures throughout the ongoing pandemic to maintain student engagement while promoting high levels of learning. In the midst of turbulent instructional conditions, Swanson’s teachers were held to, and embraced, the highest standards, which have long defined Swanson Elementary. During remote learning, for instance, some teachers set up plant experiments within their homes to provide students with a learning experience similar to what they would receive in the classroom. Teachers continued to fill out their PLC logs, and small group and individual interventions continued to be administered to students in need. Also, teachers effectively shifted to online learning in short timeframes while navigating technical issues. While the pandemic presented educators with unprecedented challenges, COVID-19 reinforced the importance of teachers, and Swanson rose to this challenge.