

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

Official School Name Fort Calhoun Jr-Sr High School
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 5876 County Road, P43
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Fort Calhoun State NE Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 68023-0430

County Washington County

Telephone (402) 468-5591 Fax _____

Web site/URL <https://www.fortcalhounschoools.org/> E-mail nwemhoff@ftcpioneers.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* Mr. Jerry Green E-mail jgreen@ftcpioneers.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Fort Calhoun Community Schools Tel. (402) 468-5591

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. Mike Conrad
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

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

Date _____

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

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

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

PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION

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

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

PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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

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

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

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

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

- Urban (city or town)
- Suburban
- Rural

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

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	0	0	0
1	0	0	0
2	0	0	0
3	0	0	0
4	0	0	0
5	0	0	0
6	0	0	0
7	24	39	63
8	33	31	64
9	40	25	65
10	27	25	52
11	30	25	55
12 or higher	35	24	59
Total Students	189	169	358

*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):
- 0.2 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 0.7 % Asian
 - 0.8 % Black or African American
 - 2.8 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 94.7 % White
 - 0.8 % 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: 3%

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	2
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	7
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	9
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	358
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.03
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	3

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

Spanish.

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 23 %

Total number students who qualify: 82

8. Students receiving special education services: 16 %
59 Total number of students served

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional conditions. All students receiving special education services should be reflected in the table below. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <u>1</u> Autism | <u>1</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>15</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay | <u>34</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>1</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>3</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>1</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>3</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: 1
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	2
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	28
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	6
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.	4

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 13:1

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	98%	96%	96%	96%	96%
High school graduation rate	100%	100%	100%	100%	98%

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	49
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	60%
Enrolled in a community college	10%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	6%
Found employment	18%
Joined the military or other public service	0%
Other	6%

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.
 Yes No

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

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

To cultivate learning in an encouraging environment; provide opportunities, skills, and tools for success; and instill attributes of respect and responsibility schoolwide.

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.

During this school year we have been open as usual with a small percentage of students choosing online only classes.

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

Fort Calhoun Junior-Senior High School can confidently be called a second “home” to many of our students, familiarly referred to as “The Fort”. It’s a place of both safety and comfort to the people of our community, adults and children alike. A small town just minutes away from Omaha, Fort Calhoun has generations of families who have established deep roots here. Teachers are educating former students’ children, sometimes grandchildren, and thus, the relationships and trust the students, families, and school have is immeasurable.

The town of Fort Calhoun is close-knit, engaged in action, and amiable. Thus, the school reflects these same values -- parents find solace and peace of mind knowing “The Fort” has the children’s best interest at heart, educationally, mentally, and socially; students are genuinely cared for and looked after, as if they were the teachers’ very own.

This care and comfort are synonymous with our school’s reputation so much that the number of option-enrollment students has grown. Parents of option-in students, those not living in the district, purposely sought/seek out our school to enroll their child(ren) because they know we will constantly and continuously do right for them.

Abiding by our purpose statement of “Inspiring: Courage, Character, and Commitment”, Fort Calhoun Junior-Senior High School strives to instill these pillars of attributes in our students because we believe it’s also what our community represents. The town and our school have a prideful kinship; together, we are “The Fort”.

Administrators and certified and classified staff whole-heartedly uphold our motto: “Inspiring: Courage, Character, and Commitment”. These words extend beyond educating our students with curriculum and content knowledge, but rather intently foster growth and development of the whole person. Undoubtedly, faculty and staff care about meeting educational standards and benchmarks, as well as value the importance of testing, but what we believe sincerely matters is the quality of our students’ character (integrity, humanity, respect, empathy, etc.) beyond their years at “The Fort.” This purpose statement is interwoven in what we teach, our demeanors and actions, and our interactions with the students. At the core of all this is relationship building -- we can assuredly say every student in our building has a teacher advocate, who offers support and sometimes tough-love; the students know they always have an adult in their corner.

By faculty and staff modeling appropriate behaviors and mindsets; likewise, we see a positive ripple effect among our students. There’s a buddy system established for new students to ease their transition at our school. Also, a high level of acceptance and respect exists among the students; and despite their differences, at the end of the day, they are each other's allies, and even better, each other's friends.

“The Fort” also provides a plethora of real-world application opportunities for our students. Upperclassmen can get a jumpstart on their career education with Metropolitan Community College (MCC) Academy; the Building and Construction class completes projects in the community, providing a sense of work ethic and pride; art students have completed a handful of murals in our town, showcasing their talents for people to admire and appreciate.

“The Fort” offers our students unique and creative programs that develop their well-roundedness. Seventh graders have a special opportunity to be instructed by our three administrators in a Pioneer Enrichment Program (PEP) class, a course focused on leadership and mindfulness to establish a positive path for their continued success while in school and beyond.

It’s never too soon for students to dream, set goals, and think about future career aspirations, and our Careers class gets students thinking early. They explore a variety of occupational paths and get a taste of the job hunting process, from resume construction and mock interviews to social and business communication etiquette. We aim to equip them with the skills to be an effective employee.

We know life for students is more complex than just school; thus, the importance of fostering positive

social-emotional development doesn't go unnoticed. Life Skills is a course that addresses topics such as drug/alcohol use and abuse, physically and emotionally healthy relationships, bullying, and mental health.

Furthermore, mental health is a topic we take seriously at Fort Calhoun Junior-Senior High School, which has established a partnership with Arbor Family Counseling that began in January of 2017. Arbor Family serves the people of Omaha and its surrounding area and is a provider to school systems. They aim to give individuals the tools to create solutions for healthy living and productive lives. Our partnership with Arbor Family provides counseling support (as well as other offered services) to our employees, students, and families. It has been a helpful resource in extremely sensitive times of crises, to those who have constant struggles in their daily lives and environment, and for others who need occasional support. We will also be implementing a Social Emotional Learning curriculum for our seventh through twelfth grade students. This curriculum will help them to be more fluent in monitoring their mental health, engage them in implementing strategies learned in their life skills and health classes, and promote continued learning about positive self image and maintaining healthy relationships.

During the especially difficult time of the initial Covid-19 shutdown and closing of schools, we continued to educationally enrich our students. We worked with families who did not have reliable internet access to help ensure they could continue classwork and stay in contact with the school and their teachers.

Before reopening this fall, a "Return to School" committee was formed, comprised of administrators, primary and secondary teachers, and parents in the community. The objective was to create the most effective, safe, and purposeful plan for returning to school during the pandemic. Each stakeholder was able to share his/her thoughts, feedback, and ideas at regular meetings that established our current rules and procedures in the building.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

The teachers at Fort Calhoun Junior-Senior High School are key contributors to the positive learning environment at “The Fort”. Effective instruction is essential at each level to guarantee success in the classroom for teachers and students. Teachers integrate state standards as we develop and deliver curriculum. Furthermore, per Marzano’s best practices, all instructors post clear and measurable learning targets in the same place each day and refer to them throughout a lesson. Communicating the learning targets with students helps move them closer to mastering the required skill(s).

Within the Fort Calhoun Junior-Senior High School, there is also a consistent and significant effort among staff members to provide differentiated instruction. Teachers integrate hands-on activities to instruct and assess all types of learners. We understand that each student is different in many ways and are driven to reach and teach each one. Additionally, technology is integrated as a tool to equip and engage students. Junior high and high school is 1:1 with Chromebooks, which allows for endless resources for us to utilize in order to create authentic and captivating activities and assignments. Through our technology resources, we are able to provide more tech-based and project-based assessments, providing flexibility and choice for students. The school has also implemented the learning management system, Canvas, in order to deliver quality content to students learning in the classroom or at home. This platform has enabled teachers to organize class content and provide tools to enrich the learning experience overall. Educators also connect via video conferencing and video lectures to provide quality instruction and engagement. Moreover, technology programs such as Edgenuity, Savvas, and IXL are also utilized as independent academic programs to meet the needs and levels of all learners.

An overview of the high school’s core curriculum includes three years of math; four years of English; three years of science; and three years of social sciences. Each year, course descriptions are reviewed and modified in order to align with state requirements. The curriculum aims to provide students with the tools needed to be successful in life. All teachers have been trained with the Marzano Instructional Framework that is reviewed through professional developments throughout the summer and school year.

Students solve problems in mathematical and real-world contexts, as well as learn college preparatory skills in our math curriculum. Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II are offered for high school credit; and, college courses such as College Algebra, Pre-Calculus, Statistics, Trigonometry and Calculus are for dual-enrollment credit. By their senior year, many students are taking college-level math classes. Each student’s sequence of courses depends on the student’s math track entering freshman year. A blend of instructional strategies includes teacher-based lectures, student-led learning, student note taking, and some discovery of concepts when applicable.

English Language Arts (ELA) classes are designed to develop students’ reading literacies of a variety of genres through fiction and nonfiction texts. Students also learn and apply the writing process to plan, draft, revise, edit, and publish writing using correct spelling, grammar, punctuation, and other standard conventions. Students are engaged in the learning process through direct instruction and class discussions, individual exploration and research, small group/team oriented activities, hands-on activities and projects, oral presentations, and written compositions.

In our school, students learn earth and life science, biology, physical science, physics, and chemistry. Through the study of their local environments, students make connections between the classroom and the world around them. Instructional techniques in the science classrooms include reading informational texts, completing hands-on labs, collaborating with peers, and creating presentations. Teachers integrate reading, writing, listening, and problem solving as they implement science curriculum.

Social Studies classes delve into content including world history and geography, American history, modern problems and current events in our world today, and the structure and purpose of the United States government. Students demonstrate their learning through collaboration, real world problem solving, independent and group projects, and a wide variety of formative and summative assessments.

Core curriculum teachers also use testing data constructively to positively impact curriculum and instruction. We regularly compare, interpret, and categorize data from NWEA, Aspire, and ACT test results. This effort involves interpreting and categorizing data in order to use information that is gathered most effectively. Data is analyzed during problem solving meetings and when assigning support teams to students who are both struggling and succeeding academically. It is effectively used by teachers to inform teaching and help gauge results. Moreover, administrators and teachers make students the stakeholders in their own learning and growth by sharing their test results/data, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and setting goals for improvement. The school also recently hired a data steward to oversee data analysis; this role involves working with the state and training teachers concerning how to understand it and how to make adjustments in instruction.

Another example of “The Fort’s” commitment to the betterment of our students’ academic and future success is demonstrated in the school’s investment in the John Baylor ACT Prep program for juniors. The time and money spent on this program demonstrates the way we value our students as we seek to improve their opportunities to receive scholarships through an increased score on the ACT.

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

Fort Calhoun Junior-Senior High School works diligently to create opportunities and pathways for all types of students.

For those who are headed to a two or four year university, we provide ample resources to build college credit before even graduating high school. Our partnerships with Metropolitan Community College (MCC), Peru State College, and College Now aid students in accruing up to a year or more of college credit.

Students who are interested in trade or service professions are offered multiple means of engagement within their desired field. This includes our building construction classes, which places students into the community to provide construction or repair services for individuals or businesses. An example of their work would be the planning, demolition, and re-pouring of a local citizen’s driveway. We also provide other students with hands-on experience and job shadowing opportunities. These include our partnerships with MCC, the school’s on-the-job training program that partners with local businesses to provide students with real work experience and apprenticeships. We also offer a Teacher’s Assistant program for students who are interested in becoming educators. This partners a student with an appropriate teacher, elementary or secondary level, and engages them in the daily routines and procedures of one of our classrooms.

Fort Calhoun also encourages students to actively engage within the school building through civic and leadership roles. We have Student Council, National Honors Society, and POPP (Pioneers Overcoming Peer Pressure), which all provide students with the ability to demonstrate leadership, create engaging resources and activities for their fellow peers, and show civic responsibility through volunteering in our community. Many local organizations work hand-in-hand with our students to implement programs or services that aid our stakeholders, which has continued during this time of the pandemic.

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

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Fort Calhoun Junior-Senior High School strives to create a well-rounded curriculum that provides multiple opportunities to students. While a great amount of focus is put on our core classes, we also work to craft other curriculum programs. We offer various classes that focus on arts, health, foreign language, technology, and life-skills based courses that help to prepare them for life beyond high school.

All eighth graders are given a survey of art to encourage creativity and expression through visual media. If students choose, they can continue to pursue their interest through their senior year by taking various

courses and joining our very active art club. Not only do they hone their skills in the classroom, but they also collaborate to create murals in our community and schools, as well as pieces for state and local competitions.

Our health program goes beyond your standard physical education program. We offer Strength and Conditioning not only as a class, but also before school hours and throughout the summer for students to maintain healthy weight and physical strength. We also require all freshmen students to take Health, a class that promotes healthy eating and lifestyle choices. Fort Calhoun also has partnered with Metropolitan Community College (MCC) to offer a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) program for students interested in medicine. In the last year, we have also created a life skills class called Adulthood 101 that continues the ideas set forth in Health, but also builds upon that knowledge by helping students understand “adult” concepts such as monitoring mental health through stressful life events, being fiscally responsible, and teaching basic skills that will help them to be adaptive and successful citizens.

“The Fort” offers Spanish language instruction for students to develop their foreign language knowledge. Spanish is promoted and encouraged as it benefits students in the workplace here in Nebraska and helps them develop knowledge of other cultures and people groups. While only two years of foreign language are required, students can take up to four years and receive college credit.

As technology changes and adapts, Fort Calhoun works purposefully to instruct all students in basic tech skills and present various classes to those interested in pursuing higher level technical fields. Junior high students are required to take Basic Keyboarding, and all ninth graders are enrolled in an Information Technology class that helps them develop skills with programs such as the Google Suite of products, coding, and web design. This class is also shifting into a new program that will provide all of this learning and give freshmen the ability to earn college credit. Technology classes are constantly being updated to reflect needs in the world and to offer courses of study that students have voiced interest in. New additions include classes in digital arts and cybersecurity.

While meeting needs in other areas, we also work to make sure students who are more trades or skills focused have opportunities to explore their areas of interest. Our junior high students begin trades exploration through Drafting and Woods courses. As they transition to high school, they can continue with more advanced instruction such as Building Construction and Management. Also, they can learn basic welding techniques in our metals program. We strive to make sure all students can access content that they find valuable and essential to their life outside of “The Fort”.

3. Academic Supports:

Fort Calhoun Junior-Senior High School operates with the needs of the student at the forefront of all decisions. When developing assistance programs for students, we take into account all ability levels to create the most well-rounded and adaptive programs.

When working with students who are identified as having a disability and requiring Special Education assistance, we have created multiple accommodations to aid these students in being successful. Those with Individualized Education Plans or 504 plans have a study hall built into their schedule each day. This provides them with time to work one-on-one with a special education teacher or paraprofessional on their daily classwork. This program also provides students with strategies in staying organized through the use of planners and reminders about due dates. Special education teachers work one-on-one with students to create appropriate goals for curricular and skill areas. We also have the Pioneer Learning Center (PLC), which offers services for students who need additional learning support either for transitional life or occupational skills for students who require a modified behavior plan to be successful.

For students who need assistance with homework or who are just a bit below grade level, we offer multiple programs and services to help them stay on track. All of our junior high students have a

daily study hall to help them adjust to an increased workload from elementary. This also gives them time to work with a teacher on any assignments that they may be struggling with or need additional assistance. Junior high students are also given credit recovery days each quarter to help them stay caught up in classes and to maintain passing status. Both our junior and senior high schools offer homework assistance through the use of Friday School and the HELP program (Homework Enrichment Learning Program), respectively. These homework programs are provided to students who may be struggling with turning in work on time. This provides them another opportunity to work with a teacher or paraprofessional to understand concepts and get assignments turned in. Homeroom on Fridays is used to check in with students and their grades. While Homeroom is sometimes used for club meetings or social emotional learning, students are often given time to work on homework or projects. During this time, they can also visit or work with a teacher if the need arises.

To challenge our gifted students, “The Fort” engages their ability through accelerated classes such as College English, Physics, Algebra, and other courses. We also extend opportunities to enroll in other dual credit courses through our college partnerships. Students can take Public Speaking, Psychology, and other general education classes. The school has also organized extracurricular clubs and activities that not only engage gifted students, but anyone who is interested in more academic pursuits. We offer Forensics, Mock Trial, and Quiz Bowl as clubs to encourage students to critically think and analyze information that is provided to them. These clubs help them move beyond classroom limitations and become immersed in an intellectual issue, problem, or scenario.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

Fort Calhoun Junior-Senior High School makes student engagement and involvement a high priority. Providing opportunities for all students to find areas of interest to invest in is of great importance to creating and maintaining a positive school climate and culture and developing well-rounded students.

In order to engage and motivate students, “The Fort” offers a wide variety of academic clubs, sports, special interest clubs, and a plethora of special events and activities for students to choose from throughout the school year and even during the summer break. They can choose to be involved in anything from Drama or Art Club, Show Choir, Cheer, Band, and much more.

Furthermore, as the building of relationships is a top priority at “The Fort”, a great emphasis is put on developing bonds with students. Teachers and administrators alike make it a priority to support and engage with students within and beyond the classroom. These strong relationships are a major contributor to the positive culture and climate of the school. Additionally, students at the junior and high school level are assigned the same homeroom instructor for the duration of their enrollment. The goal of this arrangement is for the teacher to build even stronger relationships with those homeroom students and be a solid advocate for each. The purpose of our homeroom system augments the school’s sense of creating a second “home” for students and providing a place of acceptance, safety, and advocacy.

We not only endeavor to provide a well-rounded and positive junior-senior high school experience for each student, but also work to ensure the readiness of students to enter the career field. Both the junior and senior high is structured in such a way as to invest in and develop each student to prepare them to enter the workplace. Eighth grade students take a Careers course, specifically designed to explore personal areas of interest in order to help them navigate course choices for high school. Moreover, at the high school level, students have ample opportunities to explore fields of interest and even develop and implement specific skills through hands on experience.

Engaging students has continued to take precedence during the 2020-21 school year. While many schools have been solely remote, or implementing a hybrid model, Fort Calhoun Junior-Senior High School has been able to have in-person instruction, while also providing an online platform for remote learners. Administrators and teachers have worked diligently to maintain a safe environment for students and staff through mask wearing, sanitation procedures, and social distancing. It is this vigorous group effort that has enabled us to remain open. On the other hand, providing quality online access to students that must be out of the building has been a top priority. We use the learning management system, Canvas, in order to deliver quality content to students learning at home. Furthermore, teachers set up and maintain weekly video conference meetings with students to check-in, provide additional instruction, and answer questions as needed. Additional strategies used to engage and motivate remote learners included a regular check-in with students and parents by the principal and school counselor.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Here at “The Fort”, we know that corresponding with parents and the community is key. The more involved the family, the more successful the student. Our main strategy when working with families has been to be adaptable and flexible at all times.

We create lines of communication through multiple avenues. Email is easily accessible to students and their families as all students at the junior and senior high are provided with a Google Chromebook. During Covid-19 and the closing of our school, we worked with families who did not have reliable internet access to ensure they could not only continue their classwork, but could also stay in contact with the school and their teachers. Parents and stakeholders have easy access to grades, schedules, and attendance through the PowerSchool service that we use in our building.

We also send out frequent surveys to parents to get feedback and ideas about proposed changes or updates to our school. Our social media highlights events or awards at our school while also providing critical or important information to families, such as school closures or updates to Covid-19 guidelines. Before reopening this fall, our administration created the “Return to School” team. This group was composed of our building leadership, teachers, and parents to create the most effective and purposeful plan for returning to school. Each stakeholder was able to share their thoughts, feedback, and ideas at regular meetings that established our current rules and procedures in the building.

Moreover, we have a very active Athletic Booster Club and Pioneers for Education (PFE), a parent-teacher association. These organizations help to keep parents invested in our school and the services that we are able to provide. These groups helped to fund and support a food pantry in our building that was utilized during the quarantine period in our area. We also have a TeamMates program that provides community mentors for many of our students. This helps to provide support for our students during times of hardship and create a lifelong relationship for those who may need a mentor or role model outside of the home. Our community partners, such as churches, veteran’s associations, and local businesses, assist in providing resources and services to families who may be in need. Many community members are heavily invested in making sure our students are cared for and have access to anything they need to be successful.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

On any given day, staff at Fort Calhoun Junior-Senior High School know that they are appreciated and respected. Particularly during the pandemic, Covid-19 has created responsibilities that teachers could have never predicted or anticipated in their classrooms. At “The Fort”, our administrative team has succeeded in being open, transparent, and available when teachers have voiced concerns about keeping our classrooms safe and operational. This summer, staff was provided with multiple training opportunities to help us prepare for our new learning management system. Staff was also given collaborative time and space to work on creating learning platforms. Our Educational Service Unit shared various resources to help staff prepare for challenges with remote students.

One of the biggest items needed by teachers during this pandemic has simply been time. After seeing teachers’ immense workload, our school board voted to give six additional work days to teachers throughout the school year. This modification to the calendar demonstrated a clear understanding of the unique challenges teachers have faced and provided much needed support. Furthermore, the administrators demonstrate clear support for teachers and are willing to invest in the development of the teaching staff. The open door policy provides the avenue for a teacher to approach an administrator with ideas and requests concerning ways to develop professionally.

Professional development is crucial to the effectiveness of Fort Calhoun’s teachers. The administrators and school board recognize the need to continually invest in the development of the staff. We are provided many opportunities to develop our craft through professional development training, workshops, and conferences. Staff members also regularly participate in building and district level in-services aimed at equipping teachers with needed tools and providing up-to-date strategies and activities to use in the classroom.

The high level of collaboration among our teaching staff creates a strong sense of unity and helps us develop best practices. Problem Solving Teams are developed to address issues, enact effective solutions, and work together for the betterment of students. Teachers are also involved in PLCs, which provide opportunities to exchange ideas for effective classroom activities/procedures across content areas and grade levels. Instructional rounds have been another effective tool used to sharpen one another’s skills and share ideas.

As teachers collaborate, we make it a priority to develop and utilize common language with one another and with students. Marzano training for the staff provides an effective tool as a common language reference for teachers. Using a common language enhances student achievement and builds solidarity among all stakeholders when it is used to communicate expectations and deliver instruction.

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4. School Leadership:

Our leadership team at Fort Calhoun Junior-Senior High School consists of our superintendent, building principal, and assistant principal who also serves as the athletic director. This team strives to keep our building running smoothly each day by listening to concerns or problems in the building and then seeking out the best possible solutions. Our leadership policy is to lead by example and with an open mind and door.

Our administrative team takes an active role in our building each and every day. They are in the halls as students come in and out of the building. Both principals make frequent stops into classrooms to see what students are learning and how teachers are delivering their instruction. The leadership team provides not only informal feedback, but also conducts formal observations throughout the year to give teachers support and highlight successes. Besides conducting informal and formal observations, our superintendent and both principals instruct the PEP class for 7th grade. This helps to develop relationships with the students and show staff they are willing to work hard in the classroom as well.

With students returning to school in the fall, our administration team involved teachers and parents in the planning process to provide the safest, most effective strategy for our school to reopen. The team listened to input on what would or would not work during a school day and helped to develop procedures that would create the least amount of disruption. Also, our administration team has helped with covering classes for teachers who are out of the building. This provides a great service to our students as they are able to view building leadership in a different way, engage with them in the classroom setting, and also shows teachers that they are supported.

Positive culture is essential in a school building and the administrative team works diligently to show faculty and staff that they are appreciated for the work they do. This could be through simple thank yous as they pass in the hallways, treats on a Friday afternoon, or providing more jeans days for teachers who are working with more sanitizing products than normal. Each of these little signs of support helps to enforce the administration's respect and appreciation of our staff.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

In a school that is rather racially, ethnically, and religiously homogeneous, our educators do their due diligence to widen and challenge our students' worldview and diversity lens through curriculum and social interactions. Throughout the variety of content areas and courses offered, our curriculum and instruction addresses the historical disenfranchisement of various social categories/groups, as well as highlights current events and social movements. We don't only teach about the issue, but rather provide opportunities for students to internalize and reflect, engage in fruitful dialogue, explore other viewpoints, and at best, be change agents. Students also study historical traditions and their purposes from a variety of social groups to help them identify and value the uniqueness of each, and how even though different, we all generally have much in

common. Ultimately, we strive to develop and deepen their critical thinking, social awareness, and empathy for humanity.

Aside from what we teach, we also aim to incorporate culturally responsive teaching and learning in how we teach. We are mindful of seating arrangements, student pairings, and group work dynamics. Teachers are sensitive to abilities and accommodations. Circling back to our purpose statement, “Inspiring: Courage, Character, and Commitment”, we promote a safe learning environment and establish sound classroom management strategies. In addition, teachers expect and urge our students to contribute to that security as well. We seek to provide a safe space for them to feel empowered and be courageous enough to share ideas, even though they may not fit the norm; to think outside the box; to respect differing opinions and agree to disagree; to provide alternative means to communicate; and to not be afraid to ask for help. All in all, we are consciously responsive to the diverse needs of our student learners.

According to our most recent Annual Report, 20% of our student population is Free & Reduced Lunch. Typically, these same students also come from home environments where education may not be prioritized and school is their safest place. Our aspiration at “The Fort” is to champion them, educationally, mentally and emotionally, so these students do not fall through the cracks. Aside from meeting their basic needs of providing solid meals (breakfast and lunch), we also provide an after-school homework enrichment program, coordinate the TeamMates mentoring program, focus on building relationships in Homeroom, and make a concerted effort to be their advocates. It’s important to the faculty and staff at “The Fort” to love on our kids.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Even the greatest efforts in effective teaching would fall short without relationships. Building relationships with all stakeholders takes precedence within the Fort Calhoun Junior-Senior High School and is the one practice that has been key to the school's continual and increasing success on every level. Teachers and administrators alike are intentional about creating a partnership with students and parents and ensuring all stakeholders are heard and valued.

The highest priority at "The Fort" has been and continues to be an emphasis on relationship building. Whether it is being intentional about getting to know students personally, or reaching out and connecting with "at risk" kids, or providing flexibility for the well-being of the students -- creating a caring, family-like environment for students and their families makes Fort Calhoun Junior-Senior High School a special place.

These relationships are solidified by strengthening communication and encouraging involvement with parents. Parents have access to lesson plans, assignments, and activities through Canvas. Additionally, parents may access grades, attendance, and more through PowerSchool. The school website is another resource for all stakeholders; it is easy to navigate and provides an abundance of information. To increase community engagement, student projects, activities, and accomplishments are highlighted on the website as a way to showcase the incredible happenings at "The Fort". These resources also provide an opportunity for parents to initiate conversations with their student(s) and stay involved in their child(ren)'s educational process. Furthermore, through parent-teacher conferences in the fall and spring and keeping parents informed and involved in student/school activities, all stakeholders contribute to the positive, family-like culture of "The Fort".

Moreover, junior and senior high school teachers are present at extracurricular activities and community events through coaching, volunteering, and/or spectating. Teachers are intentional in regards to creating community-building opportunities and are actively involved in developing a positive environment for all students and families. In an effort to build unity and strengthen relationships, staff members construct an abundance of engaging events for students and families throughout the year.

Staff members also connect with students and parents via email, phone calls, and face-to-face conversations, trying to create an open door policy. At every level, the teachers and administrators promote a transparent and accessible line of communication for all.

The Fort Calhoun administrative team models and emphasizes the importance of relationship building as well. The school administrators make it a priority to model and provide opportunities for involvement in the school for students, parents, teachers, and the community. It is this group effort and commitment to relationships that creates the family-like environment at "The Fort". The Junior-Senior High School is truly a unique place and remains a second "home" to many of our students. It is a place where all students are safe to thrive; our work may begin in the classroom, but it moves out from there, positively impacting the school, the community, and the world.