

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 [X] Magnet [] Choice

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

Official School Name Academy For Information Technology
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 1776 Raritan Road
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Scotch Plains State NJ Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 07076-2997

County Union County

Telephone (908) 889-8288 Fax (908) 889-6831

Web site/URL https://www.ucvts.tec.nj.us/Page/471 E-mail cgialanella@ucvts.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* Mrs. Gwendolyn Ryan E-mail gryan@ucvts.org

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

District Name Union County Vocational-Technical School District Tel. (908) 889-8288

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 Mrs. Jean Perkins

(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):
- 0 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 0 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 8 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 8 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	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	47	31	78
10	53	25	78
11	33	25	58
12 or higher	56	15	71
Total Students	189	96	285

*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):
- 0.3 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 30.6 % Asian
 - 9.7 % Black or African American
 - 18.8 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0.7 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 36.5 % White
 - 3.4 % Two or more races
 - 100 % Total**

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

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

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

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

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	0
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	4
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	4
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	289
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.01
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	1

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

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

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

Total number students who qualify: 21

8. Students receiving special education services: 2 %
7 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>0</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>4</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay | <u>1</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>1</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>0</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: 7
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to the nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below. If your current staffing structure has shifted due to COVID-19 impacts and you are uncertain or unable to determine FTEs, provide an estimate.

	Number of Staff
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	24
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	1
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	0
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	3

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 12:1

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

Required Information	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016
Daily student attendance	98%	96%	97%	96%	97%
High school graduation rate	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

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	72
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	98%
Enrolled in a community college	2%
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. 2013

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

AIT is a small, four-year career academy that fosters critical thinking skills in its culturally diverse student population. By stressing intellectual curiosity, hard work, ethical behavior, and technological expertise with business integration, the school community guides its students to achieve their greatest potential. Our graduates are prepared academically, technologically, and interpersonally for the challenges of the future.

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.

AIT has offered cohorted in-person learning. Students who selected in-person learning come to campus two days a week and learn remotely three days a week. In the summer, families opted-in their students to in-person learning or opted-out to fully remote learning. Other opportunities to opt-in to in-person learning have been offered throughout the year. At any point, families can immediately change their students to fully remote learning. After considering students’ responses to remote learning and in-person class sizes, AIT opened non-cohorted in-person learning to students who receive special services or who struggled academically or emotionally with remote learning so that they come to campus four days a week and learn remotely one day a week. In this way, the school better serves its more vulnerable students while maintaining safety precautions.

AIT uses a hybrid learning schedule with dedicated asynchronous learning time to ensure students’ continued access to supports like academic tutoring from peers and teachers as well as social-emotional help from counselors. Students engage with their teachers and peers via synchronous learning sessions. Dedicated asynchronous learning time allows students time to complete assigned work, engage in CTE activities, study with classmates, receive extra help from teachers, or talk to their counselors about academic progress or receive social-emotional support. Teachers and counselors use this time to check-in with students and offer academic and social-emotional support to students who seem to be struggling in these areas.

The need for asynchronous learning time stems from the school community's understanding that students have different learning environments, some more conducive to focus than others, and that students learn at different paces, with some students needing more time and more support than others to complete assignments to avoid becoming overwhelmed. Creating opportunities for the school community to respond to students' needs and support them and their continued success in these difficult times was a guiding principle of decisions regarding school operations.

For additional information, please consult the UCVTS Pandemic Restart and Recovery Plan ([filedownload.ashx \(tec.nj.us\)](#)).

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

AIT draws students from each of Union County's twenty-one municipalities, from urban Elizabeth to suburban Garwood to rural Berkeley Heights. School admissions occurs through a centralized UCVTS district application with no weight given to school preference. Prospective students take the UCVTS admissions test, which assesses mathematics and language arts proficiencies, and submit their middle school transcripts. They are encouraged to list more than one school preference if they are interested in more than one career and technical education pathway. The district admissions department calculates a composite score out of 100 points for each applicant based on their seventh grade course grades average (15 points), eighth grade first marking period grades average (15 points), and UCVTS admission test score (70 points). Applicants must earn a minimum composite score of 65 required to qualify for admission, and final admissions decisions are based on applicants' composite scores and school preference in relation to other applicants from a resident town. The district guarantees each Union County municipality an offer of AIT admission for at least two and up to thirty qualified applicants. Approximately six applicants per town are offered admission to each high school on campus.

PART III - SUMMARY

AIT serves Union County, which is among the most densely populated and ethnically diverse counties in New Jersey (United States Census Bureau 2019). Data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau (2019) indicates that 86.4% of the county population has at least a high school diploma or GED with 36% holding a bachelor's or higher degree. The private sector employs approximately 84.1% of the county workforce, with the largest non-government businesses being Merck & Co. Kenilworth & Rahway Pharmaceuticals, Overlook Hospital Summit Hospital, Trinitas Regional Medical Center, Blue Apron, Nokia, Phillips 66 Refinery, and Summit Medical Group (Union County Economic Development Corporation 2020).

The AIT mission stems directly from its commitment to serve students and involve families in the continued evolution of its strategies to serve and challenge students. In light of the county workforce data and feedback from the school community, AIT has added a comprehensive business management and administration CTE program through which students learn to harness the power of information technology to drive business. The school community, via the industry advisory board on which parent / guardian and local industry leaders serve, refined the new CTE program and created curricular opportunities. These range from the Business Intelligence and Analytics senior mathematics course to Global Financial Markets and Investments, where students learn through the Bloomberg Market Concepts program and participate in investment simulators offered through the Wharton Business School and Portfolios for a Purpose. Because 100% of graduating seniors go on to study at institutions of higher learning, teachers, staff, and administrators developed and implemented the student e-portfolio initiative to help students organize and reflect on their learning and easily share their talents with post-secondary institutions and employers.

The school continues to earn state, and national recognition for its commitment to preparing its diverse student body for college and careers, particularly in information technology and business related fields. U.S. News and World Report (2020) ranked AIT the eighth best high school in New Jersey, and 130th best high school in the United States. However, the school community is especially proud to have been designated a National Blue Ribbon School by the U. S. Department of Education in 2013. It is an honor that the school community celebrates in its admissions outreach and communications with post-secondary institutions as well as, on the school website.

Being recognized by the National Blue Ribbon School program also has inspired the school community to continue evolving to best serve its community. Teachers, staff, and administration actively participate in the development and implementation of new initiatives, including improving students' presentation and research skills through consistent feedback and increasing student access to earning early college credits via the Advanced Placement Program. AIT recently added two new academic opportunities—AP Capstone and The Waksman Student Scholars Program—in pursuit of these initiatives.

AIT is one of only five Union County schools that offers the AP Capstone program, which offers students the opportunity to earn either an AP Capstone diploma or AP Seminar and Research certificate. The 2-year interdisciplinary course sequence develops students' critical thinking, research, public speaking, collaboration, and time management abilities. During their studies, AP Capstone students learn to construct meaning and gain new understanding by looking at topics through multiple lenses in order to synthesize ideas and propose novel solutions to real world problems in written and verbal forms. In AP Seminar, students collaborate with their peers on a shared problem and use cross-discipline data to look at an issue holistically. In AP Research, students design and execute original Research inquiries that analyze original data to draw conclusions that address a Research gap. AIT offers the AP Capstone program through its career and technical program, which gives students a unique opportunity to grapple with real world problems in industries that they will further study and enter in the near future.

Through The Waksman Student Scholars Program (WSSP), students have the opportunity to work closely with experts to conduct an authentic research project on molecular biology or bioinformatics. Students commence their efforts at a summer institute where they work closely with field experts and one or two peers. They continue their work during the school year, and AIT instituted its Bioinformatics elective to

support students in this program. WSSP students have the opportunity to have their findings published to Genbank, the National Institute of Health Genomic database.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

AIT prides itself on offering a rigorous core curriculum that exceeds the NJ Student Learning Standards and state graduation requirements. The guiding principle for curriculum design is that students need authentic learning experiences that appeal to their interests, goals, and curiosities to encourage their intellectual growth. In order to academically challenge students who already distinguished themselves in their middle school studies, AIT's core curriculum is taught at the honors level and also gives students opportunities to take Advanced Placement courses in the core curriculum sequence.

AIT administers mathematics and Spanish language placement tests to incoming students to ensure that they engage in appropriately challenging mathematics and Spanish language studies sequences. Students with strong Spanish language skills have opportunities to take AP Spanish Language and Culture in addition to courses geared for heritage and native Spanish language speakers.

To accommodate students who are mathematically advanced, the mathematics curriculum includes advanced placement courses like AP Calculus and AP Statistics in addition to unique courses like multi-variable calculus. The most basic math we offer is Combined Algebra, in which students complete Algebra 1 and 2 in one year. Our core mathematics sequence also includes Geometry/Trigonometry, Math Analysis, and Calculus, which is offered at the honors and Advanced Placement Level. Students who advance through the mathematics sequence may continue their mathematics studies in AP Statistics, Multivariable Calculus, and Mathematical Statistics and Data Sciences, which is similar to graduate level math. AIT is proud to offer Business Intelligence and Analytics as a required mathematics course for all students in the Business Management and Administration Program.

The core curriculum encourages students to learn how to think rather than what to think. This is evident in the school's science sequence. AIT freshmen take Scientific Inquiry and Analysis, which introduces scientific skills and scientific thinking across myriad topics as well as computational thinking, statistics and analytics. The course demonstrates that everything in life requires critical evaluation rather than mere memorization of information. This sets the tone for students' studies in general. AIT freshman also complete biology as a required course in the science sequence. In sophomore year, students complete Chemistry and in junior year, all AIT students complete a physics course. A fourth year of science is required for all AIT students, with most students choosing to continue their studies at the Advanced Placement level or in the Bioinformatics course.

An interdisciplinary approach to the social studies and language arts curriculum is an extension of the desire to help students learn how rather than what to think. The grade level language arts course focuses on literature that complements the grade level social studies curriculum: world literature and world history, early American literature and U.S. History 1, and modern American literature and U.S. History 2. In their senior year, students can pursue social studies and/or language arts studies that appeal to their personal interests, including IT History, AP Government, AP U.S. History, AP English Literature, AP English Language, Writers of the African Diaspora, Creative Writing, and British Literature.

Typically, students take eight classes and engage in learning through 83 minute block periods. The longer learning blocks allows teachers and students to deeply engage in hands-on and collaborative learning activities like projects that promote critical thinking. Teachers regularly employ flipped classroom instruction so that they can use class time to meaningfully support each student as they master the skills and concepts that stem from the curriculum content. An enrichment period called co-curricular occurs daily and provides teachers additional opportunities to help students individually or in small groups. AIT provides students with Chromebooks to empower students to take ownership of their learning. Teachers take advantage of the school's one-to-one device program to design differentiated instruction where students develop important thinking, research, and communication skills through curriculum topics of personal interest.

adaptations do not uproot the overall program integrity. The learning schedule combines synchronous and asynchronous learning blocks that provide for the same rigor and support of the typical learning schedule while accounting for the implementation of safety precautions and the toll of the pandemic on students' social-emotional well-being. The length of synchronous learning block periods has been reduced from 83 minutes to 50 minutes so that in-person students have ample time to travel between classrooms while maintaining safety precautions, to allow remote learners time to take a screen break, and to address the challenge of midday bus transportation to the 21 communities that send students to our schools. During synchronous learning, teachers deliver live lessons and use Zoom Video Conferencing to bridge the physical distance between in-person and remote learners so that all students engage in unified learning experiences. AIT added a 120-minute asynchronous block to the learning schedule so that teachers and students have opportunities to work together. During asynchronous learning, a teacher may schedule a student to watch a lecture or read an article in preparation for future instructional activities or work with their group members on solving a problem. Students also can communicate with teachers on areas of confusion and organize their time to work with other learners and to meet with teachers as needed. AIT recognizes the importance of having additional time built-in to the learning schedule where teachers and students can work together to enhance student learning to ensure student intellectual growth and minimize learning loss. It also allows students to develop the independent learning and organizational skills required to thrive in college.

In response to the learning schedule change, AIT teachers work together to meaningfully streamline the curriculum and ensure that instruction focuses on the essential skills that students need to thrive academically. From such collaboration, AIT teachers have expanded their use of flipped classroom instruction. Formative assessments play a key role in providing students feedback essential to learning and giving teachers the data needed to organize instructional support during asynchronous learning blocks. In a continued effort to align everyday practice to the school's belief that students must understand that their learning prepares them to tackle real-world problems, AIT teachers continue to shift to project-based assessments where students have increased agency in choosing between two or more assessment formats.

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

AIT's two career and technical programs, Information Technology and Business Management and Administration include a series of courses created in conjunction with an Industry Advisory Board. Throughout their time at AIT, our students take a unique program of courses designed to bring real world meaning to the deep connections between business and information technology. Technology is embraced in all classrooms through one-to-one devices, laptops, computer labs, 3-D Printers, and the Microsoft Surface Hub. All courses are administered via Google Apps for Education centered around Google Classroom. Courses such as Bioinformatics utilize open access on-line programming tools such as Google Colab to create opportunities for programming across core content areas. Our business courses offer an exciting opportunity for our students to participate in personal finance and investment simulations. AIT's technology courses focus on the development and application of productivity software, operating systems, database design and development, and code. All AIT students earn industry-recognized certifications. Included among these are each of the IC3 Certifications, the Microsoft Office Specialist Certification, Comp TIA IT Fundamentals+, QuickBooks, CompTIA Project Plus, and Oracle Database and Java Programming. AIT students benefit from a partnership with the Oracle Corporation. We are honored to have been named an Oracle Academy of Distinction by the Oracle Corporation.

All students may earn credits through Structured Learning Experiences. This senior-elective opportunity provides students with valuable learning opportunities and helps connect students to industry. Structured Learning Experiences provide the opportunity for the student to experience "work-based learning" providing valuable experiences in their chosen field, and allowing them to apply their career and technical education.

Through an articulation agreement with the New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT), students who meet the conditions of the agreement and choose to attend NJIT have the opportunity to earn college credit and continue their education at NJIT after graduation.

AIT enjoys a professional partnership with Novo Nordisk, a global healthcare company with a passion for and a commitment to Information Technology. The corporation provides opportunities for our students to

observe facility operations and for career shadowing in both the information technology and business fields. Novo Nordisk sponsors an annual career day for our students whereby representatives from the corporation present information on technology's role in their chosen career path and current assignment at Novo Nordisk. Novo Nordisk also provides scholarship opportunities for our students who have been accepted to a four-year degree program and intend to study information technology or a related field.

AP Research, the second course in the AP Capstone program, offers students an immersive problem-based learning experience through the exploration of a problem of personal interest and industry relevance. Research topics are "pitched" to Advisory Board Members early in the research process.

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

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

AIT, as a career and technical academy, offers robust business and information technology programs. Students engage in introductory vocational courses in their ninth and tenth grade studies that provide a foundational knowledge of both the business and information technology pathways and allow them to make informed decisions about which CTE studies will interest them more in eleventh and twelfth grade. The CTE curriculum also informs the general curriculum so students have additional opportunities to complete core curriculum studies in a personally meaningful way. Such courses include Business Intelligence & Analytics (mathematics), Bioinformatics (science), and Communications Media (interdisciplinary).

The school takes the same care in its other curricula because the school community believes that learning must enrich students intellectually, interpersonally, and emotionally. Throughout their Spanish language and culture studies, students learn to communicate in ways that are both meaningful and culturally appropriate. The school community firmly believes that fluency in a second language allows students to be competitive in the global job market, so Spanish language teachers use authentic resources and equally focus on oral and written communication to ensure students' meaningful language acquisition. Spanish language teachers stress the importance of understanding both culture and language since they are inextricably bound together, and they encourage students' understanding of this fact through the Interpersonal, Interpretive and Presentational modes. Many students ultimately pursue the prestigious Seal of Biliteracy.

In recent years, we have increased our efforts to create partnerships with other UCVTS Career Academies. Recently, AIT partnered with the School of Design to offer Computer Art. This full-year studio course will begin by introducing the principles of design problem-solving, including practical applications in identity, information, promotion, and advertising. Issues of visual form, the design process, client and market requirements, research, and personal expression are addressed. Students explore graphics software in the Adobe Creative Suite. Studio projects in digital drawing, typography, and image editing explore design elements and principles utilizing various methods of visual communication.

Through the faculty at the District's Academy for Performing Arts, AIT students are afforded the opportunity to study Dance Appreciation, a requirement for all AIT sophomores. Here, students develop an appreciation of world dance forms, social dance, and musical theatre. Students examine ritual dance and folk dance in several cultures, and are given an opportunity to share any part dance has taken in their lives. Through a combination of in-person and online classes, students receive the tools to create choreography in any style of their choosing. Upon completion of Dance Appreciation, AIT students are encouraged to participate in Dance Club during the co-curricular hour of their school day.

The AIT health and physical education curriculum encourages students' social and emotional growth in addition to their intellectual development by addressing multiple areas of fitness from physical wellness to productive teamwork. The health and fitness curriculum encourages students to develop and monitor meaningful individual fitness goals so that they develop lifelong habits for health and well-being. To further help students achieve their health and fitness goals. Project Adventure initiatives, games, and activities encourage students' development of leadership, creativity, and risk-taking by understanding and

implementing the concepts of “Challenge by Choice,” “STAR goals,” and “Full Value.” Moreover, it establishes a supportive and respectful school culture that defines relationships at AIT and empowers students with interpersonal skills that they need to thrive after graduation.

Students have rich elective choices within each discipline in addition to interdisciplinary studies. The school values opportunities for students to broaden their interests and offers many humanities electives that develop students’ media literacy skills, including recognizing bias and societal impact, like Film & Genre Studies and Introduction to Humanities. Beyond the curriculum, AIT students benefit from a myriad of extracurricular activities to enrich them in terms of the visual and performing arts, including the dance club, drama club, art club, and music club.

The school community continues its commitment to the student e-portfolio initiative that allows students to organize academic information like career goals and work samples and encourages them to reflect on how their academic work prepares them for citizenship in the 21st century global economy and workplace.

3. Academic Supports:

The faculty and staff at the Academy for Information provide a tailored educational experience for each student, ensuring all learning styles and specific learning needs are met. While we do not have statistics or data suggesting any of our 283 students are performing below grade level, we do have data which supports that many of our students are in fact performing above grade level. To ensure these students remain engaged and challenged, our teachers often increase the rigor of the curriculum and allow opportunities for these students to further enrich their knowledge and growth beyond the required standards. These opportunities present themselves in various ways, some examples include, independent study with teacher check ins, opportunities to present/teach materials to their peers in class, serving as teaching assistants (TA) during class time.

The Academy for Information Technology also takes great pride in following Individualized Educational Plans as well as 504 plans for students with various health or learning disabilities. Modifications are made, in accordance with each student’s individual plan, ensuring the student is set up for a successful educational experience. Teachers and building administration work closely with our district’s Department for Special Services to ensure that all educational needs are met for any student who has an IEP or 504 plan.

In order to successfully address any apparent gaps in grading, especially in the current learning environment due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Academy for Information Technology has successfully been following a district initiative to allow students opportunities to succeed during such a challenging time. We are aware that many students have been tasked with the responsibility of looking after younger siblings while also completing their own school work obligations. To assist in ensuring our students continue to achieve the academic success they are used to as a result of their years of hard work and dedication to their education, we have implemented the following policies as part of our District’s Pandemic Response Road Back Plan. All students are offered the opportunity to retake a major assessment if a score of less than 80% is earned on the first attempt. Students are encouraged to make up any missing classwork or homework related to the sections covered on the assessment to ensure mastery of those topics before the retake is administered. A maximum potential score of 80% is able to be achieved on these retakes. Students are also granted some leniency on submission of homework assignments. Students are able to make up any missing homework assignment during a given marking period for a maximum penalty of 10% deduction. Also, should a student not have the ability or opportunity to make up missing homework, it was decided that the students would not be penalized with a “0” due to the current circumstances revolving around the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lastly, as COVID has proven to be challenging for various populations, it has been

disproportionately difficult on students with disabilities in our experience. Many of the in-person services provided to students with IEPs and even 504s rely on the professional to use in the moment strategies to react to the specific difficulty of the student. Working virtually full-time or even in the hybrid situation (2 days in-person/3 days virtually), has proven problematic for students who need the continuous feedback loop of a trained professional working with them. To that end, we have made specific exemptions for students that are in need of more in-person learning. Students with IEPs and 504s have been prioritized in consideration for 4 days of in-person instruction, where the district policy is still only 2 days of in-person instruction for non-disabled peers. Included in this provision is the ability for students with IEPs and 504s the opportunity to stay after the normal dismissal time in order to have supervised work time to complete assignments while being monitored by a staff member. These added services have enabled some of our students with special needs the opportunity to get back on track with in-person supports that are so important to their success.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

Extracurricular activities and community events have been the linchpin of AIT climate and culture and remain its cornerstone during the pandemic. These activities easily transitioned to distance learning format because of the community's commitment to these matters. Student organizations have sponsored creative virtual escape rooms, Whodunit-themed dances, competitions, and even Relay for Life. AIT Student Government continued to drive forward such social opportunities with themed events that included interactive presentations, competitions, and prizes as well as themed Spirit Weeks and a virtual Cook Along. This enriches the school community because it allows students to connect with each other even though they cannot physically be together.

Many extracurricular activities have thrived in the new, remote setting. Newspaper Club, which offers students meaningful opportunities for students to express themselves creatively through a quarterly periodical, the annual literary magazine Student Voices, and most recently the Keys 2 Success non-profit program that seeks to improve music education to elementary and middle school students in underprivileged areas via penpal partnerships, experienced a membership boom as students sought ways to interact with each other from a distance. UCVTS Speech and Debate also saw an increase in membership because the NSDA adapted its tournaments to the virtual environment, allowing students to participate in the virtual tournaments. Seasoned debaters worked more closely with newer members by hosting virtual event workshops and in-house competitions as well as running Google Meet events during competitions so that they could collaborate and socialize with each other between rounds.

The school's CTE organization, Future Business Leaders of America, also has thrived in the online setting. This year, the school chapter celebrated Share Your Story day by using an Instagram story template to talk about their journey and experiences with FBLA. The faculty advisors have taken advantage of Zoom Video Conferencing and asynchronous learning time to connect student competitors with Advisory Board members and FBLA alumni. These meetings allowed students both to practice presentations and receive meaningful feedback before competing on the state level and to engage in the larger community in an innovative and sustainable way. The student organization's yearly event, Project Hope!, underwent a similar virtual facelift and has evolved into a night of camaraderie for club members and the school community at large.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

AIT's two career and technical programs, Information Technology and Business Management and Administration include a series of courses created in conjunction with an Industry Advisory Board that consists of faculty, college/university partners, business representatives, students, parents, and community members. These advisory boards direct the scope and sequence of our vocational programs and help us ensure that students are prepared for college and a career in their chosen field of study. These boards also help us understand the unique aspects of each career field so that we ensure that each program provides students not only with the content learning, but the career skills and soft-skills that lead to success in each field.

A weekly newsletter is prepared by AIT's Student Activities Coordinator with contributions from advisors, counselors and teachers from across the disciplines. The Weekly Newsletter is distributed, via email, by the School Principal to all faculty members, parents and students. The Principal's weekly email generally includes an acknowledgement of a recent past event. Most recently, the success of FBLA competitors at the State's Leadership Conference was celebrated in the Principal's weekly message.

Regular meetings of AIT's Parent Organization have continued in the virtual environment. AIT's Parent Student School Organization is a vital part of our school's communication structure. They provide an important perspective at their monthly meetings that students, faculty members and administrators attend. At each meeting, a detailed Principal's Report is provided followed by a question and answer session with all attendees. The transparency of these meetings has proven invaluable to the culture of our school community.

Working together, we have recently created opportunities for students to serve as official representatives to the PSSO.

As indicated previously, AIT recently underwent a comprehensive strategic planning process. Throughout those efforts, feedback collected at PSSO meetings, particularly during the annual TownHall meeting with the Superintendent, helped us to shape a vision that would be embraced by all stakeholders.

This Spring, as the District worked to welcome newly accepted students, our current students were invited to serve as student ambassadors, providing socially distant tours of the campus to new students and parents alike. Representatives of the PSSO participated in this event as well, taking time to welcome new parents to the School and to their organization.

The challenges of the pandemic have been met through frequent communication from our Central Office Administration, including two webinar opportunities that engaged parents on reopening plans at the start of the school year. A COVID-19 information hub was added to the District's Webpage, where the community members can easily access the Superintendent's 19 Community Letters and 50 Covid Positive Communications previously emailed to all members of the Community. At pivotal moments in the planning process, parents, students, faculty members and administrators were called upon to provide candid input and feedback through detailed surveys.

In addition to regular communication about County Community Food Drives and the Grab and Go Meals available at no cost to all students, parents have been provided information about New Jersey's food assistance program, NJ SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program). COVID-19 testing information and locations have also been distributed.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

AIT professional culture thrives because all stakeholders take an active role in its cultivation. Professional development adheres to a peer-to-peer model. Teachers design professional development workshops that highlight successfully implemented instructional approaches that seem of benefit to their peers, and teachers also comprise the district committee that plans ongoing professional development opportunities in addition to two annual in-services. Administrators encourage faculty to share their individual classroom successes at faculty meetings. Faculty meetings often revolve around reflections about school matters big, e.g. student portfolios, and small, e.g. grade level meetings, so that faculty feel actively involved in creating a culture of learning. These conversations continue outside the confines of scheduled meetings; Google Classroom is used for exchange of ideas/collaboration between professionals, and posters hang in the break room where faculty can add to the conversation on recurring topics at any time.

The community ownership establishing a professional culture afforded meaningful support during the school's transition to distance learning and hybrid model education. The district provided an extra in-service for faculty to learn about instructional technologies that their peers already used in their classrooms that seemed especially useful in pushing out distance learning instruction when we first became aware of the state's eminent mandating of distance learning in March 2020. This ensured that each school professional commenced distance learning instruction with specific ideas to use and an awareness of peers who they could speak to for additional support. Administrators also employed Google Hangouts to encourage daily discussions for faculty to work through distance learning instruction difficulties together by sharing their experiences with each other and brainstorming solutions to common issues.

This model became the inspiration for professional development this year. The September in-service again utilized faculty sharing instructional approaches that they developed during distance learning instruction that they felt would interest and benefit their peers and offered different levels - novice, intermediate, and advanced - to accommodate faculty's prior knowledge or experience. Faculty and staff feedback drove additional professional development opportunities that ranged from traditional professional workshops to collegial conversations that permitted faculty with a common interest like supporting struggling students or meaningfully integrating remote and in-person learners met to discuss their thoughts and brainstorm solutions.

4. School Leadership:

AIT's organization facilitates achievement of its purposes and core values as expressed in its mission and successful implementation of its educational program, services, and activities. The building based administrative team functions as a true partnership, comprised of the building Principal and Teaching Supervisor. As an administrative team, the Principal and Teaching Supervisor oversee the daily operations of the building. Although the Principal and Teaching Supervisor work as a true team, there are some responsibilities that are unique to each individual role.

One of the foundational beliefs of the Academy for Information Technology is that leadership is distributed among all stakeholders at the school. The school and district administration work to create space for students, parents, teachers, and community members to take ownership in appropriate areas. We believe that this approach to leadership allows us to tap into a diverse well of expertise and collective skills.

We also have formal structures that involve stakeholders in leadership positions. Our school advisory boards provide an opportunity for parents, alumni, teachers, and industry members to have direct input into our career and technical programs.

Each year, former educational professionals of the year are invited to serve on the School Improvement Panel (ScIP). This dynamic group provides input in the areas of teacher evaluation, mentoring, professional development, and helps create draft agendas for faculty meetings. Members of this group have provided professional development to our faculty at monthly faculty meetings and often serve as a sounding board for new initiatives.

Teacher leadership is also a major part of our success at AIT. In a formal capacity, we have several positions that allow teachers to take a role in the decision-making and administrative processes of the building. First, the Curriculum Coordinator helps monitor and lead the curriculum revision and improvement process. She is directly involved with helping the other teachers ensure that their planning and instructional practices are aligned to Student Learning Standards and the 21st century science standards. Next, the Student Activities Coordinator is responsible for being the first line of approval for all extracurricular events. The Student Activities Coordinator works directly with club advisors and students to plan events, maintain accurate records, organize elections, and monitor the selection of student leadership.

Student leadership is also an important aspect of our school leadership philosophy. Our student government is encouraged to take an active role in our school decision-making processes through AIT's Student Leadership Council. The AIT Student Leadership Council is a core group of elected and appointed students who represent the student body and assist advisors and administrators in future planning. Typically, students are invited to serve as members of the SLC after being elected by their peers or honored by the faculty as a student of the month. Students may also be asked to serve as an Advisor or Principal's Appointee. As a member of the SLC, students serve as a bridge between the administrative team and the student body, representing the interests and opinions of our students. Members of the SLC may be invited to act as a student representative to AIT's Advisory Board. This honor is typically reserved for members of the graduating class.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

The Academy for Information Technology is an ethnically, racially, culturally and economically diverse institution that draws students from 21 different towns in one of the most densely populated counties in New Jersey. Union County is also home to a plethora of immigrant groups, adding to the rich diversity of each of the community at large.

In our District, the Multicultural Club draws upon the rich ethnic and cultural diversity of the larger community to offer programs, workshops and activities. The Multicultural Club Mission is to explore and promote an increased understanding of the various cultures of the World among all members of the School Community. To that end, members of the club further their knowledge of

the global community and work to foster appreciation of different cultures, nationalities, ethnic groups, and languages among all students. The Multicultural Club plays a vital role in bringing students together in a friendly, celebratory and educative manner. It fosters the importance of intercultural communication to create a stronger community by encouraging students to celebrate their differences while appreciating their similarities. Students involved in the Multicultural Club work together to improve cultural awareness by working on social events that allow them to enhance their own knowledge about diversity.

Similar work is done by members of the District's Spanish Club, an organization whose mission is to promote Hispanic culture between members, celebrate important Hispanic holidays, and promote Hispanic culture appreciation.

The District's Gay-Straight-Alliance (GSA) welcomes all students to help maintain a school environment free of homophobic sexual, verbal and physical harassment. Our GSA actively works to bring LGBTQ+ students and straight allies together and provokes thought through education and awareness. Our GSA provides support by maintaining an open door policy, providing outside resources, and creating a learning environment in which every member has the opportunity to develop communication and leadership skills, which in turn foster self-confidence and personal growth.

AIT actively pursues opportunities for its diverse student body. Most recently, AIT hosted a virtual assembly, welcoming representatives from The Diversity Org. The Diversity Org educates low-income students on how to obtain corporate and high-income careers and exposes students to large corporations as they engage in professional development workshops. The group also helps students obtain internships. AIT has provided similar opportunities for our students to connect with organizations such as All Star Code and Girls Who Code.

Our social studies teachers utilize the vast experiences of our diverse student body and faculty as a teaching tool to tell the American story. For example, the parents of a pair of our students spoke to our social studies classes as witnesses and survivors to the Srebrenica Genocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina. One student's grandmother spoke of her experiences surviving the Holocaust. Students are encouraged to share their immigrant experiences and teachers nurture and embrace these stories. One student from Pakistan spoke of how wrenching it was for her family to be forcibly removed from India during Partition in 1947. Another student spoke of having to leave her family in China for fear of persecution for violating the one family-one child law. During Black History Month, students analyze the works of Paul Robeson, Billie Holiday, Marian Anderson, Ralph Ellison, Zora Neal Huston and Ida B. Wells. In United States History classes, students examine the forced immigrant experiences of African Americans, European groups, and groups from the Asian Subcontinent, China and Japan. Students analyze the Chinese Exclusion Act, the Gentleman's Agreement, the internment of the Japanese during World War 2, and subsequent Supreme Court Cases. Students explore the Civil Rights Era, from the collapse of Reconstruction to present and are encouraged to use their historical thinking skills to compare and contrast events, groups and experiences.

Using resources from groups such as Facing History, our teachers have continued to facilitate meaningful discussions as students examine the events and challenges of our modern society. Electives such as Genocide Studies & The Holocaust, War & Conflict in Modern America, and Writers of the African Diaspora allow students to examine topics surrounding these important issues on a deeper level.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

A key aspect of our approach to the challenges of this school year has been to be mindful of the social and emotional well-being of our students. Last spring, soon after transitioning to the virtual environment, we received feedback that students were greatly missing the types of activities that took place during our co-curricular time and after school. Activities such as teacher extra help, co-curricular club meetings, and time to interact with peers on group projects and other activities was sorely needed. To address those issues we implemented a Wednesday enrichment day with 4 hours of extra help and 1 hour of extracurricular time.

Based on feedback from the community, maintaining the Wednesday schedule was prioritized when developing the Reopening Plan for the 2020-2021 School Year. In response to specific feedback from students, we changed the amount of extra help time to 3 hours and added an additional hour for co-curricular activities.

As we have progressed through the school year, each Wednesday, in lieu of regular class meetings, students are encouraged to create a schedule and set appointments with teachers. To start the day, students must complete a question posted by their school counselor. Student responses to these questions serve as a way of checking in to see what students may be in need of additional support. To that end, our counselors have utilized Wednesdays for grade level and individual meetings, allowing students to benefit from time with them without taking time from their classes.

While we encourage students to seek help as needed, teachers may require some students to meet with them during extra help time in response to needs identified through formative assessments. These meetings may be one-on-one or may occur in small groups. Peer tutoring is also available throughout the day through the National Honor Society and Spanish Honor Society.

Two blocks of time are built into the day to encourage student participation in co-curricular activities and events offered by the District's various clubs and career and technical organizations. Community building events have been regularly offered as part of a continued effort to keep students feeling connected, not only to AIT, but to students and faculty from each of the District's five full-time academies. Advisors have grown increasingly creative in their event planning, keeping students engaged and connected throughout the year.

Organizations such as FBLA have thrived as a result of the increase in time available to students and advisors alike. Groups such as Coding Club have used Wednesdays for student led workshops on topics such as Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning. During Black History Month, our Student Government used Wednesday afternoons to host a virtual viewing party of Hidden Figures. Groups of students have used Wednesdays to participate in mathematics and investment challenges, working together and benefiting from access to faculty mentors on such days.