

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

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

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

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

School Mailing Address 1202 11th Avenue  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Dorothy State NJ Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 08317-5511

County Atlantic

Telephone (609) 476-2412 Fax (609) 476-3966

Web site/URL https://www.weymouthtownshipschool.org/ E-mail defrancisco@weymouthtsd.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\* Ms. Mary Lou DeFrancisco E-mail defrancisco@weymouthtsd.org  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Weymouth Township School District Tel. (609) 476-2412

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

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

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

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

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

## **PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION**

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

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

## PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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

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

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 1 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 0 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 0 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 1 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	7	7	14
K	8	1	9
1	8	7	15
2	9	9	18
3	8	2	10
4	6	6	12
5	14	10	24
6	5	7	12
7	6	10	16
8	9	4	13
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	80	63	143

\*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 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 1 % Asian
  - 4 % Black or African American
  - 13 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 74 % White
  - 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: 7%

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

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

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	9
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	2
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	11
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	156
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.07
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	7

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

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 34 %

Total number students who qualify: 49

8. Students receiving special education services: 25 %

36 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>2</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>0</u> Other Health Impaired                 |
| <u>3</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>6</u> Specific Learning Disability          |
| <u>2</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>22</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: 2

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

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	14
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	3
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	7
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	1

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 10:1

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

<b>Required Information</b>	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016
Daily student attendance	93%	95%	94%	92%	94%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Weymouth Township Elementary School exists to provide our students an innovative, nurturing, an effective educational environment. Through high expectations and accountability we provide opportunities for our students to grow academically, socially and emotionally into global citizens and lifelong learners.

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.

Weymouth School opened on September 8, 2020 with a hybrid model of operation. The hybrid model includes four days of in-person learning and one day of all remote learning. During the all remote day, students receive their Art, Music, Health and Technology classes virtually through Google Classroom. During in-person learning, all students stay in their homeroom with one teacher and in some cases an instructional aide. The district has one homeroom per grade with the exception of one grade that needed more space. That grade was divided into two classrooms to accommodate six feet social distancing. Student desks are six feet apart and fitted with plastic divider screens. Opening the windows allows for greater ventilation. Students have a thirty minute lunch and an organized play period outside. Families were offered a choice of a full remote or the hybrid model. Following guidance from the NJ Department of Health the district will transition to five days of in-person learning during the fourth marking period. Families will continue to have the option of remaining in the all remote model of learning.

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

## **PART III - SUMMARY**

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Weymouth Township sits in the southwest section of Atlantic County in the New Jersey Pinelands or Pine Barrens. It covers an area of 12.12 square miles, is bordered by the Great Egg Harbor River, South River, and Tuckahoe River and is largely rural. Weymouth Township Elementary is the only school in the township and serves students in grades Pre-Kindergarten to eight. Pre-Kindergarten through fourth grade students are self-contained in classrooms in one wing, and students in grades 5-8 are departmentalized in another wing. We have a large outdoor space and all students enjoy a recess period. There is one class per grade level; therefore children grow to know each other very well, giving our school a comfortable family atmosphere. When you ride the same bus, sit next to each other in class, play softball with, or go to church together, deep and long friendships develop. Our faculty members enjoy long and successful careers in our school and often times will have taught the siblings or even the parents of their current students; becoming part of an extended school family too.

While the debate for educational reform continues in the political and academic world, here in our small community school we continue to meet students where they are and work to prepare them to become lifelong learners able to be successful in an ever-changing world. We offer a rigorous instructional program guided by national and state standards. The results of our standardized testing indicate that our students and teachers work hard to meet the standards. An even better indicator of our success is when our students come back to visit. Our previous students come back for various events, spring concerts, and field days or just to thank their teachers for preparing them for high school.

An important turning point in the direction of the school's mission and vision happened when we became involved in a project sponsored by the Center for Social Character Development at Rutgers University: Fostering Change in School Culture through Character Education. The yearlong project gave us the roadmap for developing Professional Learning Teams (PLT), for developing a Character Education philosophy and for transferring our new learning into changes in practice. We outlined a plan to improve our programs that would bring about changes to our school climate. We chose actionable tasks that we could measure and observe the results through the daily actions of our students and staff. We developed methods to study data and make decisions for meeting the needs of our students.

We have found that the work we do to refine and improve our Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) is fundamental in creating a personalized learning environment. Connecting a student's social-emotional learning needs with their academic needs helps a student feel encouraged to tackle challenges, to ask questions, and to feel safe and trusted. Teachers work in groups to collaborate and create plans that help students celebrate their successes.

Our faculty is highly professional and committed to their continued growth and learning. All professional learning is embedded with a common thread that the fundamental task of educating is not simply to make certain that students are taught, but rather to ensure that they learn. As difficult as it is in a small school, we feel it is important that teachers have shared planning time.

Another initiative that supports social and emotional growth in our students and staff is through our four pillars of Character Education. Developed during our work with Rutgers, we continue to refine and update our pillars yearly. Our pillars encourage all students and staff to be: Respectful, Responsible, Ready for School and Safe. Some of the ways we encourage these principles are through morning announcements, cross-grade spirit teams that meet quarterly to participate in activities that encourage sharing and community outreach, physical fitness walks, monthly acknowledgement of students who reach personal goals, community gardening and road clean up.

We are particularly proud of receiving Preschool Expansion Aide (PEA) during the 2019-2020 school year, which enabled us to add an additional preschool classroom and open up our program to include three year-olds from the community. Being able to provide this for our community and to meet our students a year earlier is mutually beneficial.

Our small school community encourages strong ties between home and school. Our parents and grandparents generously support our efforts through fundraising, assemblies, and community events.

When faced with the COVID-19 challenges and school closure, Weymouth Township School worked closely with the other districts in the county and developed a plan to reopen for the 2020-2021 school year. Parents were offered the option for all remote learning for their children and in September, twenty-six percent of our enrollment took advantage of that method of learning. The remaining fifty-six percent attend in-person learning four days a week with one day of remote learning on Wednesdays. In addition, eighteen percent of our students transitioned to homeschooling. By the end of second marking period, most families transitioned back to in-person. Being flexible with families and unbending with the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) recommended safety measures we have instituted, we have persevered. The next challenge we face will be to address our students' learning loss. With our strong commitment to the individual success of our students, we are confident that we will prevail.



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

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

At Weymouth Township Elementary School our view of curriculum is everything experienced by our students, including everything they participate in that includes or teaches a lesson, all their interactions and interpersonal relationships, and their extra-curricular activities. In addition, we pay particular attention to the hidden curriculum, anything that is implied through the values and behaviors of teachers and administrators, the non-written rules, routines, discipline, the school building, the playground, and even hallway decorations. We pay very close attention to the feeling one gets when they walk through our doors, whether you are a visitor, a student, a staff member, or a parent or community member. We are aware of the important social and emotional lessons that students learn from teachers, administrators, school nurse, cafeteria and custodial staff and most importantly their own peers.

Our teachers teach the New Jersey Student Learning Standards (NJSLs) for English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Technology, Visual and Performing Arts, World Languages, and Health and Physical Education. Our preschool teachers use the Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards. Teachers' lessons incorporate the Depth of Knowledge (DOK) chart, developed by Norman L. Webb of Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, for teaching higher order thinking skills, differentiated instructional strategies, individual learning styles and interests.

Our balanced literacy approach is designed to foster joyful and meaningful engagement with literacy. We begin by encouraging a love of reading and building on foundational skills in phonics, fluency, and comprehension. The program continues through upper elementary and middle school by gradually moving the emphasis to comprehension, grammar and vocabulary and the craft of writing. Students learn to communicate effectively and coherently and build upon their learning from year to year. Readers and Writers Workshop Units of Study by Teachers College of Columbia University (TCRWP) is the program teachers use to implement the English Language Arts Curriculum. Professional development has been available to all literacy teachers aiding their growth towards mastery. The district has supported several staff members to attend intensive training at Teachers College at Columbia University. They facilitate workshops to turnkey their learning to other members of the literacy team when they return. One of our goals when we moved to this philosophy of instruction was to build our classroom libraries to meet the individual needs of our students. We didn't just put the books we had into a bin and call it a day. The classroom libraries are alive and change with the students' needs and interests. We seek to introduce as many new and classic authors and titles as possible. Our belief is that if our students have access to numerous great books, and teachers that are passionate about teaching literacy then there is no way their reading skills will not improve and thrive.

The pandemic and resulting changes to instruction have made us rethink many of the methods we use to teach ELA. Thankfully, TCRWP made resources available to compact the Units of Study to focus on fundamental topics. The project offered videos of mini-lessons to use during remote learning. Our teachers worked together to identify essential learning and then reworked their scope and sequences to fit the modified schedule made necessary by the restrictions of teaching during the pandemic. The inequities and disparities that have been brought to light by the pandemic have driven teachers, administrators and support staff alike to focus on the whole child. We added a class period a week to address Social Emotional Learning (SEL). During this class period, teachers meet their online and in-person students to provide support and organizational skills for all their subjects.

Our mathematics program is rooted in the vision of the Principles of Action by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics: that all students should have access to effective instruction that engages them in meaningful learning which promotes their ability to make sense of mathematical ideas, and to reason mathematically. Our mathematics teachers have specialized expertise that not only make them "good at math" but able to teach math. Our math teachers collaborate with each other and understand that mathematics develops across progressions. Knowing their students' progress in relation to the progressions, saves a lot of planning time and teachers are better able to meet their students where they are mathematically. High performing students may take Algebra I in eighth grade. Students in grade 5-8

participate in financial literacy courses, following the Junior Achievement of NJ program. The pandemic has provided some real life situations that our math teachers have used to create Project Based Learning (PBL). In addition, teachers have set up one-on-one tutoring sessions to support their students at all hours of the day to accommodate working or stressed out parents.

Our students experience science through a digital curriculum and bring it into their classrooms through exploratory hands-on materials that promote inquiry and excitement in the field. The real-world scientific connections they make build their curiosity and passion for STEM. The curriculum is aligned to the Next Generations Science Standards and the New Jersey Student Learning Standards for Science. The pandemic brought a unique set of challenges to this hands-on type of learning. The program we use, STEMscopes responded quickly and efficiently by providing support for asynchronous and synchronous lessons making it possible to link directly with our teachers' Google classrooms.

Our social studies program prepares our students to examine the complex challenges of the 21st Century by looking back at the people, places and events that happened in the past. Students are encouraged to grow and think critically, beginning with learning about relationships in their families and school, and then continuing with their communities and beyond. Students learn about New Jersey history, economics and geography. In middle school students begin to expand their studies to include the ancient world and civics to prepare to be thoughtful, engaged citizens. The program incorporates NJ College and Career Ready Standards and helps prepare students to adapt to the rapidly evolving workplace and world. Emphasis is put on appreciating cultural diversity and experience through the examination of primary sources and current events.

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

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

Weymouth is very proud of our preschool program. We began our program in 2007 as a recipient of Early Childhood Program Aid (ECPA), with a full day program serving four year-olds in the district. In 2019, we received NJ Preschool Expansion Aid (PEA) enabling us to expand our program by adding an additional classroom and include three year-olds in the program. Our teachers use the highly acclaimed, HighScope Curriculum where children learn in a play-based environment. HighScope is one of four NJ recommended curricula that is aligned with the NJ Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards. The NJ Learning Standards for K-12 include the Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards providing a coherent progression of standards across the grades. Currently the standards are designed to prepare our students for college or careers by emphasizing high-level skills and critical thinking. Our teachers participate in individualized professional development to increase their knowledge and continue to improve strategies to meet the needs of our youngest children's educational, physical, emotional and social growth. During a typical day in preschool, students develop plans for self-directed play and participate in small group and individual teacher facilitated centers where they work on language, phonemic awareness, and number sense. Teachers use an online platform to share the children's progress with families. Families are invited to become a partner in their child's education through various events and programs throughout the school year. The program is supported and evaluated through the use of The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Third Edition (ECERS-3). Our preschool teachers sit on committees and teams that meet to provide support and intervention suggestions and plan transition activities for students in grades K-three. Professional Learning Teams and administration study curriculum development and delivery to ensure all standards are addressed.

The pandemic has presented a much different challenge for our preschool teachers and our young students and their families. Remote learning cannot replace in-person learning for the youngest of our students. In response our teachers accepted the challenge and created videos and activities that parents and children could do at home. When students were allowed back in the building for in-person learning, we had smaller class sizes, limited the types of toys that were available and created spaces where social distancing felt a little more normal. We couldn't have parents in the building, but our teachers created opportunities for parents to connect with each other and with what was happening in school. We have learned so much from

this pandemic, especially about the development of our little ones. When this is over those lessons will make us better and more responsive educators knowing that when we build strong relationships we create better learners.

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

Every week students have classes in Art, Music, World Languages, Technology and Health. They also enjoy Physical Education twice a week. Each subject's curriculum is based on the New Jersey Learning Standards and provides students a creative and physical balance to their education. These are not supplemental classes for our students, but rather a place to develop critical thinking and creativity, support math and language development and cultivate social, emotional and physical wellness.

In art class students are exposed to learning experiences that engage them with a variety of artistic media and expression. They learn in a safe environment where they are free to explore their own meanings, and develop an awareness of perceptions, knowledge and experiences. Students all participate in the district Art Show showcasing their work. We also encourage students who demonstrate precocity in the arts to participate in Art Enrichment to express their own unique talents or passion in a deeper way.

Our students are exposed to a rich music curriculum where they sing, dance, read, compose and play music on various instruments. Various grants have provided our students with the opportunity to learn an instrument, including guitar, percussion, recorders, clarinet, and piano. Our school choir includes students in grades five through eight. The choir performs in two concerts a year, performs at community events and senior centers and often go on to a performing arts high school to continue to pursue their dreams. The drama club puts on a presentation and invites the whole school to perform at intermission or during the play.

World languages are taught in grades K-8. Students in the primary grades learn how to describe themselves, their families, homes and neighborhoods. They learn about other cultures' foods and traditions. In middle school students devote more time to conversation and understanding of diverse cultures.

Every aspect of our lives are touched by technology in the 21st Century. Students engage in a technology rich curriculum. We recognize the responsibility to both provide tools and applications for the functioning of the district but also instruction and support to students and staff to access digital information and communicate virtually. Our students' academic achievement is enhanced by our district's commitment to our technology infrastructure and the attainment of skills and knowledge required to experience success in a global society. Educational technology is infused across all curricular areas, is aligned with the most recent NJSLs and the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) and the National Educational Technology Standards. Our staff participates in ongoing high-quality professional development activities focused on enhancing proficiency and instructional practices. Students utilize Google Apps for education and are introduced to a variety of programming, coding and applications in their weekly technology classes. The preschool and kindergarten classrooms have iPads and each classroom in grades 1-8 has a Chromebook cart for a one-to-one device program. High-speed internet is available in the building and in the outside classroom. Each classroom has an interactive display board. Morning announcements include a weekly video broadcast designed and created by students in Tech Enrichment Club. STEAM club members participate in a variety of activities that include robotics, 3D printing and engineering.

## **3. Academic Supports:**

Anyone that has been in the field of education for some time is no stranger to educational reform. Often reform mandates come with something to add to our already busy days, causing stress and anxiety. What we have found to be fundamentally true and an underpinning of almost all reform is the philosophy that we as a school system support continuous improvement of instruction, and increased personal and shared accountability for raising levels of student achievement. In other words, we all believe that failure is not an option for our students. How do we do it? We start out by looking for gaps in our curriculum and addressing the gaps. Our teachers participate in Professional Learning Teams (PLT) that they choose as part of their professional development each

new school year. Working together we develop goals and objectives to address district-wide curriculum questions, formative and summative assessments, behavioral concerns, and social and emotional learning. Data is gathered and analyzed from multiple sources such as the Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment system, DIBELS, Wilson Foundations Assessment, various textbook benchmarks, and the NJSLA in Mathematics, English Language Arts and Science. This data informs our Student Growth Objectives (SGO's) and helps us make decisions regarding materials and instructional practices. Our basic philosophy is based on The Understanding by Design framework (UbD™ framework, by Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins). Our teachers plan their lessons using a backwards design. They ask themselves, what do I want my students to know or be able to do at the end of this unit? How will they learn it? And what will I do when they do or don't? A lot of time is spent on understanding how students can transfer their learning and become independent.

Our Intervention & Referral Services (I&RS) Team is comprised of a supervisor, the school nurse, classroom teachers from middle and upper elementary, a special education teacher, and a reading specialist. Meetings are held monthly or as needed for a referral. Action plans include only interventions that can be measured and are tailored to meet individual students' strengths and weaknesses.

Our Special Education students receive services through an inclusion model. Our special education teachers and general education teachers co-teach and all our students benefit. This is especially important in a small community such as ours. This helps our children develop empathy and become more comfortable with and tolerant of differences.

The district supports the documented benefits that occur for gifted students, in addition the benefits that all children experience when gifted education strategies and programs are extended to other students as well. Services are provided for students in grades K through eight. Students identified as potentially gifted in an academic area in grades K through 3 are provided with appropriately differentiated instruction as determined by the classroom teacher. Students in grades 4 through 8 who are identified as gifted and talented will have more specific plan according to their screening and identification assessments.

One example of how dedicated our teachers are is how they advocated for a Homework Club. They realized that so many parents either did not have the time or the ability to help their children, so they developed a plan to stay after school and help their students. It was so popular, we had to stagger the attendance.

The pandemic has put an enormous amount of pressure on our school to meet the inevitable learning loss that our students have experienced. When the 2019-2020 school year ended we knew that we had to do something to help our most needy students. We planned and organized a summer bridge program for those students. At the time students were not permitted in the building, so we met them outside in our outdoor classroom. When the state allowed for a reduced number of students in the building, socially distanced and masked, we expanded the program to include more students. In addition we were able to expand and organize a summer feeding program to help our struggling families.

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

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

When anyone enters our building they are immediately welcomed by beautifully painted murals that say “You Belong Here” and “Have Courage and Be Kind.” We want all to feel welcome and an integral part of the school community where diversity and respect are valued. We recognize that murals and quotes alone don’t create a positive school culture. An institution’s culture is embedded and becomes the foundation of all that happens. One way that we have built our culture is through the work of the Character Education Professional Learning Team (PLT). The team created “The Weymouth Way”, an active and living document that serves as a resource and record of activities for monthly themes. The goals of the Character Education PLT was to change the culture of the school through character education. First and foremost, was to teach core values through integrated and explicit lessons taught weekly by the homeroom teacher. The second goal of the team was to develop and implement a system to acknowledge and reward students and staff for positive actions and behaviors. Each homeroom after developing and teaching core expectations and the four pillars of character (Respect, Responsible, Ready for School and Safe) developed a system that rewarded students. Video and audio morning announcements promote the monthly character themes and celebrate success. Finally, a system was developed to re-teach students who exhibit consistent inappropriate behavior. Parents and community members often contribute to the celebration of successes.

Once or twice a marking period we gather in Spirit Teams. These are mixed grade groups where students participate in purposeful activities to convey the message that school success takes more than just an individual effort—it takes teamwork. The groups are led by student council or peer leaders. Our staff and students love these experiences and they contribute to our family atmosphere.

As a school we celebrate Student of the Month. Students who have demonstrated that they understand the monthly character theme through their words and actions are invited to celebrate at a special lunch, sometimes with the principal. We have a collegial staff that really care about each other, celebrating each other’s milestones and transitions. We enjoy Pot-Luck lunches, holiday celebrations and simple walks around the track together.

Keeping our students engaged during the pandemic has been particularly difficult. Not ever having to plan for a school year like this, we scrambled to find ways to keep our students connected to school. One way we did this was through our 8th grade commencement ceremony. We followed the Governor’s Executive Orders and created an outdoor event for our students and families. Lucky we had a big enough outdoor space to socially distance. Thankfully, the weather cooperated as well, and we were able to celebrate the end of their time at Weymouth with a special ceremony. We also organized a parade through the community to wave and say hello to our students. We had 100 percent participation from our teachers. Our superintendent also encouraged any staff who wanted to make a video to post on the website. The message of all the videos was to say hello and let our students know how much we missed them. Once the summer of frantic planning was over, we opened our school in September with a hybrid learning method in place. We were able to create classrooms with six feet social distancing and have all students who chose in-person learning back in the building. In-person learning is Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, with Wednesday an all remote day for deep cleaning. While some families choose an all remote model, most chose to have their children return to in-person. Just seeing their little masked faces get off the buses was all we needed to roll up our sleeves and get this school year underway by whatever method was necessary.

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

Weymouth is a very close knit community. Many of our current students are the children or grandchildren of former students. Many of the activities and events that occur throughout the year are attended by our families. Some of these include preschool events for Mother’s Day and Father’s Day, Kindergarten Thanksgiving and Closing ceremonies, Winter and Spring Concerts, Art Show, Talent Showcase, Poetry/Literacy Night, Parent-Child dances, Field Day, Picnics as well as community sponsored events, like the annual Weenie Roast and the Fourth of July Celebration. We communicate with our parents through

weekly Friday Folder online messages. Our Student Information System has a parent portal where parents can check their child's grades, attendance records and homework. Teachers have websites posted on our school website where updates and announcements are posted frequently.

Back to School Night invites parents to come and meet any new staff members and get to know what is ahead in their child's new school year. Preschool and Kindergarten parents are invited to separate Open Houses to orient our newest students and their parents. A practice bus ride is often included. Report cards are issued once a marking period and parent conferences are scheduled twice a year in the fall and spring. We truly believe that parents are our students' first teachers and we invite them to join us as we begin the journey together. Occasionally, we will host evening programs for parents, such as Child Assault Prevention (CAP) and Bullying Prevention, Cyber Safety Programs or other events through the Atlantic County Municipal Alliance or Atlantic Care. In addition we have had parent information sessions on standards based report cards, homework help, and standardized testing.

We have a strong connection with Stockton University for pre-service teachers and student teachers. Much of our professional development is through the Southern Regional Institute and Educational Technology Training Center (SRI/ETTC) located at Stockton University.

We have had an active Home & School Association that has sponsored fund raisers, field trips, book fairs and other activities to support the educational program of our students.

The pandemic has made all this work and involvement very hard on our staff, our students and our parents. But even in this environment we have tried to remain a supportive extended member of our families, arranging meal and material pick-up, making deliveries if needed, arranging tutoring sessions, and connecting families to resources if they are experiencing hardship from loss of income or if they have health concerns. During the school day, teachers have Social Emotional learning (SEL) time built into their schedules. Now more than ever, our students' social and emotional health and development is a central focus.

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

To create lifelong learners you have to be a lifelong learner. Our teachers never settle for what they currently know and continue to seek to improve and build upon their current knowledge. They do that through formal education and other informal activities such as, reading journals and articles, observing each other teach, watching professional videos, belonging to professional education associations and embracing change.

Professional development opportunities range from the mandatory professional development requirements that are specified in NJ state statute and regulation for all staff or particular groups to personal growth interests. Teachers work with their supervisor to create Professional Development Plans (PDP) to develop individualized plans that reflect district, school, and personal goals and objectives. Teachers are supported to attend district funded workshops and conferences related to their specialization and then encouraged to turnkey the information and learning they received. A faculty in-service could be made up of one or several teacher presentations of new researched based instructional methods or curriculum development. During the pandemic when all outside professional development was cancelled, we worked closely with the SRI/ETTC at Stockton University to create a district wide website to provide workshops to meet our staff's needs. The workshops include: Virtual Teaching Resources, Google, Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) and Web Tools to support remote learning.

Our faculty choose which PLT to participate in for the school year and meet monthly to work on established goals. The goals are developed through student data analysis and current district and individual goals and objectives. Many people advance their careers pursuing advanced degrees and certifications.

Monthly faculty meetings and weekly team meetings serve as hubs to communicate relevant research, new learning and enthusiasm to lifelong learning.

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

Weymouth Township is a school family where administrators, faculty, staff, students, parents and community members all work together for the common purpose of providing the highest quality educational program to prepare our students for high school and to live happy, healthy, successful lives.

Our administrative team consists of a Superintendent/Principal, a Supervisor of Curriculum & Instruction, a Part-time Supervisor of Special Education/LDTC, and a Business Administrator/BOE secretary. Our preschool Master Teacher/Reading Specialist and PLC Team leaders meet regularly and invite administrators.

Our philosophy is rooted in our belief that all children are unique and curious. We function to create opportunities and an environment where they can grow physically, emotionally, socially and academically. We believe that we are responsible to nurture and grow their curiosity and to guide them to operate in their “Zone of Proximal Development”, working slightly beyond their capability and gradually removing our support and encouraging independence. We celebrate our students’ accomplishments by posting their work throughout school and on our website, we acknowledge them at board meetings and in weekly newsletters.

Students build upon their classroom learning through enrichment activities during class and in various clubs, like STEAM, Art, Technology, Chess, High School Quiz Bowl and Think Day. Our students are also school leaders and help support and create school spirit through Student Council events. They identify areas of need within the community and raise awareness and funds for various organizations, like the Atlantic County Food Bank, the Atlantic City Rescue Mission, the Atlantic County Women’s Center and the Funny Farm Animal Rescue Sanctuary.

During the pandemic, many of our traditional activities have had to be suspended. We have never before had to completely rethink how we were going to do our jobs. We had to ask teachers to teach from home, and then go back and forth between online and face-to-face learning environments, to create engaging lessons, monitor their students’ mental health and their own all on a moment’s notice. The administrative team first struggled with how, whether, and when to safely reopen school. Following the recommendations and directives coming from all the various agencies (NJDOE, CDC, County Health Department) we developed a Reopening Plan to address first and foremost containing the spread of COVID-19, keeping our school open and our students safe and learning. Administrators have taken on many different roles during this unprecedented time, delivering meals and materials to families, measuring spaces for social distancing, assembling desk shields, being a cheer leader to some and a guidance counselor to others. But mostly reminding everyone that they are doing a good job and that someday this will be over and we will have learned an awful lot about ourselves and our profession.

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

Our school community is located in a small rural area not far from a large metropolitan city and its surrounding suburbs. While at times we may feel comfortable and insulated from the larger more diverse problems of the bigger city, living in a global society we cannot ignore or claim ignorance to society’s critical challenges. A few years ago we began our school year with a workshop on Creating Resiliency. During this training one of the first things we did as educators was to self-reflect on our personal journeys. Some of the questions we focused on were cultural awareness, our unconscious attitudes, and stereotyping. We learned how our attitudes impact how we relate to our students and their parents, how we write and deliver curriculum, plan lessons and assess learning. During planning in the beginning of the school year, while creating individual PDP’s teachers and administrators discuss how best to create high expectations with an understanding of a students’ background. We begin from a place of empathy and compassion. As a staff we begin the year by examining the four pillars that form the foundation of all we do and ask ourselves what does respect look like in everything we do? Respect is not just a word, it is how we behave. We cannot teach children to be respectful by being disrespectful. By being culturally responsive we help all to feel welcome, safe, and respected.

We recently began using a Social Emotional Learning (SEL) program for K-8 students that is a holistic approach to teaching the skills our students need to be successful in school and life. Our Social Studies program includes developmentally appropriate current event lessons and activities. We utilize the resources through Learning for Justice, formerly Teaching Tolerance, for classroom activities and lessons. The New Jersey School Climate Survey and other informal surveys inform our decision making. We create a positive environment for parent engagement from the very beginning of our students' educational journey starting in Preschool and then seek ways to maintain the momentum of engagement, such as sharing successes and revisiting and reviewing strategies. Our main focus is on creating and maintaining positive relationships and that often comes first with maintaining open and frequent communication.

Another area where we respond to the needs of our community is by seeking out and providing resources for our families. For example, the pandemic has brought to light the problems of equitable access to devices and internet service. We were able to use our CARES funding to provide one-to-one devices for all our students in grades one through eight. We connected families with service providers to help get them internet at low or no cost. We intend to provide equitable access for all families to participate in the Summer Bridge Program. By keeping our doors open this summer our school will be an active resource for students and parents as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic stronger and recommitted to a strong and inclusive public school.



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

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The one strategy that has been the most instrumental to the district's support of our students since the pandemic has been our Summer Bridge Program. When the pandemic hit the United States last spring educators all over the world sprang into action. Questions about how to continue and finish out the 2019-2020 school year occupied our decision making. How are we going to ensure that students complete the learning of the present year? While our summer was consumed with plans and discussions about how to reopen school in September to keep staff and students safe, we also knew we had to address the most recent learning loss. In the summer of 2020, we planned and operated a Summer Bridge Program for any student identified by the district that was in need of additional learning time. It was planned for those who have been most negatively affected by the pandemic. These were students that were unable, due to lack of resources or other issues to access learning or make progress at the end of the 2019-2020 school year. We offered in-person learning utilizing an outdoor learning space and social distancing inside of the building to provide students with high quality, individualized, targeted instruction. We were fortunate that a few of our exhausted teachers were on board and developed high-interest lessons that kept students engaged and learning.

The plan is to expand our Summer Bridge Program for summer 2021 to include all students who would like to participate. We believe that it's not just learning loss our students have experienced. Our children are frightened, disconnected, anxious and in some cases grieving. They can't learn when their lives are so disrupted. If we are going to address the standards that haven't been taught we must fully understand what has happened to them this year. The Summer Bridge Program II will not just be to address learning loss, but rather to be responsive to the needs of the students under our care. We will target our high-priority students, but also offer enrichment classes for all students. Most importantly students will have time to reflect on their pandemic gains and losses and talk about what they need. Our job is to listen. As a profession that values lifelong learning, we have an opportunity to learn from this global crisis and provide our students with tools they will use to meet the challenges they will face in the future. The Summer Bridge II will address these challenges. The program will run for six weeks and offer classes in math, language arts, and a variety of electives, including STEAM, visual and performing arts, gardening, cooking, robotics, and coding. Breakfast and lunch will be provided free to all students. Upon guidance from the county health department and the NJ Department of Education we are hoping to provide a few field trips to enhance the instruction provided this summer.