

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

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

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

Official School Name PS 249 Caton (The)
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 18 Marlborough Road
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Brooklyn State NY Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 11226-2689

County KINGS

Telephone (718) 282-8828 Fax (718) 284-5146

Web site/URL https://www.catonschool.com E-mail ebrown4@schools.nyc.gov

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* Shenean Lindsay E-mail slindsa@schools.nyc.gov
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name New York City Geographic District #17 Tel. (718) 221-4372

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 Ms. Erica Kendall
(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):
- 21 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 10 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 18 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 49 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	21	15	36
K	70	64	134
1	57	79	136
2	59	66	125
3	58	63	121
4	71	53	124
5	73	63	136
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	409	403	812

*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):
- 1 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 7 % Asian
 - 43 % Black or African American
 - 45 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 4 % White
 - 0 % 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: 33%

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

Due to the Covid=19 crisis, several families moved out of state. They either had to move because they faced housing uncertainty or they lost jobs due to stay-at-home orders in NYC. Many families moved merely to find more secure employment or housing in other regions.

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	181
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	92
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	273
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	817
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.33
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	33

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

Spanish, Haitian Creole, Bengali (Bangla), Arabic, Tagalog (Filipino), Mandarin, Fulani, Urdu, French, Indonesian, Khmer (Camboge), Bosnian, & Albanian.

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 25 %
200 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 74 %

Total number students who qualify: 604

8. Students receiving special education services: 19 %

151 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>9</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>1</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>4</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay | <u>40</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>1</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>96</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: 21

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	3
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	36
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	22
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	16
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	8

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 23:1

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

Required Information	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016
Daily student attendance	96%	95%	94%	95%	95%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

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

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

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

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

Yes No

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

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

We believe that every student, without exception, without excuses, will experience academic success and will be proficient or advanced in reading, writing, and mathematics.

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.

P.S. 249 is implementing a hybrid model for the 2020-21 school year, transitioning to 100% remote learning only as needed when Covid-19 cases become high within our building. This school year, we have experienced two, 10-day closures. During the summer of 2020, we engaged with parents via survey to allow them to choose the instructional model that worked best for their student. Our school now includes four cohorts of students. Two cohorts attend in person two or three days per week and participate in distance learning on other days. One cohort, based on family choice, is 100% distance learning. In January 2021, teachers made recommendations for a fourth cohort to support students who were struggling the most, allowing these students to attend in person 100% of the time. Students in this cohort consist of students with disabilities, English Language Learners, and chronically absent students. P.S. 249 follows all CDC guidelines, which include social distancing, temperature checks, hand-washing, and weekly COVID testing of staff members and randomly selected students.

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

PART III - SUMMARY

P.S. 249 is a racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse student body in Brooklyn, New York. At our Title 1 school, our students represents 21 different countries and most of our 812 students are economically disadvantaged. The families in our community are hard-working yet are often forced to share small apartments with multiple families due to a high cost of living. Some of our students live in temporary housing, domestic violence shelters, or other non-traditional living arrangements.

At P.S. 249, we are fully committed to academic excellence for all students. We believe that all students should be college and career ready, and we begin the focus on college readiness in Pre-Kindergarten. College awareness is a common theme throughout our building and students develop a passion for higher education as we celebrate the value and opportunities that it can bring. We believe that all students will meet and exceed grade level standards, they will be taught to be lifelong learners, and will move towards college honoring who they are and their special abilities.

At P.S. 249, we care about students' well-being first and foremost. We believe that when students feel cared for and have trusting adults in their lives, they can thrive academically. One practice we took on to build a culture of care at P.S. 249, pre-Covid-19, was to have our entire administrative team in the cafeteria greeting students as they arrived each day. As they walked by our team, we insisted on making eye contact with each and every student, and to stop the ones we could see were grappling with emotional stress. We'd also use this time to help students with one-on-one academic tutoring, as well as a time to play games and engage with kids socially. Not only do we fully believe in academic rigor, but we believe that it can only occur when we address the needs of the whole child. The students recognize their identities, and we are committed to using data and assessment to impact the whole child, including their culture, their likes, and their needs to help our students grow as learners.

Being a school who sees a large influx of immigrant students, we commit to intervention for all students on day one. We don't let students flounder and struggle for weeks while making placement decisions, but instead we collaborate in our Achievement Teams to make instructional changes and interventions needed for that student. We quickly determine if an IEP is needed and if students need ELL supports within days of arriving on our campus, and we put students on an immediate track to academic success. For example, if a student isn't reading at grade level, we provide them with a flexible schedule. For example, they have instruction at their reading proficiency level that addresses their specific needs for selected periods of the day while remaining in their current grade level where they get small group instruction that is tailor made. While we feared it may induce social pressures for students, we quickly realized that the academic success students experienced was the outcome and students did not feel embarrassed or ashamed to be with younger students, as it is a part of our school culture.

When Covid-19 forced school buildings to close in the spring of 2020, we remained focused on providing academic rigor through distance learning. We quickly made instructional changes and adapted to best practices for distance learning instruction, which allowed us to embrace smaller-group instruction and continue our RTI and MTSS interventions. Our school has always incorporated RTI and MTSS interventions to support students in smaller-group instruction where needed across all core subjects, meaning that students have always had access to and have built relationships with other adults in the building besides their classroom teacher. Our students feel safe and supported by everyone in the school community. This has served well during Covid-19 since we now have the shared responsibility in teaching all of our students. In fact, our elective teachers in subjects such as art and dance have been able to support small-group instruction with classroom teachers, allowing us to remain academically rigorous during the pandemic.

When we reopened this fall, our teacher community made the decision that simultaneous learning was the best approach for our students. When given the choice to hire additional substitute teachers and have reduced class sizes, our staff refused as they felt a true dedication to the success of their students and their classes, regardless of where learning occurred. So instead, we utilized other coaches, tutors, and elective teachers to support our classroom teachers so we could keep instructional groups smaller.

Our staff culture is grounded in collective efficacy, or the shared belief that we can make an impact collaboratively for the students in our building. Our school cultivates a climate of growth for all members of its community, students, and staff. We take pride and are passionate in creating a positive and caring learning environment that focuses on student growth where we teach to the students not to a curriculum.

We promote and encourage the professional growth of our staff through numerous opportunities to engage in professional conferences and virtual professional development with expert consultants and coaches in order to help us to provide high-quality instruction that is effective, relevant, engaging, and well-rounded.

Our school has been successful because we have created the environment grounded in achievement and provided our teachers with the tools needed to continue to improve their teaching practice while feeling supported by leaders and colleagues. Our students are given opportunities to thrive on day one, and they feel cared for and supported as a member of the P.S. 249 family.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

Our school staff and leadership are guided by the best educational research and practice available to improve teaching and learning. One of the philosophies that we embrace is the Visible Learning research from John Hattie. The philosophy is guided by the idea that certain influences on learning have more impact than others allowing educators to use data to make instructional decisions that will result in the most growth in one year's time. Because an effect size of 0.40 is equal to one year's growth over one year's time, we focus on influences and practices that have the most impact. All of these fall within what John Hattie calls "the zone of desired effects" such as teacher clarity (0.75), teacher-student relationships (0.52), collective teacher efficacy (1.57), small-group instruction (0.47), RTI (1.29), feedback (0.70), classroom discussion (0.82), scaffolding (0.82), self-regulation (0.52), and goal setting (0.68).

Our curriculum procurement and instructional resources have been chosen as they best meet the needs of our students. The school believes in coherent practices, not programs, and we strongly feel that it is our instructional expertise and excellent teaching practice that allow students to grow. Exceptional curriculum supports this journey, but curriculum products alone don't drive student learning.

The school uses a balanced literacy approach through the Teachers College Units of Study in Reading, Writing and Phonics (TCRWP). This model includes read aloud/close reading, shared reading, interactive writing, reading workshop, writing workshop, and phonics/phonemic awareness. During Covid-19, the school has adapted its curriculum and instruction for reading, writing and phonics by using the TCRWP digital units of study. In addition, we utilize digital books from Epic, Myon, and Literacy Footprints to support reading. We look at the curriculum as a research and use it to help us grow our learners. For example, for our readers, the curriculum address phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, and comprehension. We engage the readers in reading many types and genres of books as well as listen and talk through academic language around their reading habits and books.

We implement balanced mathematics using EngageNY and Embarc.online resources. Our balanced mathematics approach includes daily practices, such as problem of the day with the use of SOLVE approach, math review focused on standards (a spiraled review including mental math drills), fluency/concept drills, mathematics workshop, and poster method (when students work in groups to solve problems). We also love to use manipulatives to help our students gain deeper understanding in math.

We use Amplify for Science curriculum. Our core curriculum for Social Studies is Passport, but we also incorporate Civics for All for civics education. Science and Social Studies are taught through reading and writing to encourage a transference of skills throughout the curriculum. Our approach to teaching social studies and science is that we teach for transference of reading and writing skills and strategies across the curriculum and school day so that our students have ample time to grasp these concepts. Social Studies and Science allow for students to have more opportunities to read and write. This core curriculum allows students to build knowledge through text, content, explorations, and inquiry.

In March of 2020 when school buildings closed, we developed a school-wide approach to distance learning. We wanted to provide students and families with structures they were familiar with, especially if they had multiple children in different grades. We transitioned all classes to Google Classroom. Grade levels created daily slides that guided students through their typical daily agenda they would experience at school. The biggest changes that were made for the 2020-21 school year was the amount of live teaching for remote students. This school year, both our remote and hybrid students follow the same daily agenda, very similar to our pre-pandemic agenda, with a majority of the instruction live. Teachers have also added an assortment of digital tools to enhance their distance learning. We have also found innovative ways to support continued growth these past few months. For example, teachers saw our students were spending less time writing, so we developed a student-led newspaper during the pandemic to encourage more writing. We also deliver loose leaf paper to students' homes to encourage pen to paper writing.

We believe in using a variety of instructional approaches to meet the diverse needs of our students. Explicit

instruction is often used in whole group mini lessons, where we meet the learners through multiple pathways of learning, but also in small groups where we work one-on-one or in a group to meet the needs of the individual students. Differentiated instruction occurs throughout all core areas of instruction, and we also use personalized digital programs to help us differentiate needs. We use formative and summative assessments to help us see the individual needs of our class group and individual children. This is often done in the moment or before or after a unit across the year.

In order to create independent thinkers and problem solvers, we also use instructional practices like goal setting, peer tutoring, discussion, and cooperative problem solving. The students do their own assessing using student-facing rubrics and mentors in all subject areas to help them grow as suggested in the CCSS standards. For example, we use a K-5 practice in math called the poster method where students cooperatively solve a complex word problem. This involves students sharing strategies, debating, discussing, and delivering peer feedback.

In terms of assessment, we prioritize heavily tested standards for English Language Arts and mathematics in our daily instructional practices. This system is a consistent practice across the school building. In prior years, we administered simulated periodic assessments based on released items from NYS exams a minimum of three times per year. This allows students to take these assessments and be placed on a pathway to meet their specific needs. Teachers have created exit slips for reading, writing, and mathematics. Some of the same assessment systems are in place, just with modifications, to meet the needs of the students during distance and hybrid learning. These include pre/post on-demand assessments in writing and in mathematics. On-the-spot assessments are a bit different now; teachers administer Zoom polls, digital performance assessments, Google forms, and other online platforms to get a pulse of the class.

Formative data drives all instruction at P.S. 249. We believe that formative assessments should be given and data should be analyzed at both the grade level and the class level in order to make revisions to curriculum and lesson plans to meet the needs of the learners. All teachers in grades K-5 give the Teachers College running records five times a year to monitor students' reading levels. Kindergarten through second grade teachers give an assortment of foundational literacy assessments in letters and sounds, high frequency words, and phonemic/phonological awareness five times a year. Also, all K-5 teachers use on-demand pre- and post-assessments in writing, pre- and post-math module assessments, and weekly math review quizzes. This school year we implemented the iReady ELA and math diagnostic which is given online. All of the assessment data is analyzed in grade level Achievement Team meetings in order to determine instructional implications for the grade and specific classes. In addition, this assessment data is used to determine which students receive extra interventions. It is continually revisited at each collection period to make revisions to students needing interventions.

Overall, our instructional strategy is driven by research-based best practices and student assessment data in order to have the highest impact on student learning.

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

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

Our school offers a full day Pre-Kindergarten program, which includes instruction in all core areas including ELA, mathematics, social studies, and science, designed around the NYC Pre-K Interdisciplinary Units of Study.

In the 2020-21 school year, modifications were made to create both a remote and hybrid Pre-K program that would maintain the core values in Pre-K. The remote program is designed with both synchronous and asynchronous activities via the SeeSaw platform. Synchronous learning includes two daily whole group meetings and two daily small group sessions. The whole group meetings are designed to build community and allow students opportunities to interact with their peers. This includes students sharing pictures and videos of their play and asking their peers for feedback. The daily small group meetings focus on early

literacy and math skills including read alouds, poems, songs, and games. Asynchronous activities include two daily choice time blocks. Families are provided with daily assignments and a monthly choice board of activity/play suggestions aligned to the unit. Families post videos and pictures of their choice time on SeeSaw. Teachers leave verbal feedback for students and their families including comments, tips, and questions. The hybrid program made minor modifications to meet the health and safety guidelines around COVID-19, but the curriculum and daily activities have mostly remained the same.

Our Pre-K program follows the New York State Pre-Kindergarten learning standards which includes five domains: Communication, Language, Literacy, Cognition, and Knowledge of the World. This allows Pre-K to lay the foundation in both the ELA and Math standards to prepare students for what they will encounter in the future grades.

Students who attend our Pre-K program show stronger school readiness skills including the ability to work with their peers and independently follow routines, as well as more developed fine motor skills. In addition, students who attended our Pre-K typically have a stronger foundation in early literacy and math skills that allow them to grasp new concepts taught in the early grades at a faster rate.

Our mission and vision at P.S. 249 is that College begins in Pre-Kindergarten, as we have a focus on future readiness and preparation from even the earliest education experiences.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

At P.S. 249, we are committed to content areas that fall outside of core subjects. We embrace other content through initiatives such as Computer Science for All (CS), arts education, foreign language education, physical education, and health. Whether in person or virtually, we continue to stand behind the mission of P.S. 249, which is to nurture students as they become college and career ready.

For example, students in P.S. 249's arts program are encouraged to engage fully in the art-making process, taking creative risks and developing their own voices. Instruction is delivered year-round by full-time, licensed Music, Dance, Theater, and Visual Art educators, and supplemental clubs and afterschool ensemble programming are offered as well. Flexibility in recent months, ensuring that students continue to have access to all arts disciplines through Google Classroom, has been key, along with the distribution of arts materials to students who may have limited access at home.

Throughout the school year, our young artists have many opportunities to display and perform their work and share in artful experiences with their families and community. Examples of such events include our Winter and Spring Showcases, school plays, an annual Art Fair, and District, Borough and Citywide festivals and exhibitions. For the past 10+ years, our artists have had work displayed in the P.S. Art Exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and/or the Borough Arts Festival at the Brooklyn Children's Museum and online. Even during the pandemic, we have offered live arts weeks for students and families, virtual lunchtime arts activities, parent workshops, and various culminating, virtual 'share' events.

The Arts Team continues to work collaboratively, with administration, and through professional development opportunities, to make certain live and asynchronous lessons are supported by the NYC Blueprints for the Arts. We host and facilitate "Arts Mondays," a monthly PD through the Office of Arts and Special Projects, for art educators across the borough. This work is part of a federal grant-funded 4-year research study that will be part of a published report showcasing the work in formative assessment that continues to sustain discipline-specific dialogue, problem-solving strategies, technological assistance, and the sharing of practice.

P.S. 249 has developed a comprehensive physical education program. The school is staffed with two certified physical education teachers who utilize the NYC DOE scope and sequence to guide their instruction. That scope and sequence has allowed them to foster an environment where students can participate in gross motor and fine motor activities that build core movement skills. Students participate at a pace that is suitable for their age, weight, gender, and most importantly, comfort level, providing the opportunity to build the foundation for lifelong health and wellness. Our students, starting in Pre-K,

participate in physical education class weekly.

We also host an annual health fair for our school community. Our health fair, coinciding with parent-teacher conferences, allows our students and their families to connect with vital community services. Such services include after school care, physical health services, mental health services, social services (such as free meals, food voucher programs, etc.), family care outreach, and on-site flu shots. Our health fair is comprehensive, and the number of participating vendors has grown each of the past three school years.

Our Computer Science for All initiative is focused on giving all students the CS skills they need to be successful in a modern world, workforce, and digital economy. We are committed to CS education for students starting in Kindergarten, as we embrace the need for diversity in the technology field and we want to prepare our students for careers that are ever changing and likely don't exist as of now.

3. Academic Supports:

Our school believes that it is our job to meet the needs of all learners, including students who are both below and above grade level, and we tailor instruction as needed to meet the needs of all students.

Our core curricular areas of reading, writing, and math are all taught using a workshop model, allowing teachers to teach a whole group lesson and then use on-the-spot assessments to determine which students need to be provided differentiated instruction in small groups during independent work time. We utilize this whole group and small group instruction even during distance and simultaneous learning, utilizing additional teachers to support the small group teaching. During small group work, teachers focus on the Bands of Text Complexity to target and teach the specific skills students need to become proficient readers. The independent work time also allows for teachers to teach pre-planned small groups based on previous data points to meet the students' needs.

Our teachers use a model of professional learning called Achievement Teams to review student data, identify subgroups of students, and determine which high-impact instructional strategies will be used to support all students. Our teams meet once per week and are consistently reviewing pre-assessment and formative assessment data and making decisions on where students need interventions or additional instruction. As we meet in these teams we address the needs of our tier one students first where we try to meet their needs in the classroom. If necessary, we meet the needs of tier two through research-based small groups and meet to assess after six to nine weeks. Tier three gets a more intensive interventions/strategies, such as smaller groups of three or one-to-one tutoring.

In addition, differentiated materials and tasks are used during independent work time to support student needs. Some examples include leveled book baggies, targeted charts and tools, and individualized goals. All students have access to digital curriculum programs that provide personalized learning in math and ELA, such as DreamBox, MaxScholar, Raz Kids, MyOn, Literacy Footprints, and iReady.

Our educators provide a variety of interventions to target specific subgroups. Our academic after school programs include an English Language Learning Academy, targeting our beginning ELLs. In addition, we offer Saturday Academy for all students. We also utilize a reading and phonics program for students reading below grade level in any grade. We have small group tutoring in math, reading, and writing programs to support struggling students and we provide both reading and math in breakout rooms for small-group interventions.

In order to meet the needs of our Students with Disabilities (SWD), we utilize out of classroom

staff for small group intervention every day for 45 minutes. The RTI teachers are given specifically modified material to meet the needs of our most struggling students. The lessons are broken down into smaller tasks and students are given scaffolds such as sentence starters, writing frames, and specific success criteria. Exemplar pieces in both math and reading are used so students can see exactly what they need to accomplish. Students also learn from errors by doing error analysis where teachers use student work to show how to analyze and fix errors. During this time, students are encouraged to self and peer assess their work. We have students assist students and provide supportive collaboration through peer tutoring to meet the needs of our students with disabilities.

We use flexible scheduling for both students who are below and above grade level. This allows students to go to a different grade level for core subjects to have their specific needs met. For example, a second grader who excels in math might go to a third grade classroom during the math block, or a third grader who still needs phonics support might visit a second grade classroom for the phonics period if it is better aligned to his or her current skills.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

Our school believes we are a core part of this community and an asset both to our students and their families. We are committed to knowing every student well as we feel student achievement begins with strong teacher-student relationships. Our goal is to provide that safe and welcoming environment for our students as we give them tools to grow academically, socially, and emotionally. We also meet across the year and in the summer in the school yard for summer reading to read, talk, discuss, and grow.

While we are proud of our academic programs, we are just as proud of our SEL initiatives and those that support the whole child.

At P.S. 249, our school day begins with our social-emotional curriculum, which uses the Sanford Harmony guiding principles, designed to foster communication, connection, and community. Prior to the start of the new school year, our school began to work on revising our SEL curriculum to meet the needs of our students as they returned to school in the midst of the pandemic. We knew that our students would need emotional support not only due to the pandemic, but also as a result of our country's deep political and social divisions.

Our school began an SEL committee of representatives from every grade level, our school counselor, our school psychologist, and our school social worker. The committee meets twice a month to discuss the curriculum for the upcoming SEL units. Current events are seen as opportunities for our students to engage, process, and ask questions in a sensitive and respectful environment.

We follow PBIS, a school-wide behavioral support system that encourages positive decision-making and independence, and fosters a culture of unity among students, teachers and families. Individual students are rewarded for actions that display positive behavior.

Our amazing P.S. 249 community is strengthened when we come together at the many school and social events. Our social-emotional initiatives include so many events, activities, and student's enrichment programs that support students and the community at large. These events include college assemblies, Dr. Seuss Day, virtual dances, mindfulness activities, Respect for All, Black History Month assemblies, open houses, birthday celebrations and game nights.

We partner with many community-based agencies such as Ifetayo Cultural Arts, Noel Pointer Foundation, America Scores, Epiphany Blue, and the Child Mind Institute. We value our solid partnership with our afterschool programs, CAMBA Kids Connection and CAMBA Stars. They continue to serve our students and provide support during these unparalleled times. Programming is facilitated using a curriculum specifically designed for out of school time and includes social emotional learning, homework help, conflict resolution, team building and leadership skills, literacy, STEM, arts and crafts, recreation, and clubs.

Our school is a safe haven for students and their families and, even during the pandemic, we work as a community to build these relationships. Our teachers celebrate students by delivering baked goods or meeting families to deliver learning materials. Families rely on our school for meals and for other supports, and we embrace this role as a support for our students.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

There is a strong culture around parent engagement at P.S. 249, one that took a long time to foster within our community. We work diligently at building good relationships with our students' parents and families, and for there to be a trusting relationship within our community.

We offer multiple opportunities for families to engage with our schools, such as virtual assemblies, webinars, family events, open houses, PTA meetings, town halls, monthly birthday celebrations, curriculum nights, and other informational workshops. Parents are encouraged to visit the school website and join the

school's social media accounts to receive ongoing updates and information about school and community events.

With these parent interactions, we really do go beyond just having these as options to finding ways to make them meaningful and useful. Our PTA alliance serves as a true testament of the way the pandemic has brought our school community closer to continue serving our families. We have seen that the attendance to our PTA meetings has more than doubled because we use these times to share information about the school and Covid-related updates as well as an opportunity to highlight students for outstanding attendance and academic app usage. We work hard to engage parents who may be otherwise disengaged. For example, we have many parents who are not native English speakers. Because of this, our teachers work to translate content and answer questions during PTA meetings.

We also want to be a resource for parents. We have partnered with Child Mind Institute, an independent, national nonprofit dedicated to support children and families in need. Recently, we surveyed parents about the topics they wanted to learn about during these events and based on the responses, we created a series of caregiver webinars that parents have requested, which include Supporting Your Child in Virtual Learning, Building a Foundation for Reading at Home, Mental Health 101: Signs & Symptoms of Common Disorders in Youth, Mindful Parenting, Effective Behavior Management Strategies, When to Worry About Children's Worries, and Managing Caregiver Stress.

Teachers and staff members are encouraged to create meaningful relationships with students and families while maintaining communication in support of students' well-being and academic achievement. We work closely with them to ensure they have a solid understanding of educational accountability and expectations, accessing community and support services, and technology training in order to be able to help their children at home.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

Our school promotes a culture of learning for educators. We have high expectations for all teachers, but we also want them to feel valued and supported through continuous professional learning, which gives them the tools to improve their teaching practice.

We have always embraced a culture committed to professional learning and we have always committed to developing collective efficacy through collaboration. We believe that learning together and working together towards a common goal makes our school stronger.

When the pandemic started, we continued to prioritize teacher collaboration and made time for teachers to continue to work together. Teachers collaborated during common planning time, which was embedded in their existing schedules. In addition, para-professionals were provided with weekly meetings and discussions based on professional articles as it related to the services they would be providing to students. During the summer, teachers were provided with opportunities to attend virtual institutes and access ebooks on distance learning and teacher clarity.

We invested in upskilling our teachers around technology needs with distance learning as well. Educate was contracted to provide technological support in the use of Google Classroom and Zoom. Staff members also receive individualized technological support. The administration meets each week with a consultant from Educate so that we learn what the teachers are doing in the distance learning environment. It has helped us get a better understanding of remote learning and how we can provide the best education possible during these times.

We also believe in individualized attention and so we purchased access to SimpleK12 for all staff members to receive personalized, self-directed professional learning.

We are committed to continual learning and we do regular book clubs and webinars based on our current needs. We also empower different grade levels to lead these conversations and encourage creativity.

Our administration is also an integral part of any professional learning initiative and they fully participate alongside teachers.

Our school believes in building teacher capacity by learning from one another. We have a variety of structures in place that allow teachers to learn best practices that are being used throughout the school. One structure is our vertical leadership team. This team includes teachers from each grade level that meet twice a month to share best practices, analyze data, and engage in professional learning. During the transition to distance learning, this was particularly helpful since teachers could share strategies and digital learning tools that they found to be successful with their students. We also use intervisitations and labsites to give teachers opportunities to learn from watching their colleagues teach. Typically these would occur with teachers visiting classrooms in person, but they are currently happening on zoom.

Professional learning is a building-wide initiative and we are all completely vested. This is the professional culture of our building both pre-pandemic and right now. We are committed to excellence and we embrace a learning culture.

4. School Leadership:

The school culture is one of professional growth, shared leadership and decision making. We believe in distributive leadership and collaboration among all constituents. Leadership is shared among everyone, including parents, who give us feedback through conversations and surveys.

Our culture is based on the idea that anyone in our building can learn from any other person in this school, regardless of role or title. Everyone has an opportunity to lead something in the building. Teachers could lead a book club, an event for students, parent meetings, or something they are passionate about and want to share. The idea is that capacity is built on every level so that there is a plan for succession and we develop leaders inside our own building.

All leaders must continually learn and grow so that we positively impact all students. The role of the principal is to build other leadership in the building and support staff and students. The principal believes in strategic practices focused on school goals. Once the goals are established, the principal ensures that every team member is focused on working toward these goals. We build, manage, and adjust systems and structures in the building to make certain that our students are succeeding in all aspects of their school life. We make certain that all classrooms have coherence across the school building.

One way to build capacity and support teachers is through the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT). The ILT observes teachers and provides feedback and coaching support. The data specialist is one member of this team and their role keeps track of student progress and shares data with the Achievement Teams, our school's version of a PLC or teacher team. The data specialist observes Achievement Team Meetings and provides next steps for individual teacher growth. The administration does formal evaluations and provides feedback, coaching, and resources based on individual needs. The ILT uses Sam Connect to track their use of instructional time and set goals for themselves. They also attend virtual meetings with Sam Connect where they have a network with other school leaders. The ILT has a good sense of each teacher's practice in specific areas and how it relates to our strategic plan. These teachers who have high impact share their strategies with other teachers in the building so that our team becomes stronger.

The leadership team focused their efforts on safety during Covid-19. Safety has been our top priority, both for students and staff, and has been a commitment as we have been able to open our building to many hybrid learning and fully in-person students.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

Culturally responsive teaching is important to our school as we see such diversity in our student body and within our staff. Our school addresses the diverse needs and backgrounds of our school community by building our understanding of different cultures and contributions of different

ethnic groups. We do this through the choices we make in books found in all our classroom libraries and the choices in the texts we use in our curriculum. We understand and honor the importance of our students being able to identify with the texts they read and to see their culture reflected within. More importantly, we engage in conversations about the books we read and teach.

As we started to review the books we had in our libraries, we started the approach of the concept of “Windows and Mirrors.” “Window” books offer our students a view of the lives and experiences of their peers, while “mirror” books provide our students with an opportunity to feel seen and valued. We strive to include diverse books and authors, including own voice authors. We know that our students grow their self-efficacy and self-concept when they see their lives positively reflected.

Another integral part of our culturally responsive teaching and learning is the way our school celebrates the diverse backgrounds of students, families, and staff through cultural celebrations, such as Hispanic Heritage Month, Cinco de Mayo, Respect for All Week, Black History Month, Multicultural Week, and more. One of our staff members is also a children’s book author who writes stories that are relevant to the diverse student population of our school. This school year, parents are involved in our cultural celebrations via the Zoom platform.

Teachers also share their culture with our staff and students through celebrations during our College First Fridays. For example, teachers shared their culture and heritage during Hispanic Heritage celebration on the Zoom platform. Many teachers spoke about their culture and their experiences growing up and being able to go to college.

To continue building our knowledge of culturally responsive teaching and learning, several of our staff members and leaders participated in a three-day Black History is American History Institute hosted by Teacher’s College Reading and Writing Project in February 2021. During this institute, teachers built their knowledge about students of color as it related to American History. They learned about many books and resources that would promote students to learn about their culture and heritage in the curriculum. They also learned how to address implicit biases and promote an inclusive curriculum. The resources were shared with all staff members which included virtual libraries, video clips, suggested book titles and websites.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

When the pandemic changed the future of teaching as we know it, our school committed to a simple practice, being consistent. We have always held high academic standards and built a community grounded in care for the well-being of our students. We are always committed to building relationships with students and their families, and the pandemic did not change this. Even when building closures forced our practices to change, we committed to remaining consistent in our expectations, our teaching practice, and our drive for excellence. Consistency of our instructional practices has been instrumental to our success because the familiarity has impacted our students and made them feel safe during these uncertain times.

In order to understand our academic impact, we have continued to lean on student data and assessment systems to measure growth. We have implemented these assessment and data analysis systems to focus on continuous improvement and include benchmarking students to measure whether or not they are growing and learning. Yet we don't lean on these assessments alone. Not only do we have these systems in place to measure learning, we use this data in our Achievement Teams meetings. These grade-level meetings allow teachers to discuss student data and align the best instructional practices to learning. This is where we make decisions about what instructional practices work best or which students need small group instruction or other interventions. This is where teachers learn to look at their data and to understand their impact as an educator.

Teachers are also asked to share their data spreadsheets and show how they are keeping track and monitoring student growth through their multiple sources of assessments. During these conversations, we make certain that resources are being allocated to the classrooms equitably and students receive support for instruction. This includes interventions and enrichments based on individual student need. Based on our conversations with teachers, we identify students that are most in need of intervention and we act quickly, just as we would have pre-pandemic.

When the pandemic began, we knew that distance learning would be hard, but we never reduced our expectations. We never tried to "get by" or just "finish out the year," even though we had struggles along the way. Instead, we focused on what worked best and how to continue to improve our practice to meet the needs of all students. Collectively, we committed to excellence at P.S. 249.