

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

Official School Name Kiski Area South Primary School
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 230 Mamont Drive
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Export State PA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 15632-9802

County Westmoreland County

Telephone (724) 327-4057 Fax (724) 733-0689

Web site/URL https://southprimary.kiskiarea.com/ E-mail brian.kutchak@kiskiarea.com

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

Date _____

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent* Dr. Jason Lohr E-mail jason.lohr@kiskiarea.com
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Kiski Area School District Tel. (724) 845-2022

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 Cassandra Heinle
(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):
- 4 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 1 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 6 TOTAL

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

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

- Urban (city or town)
 Suburban
 Rural

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

| Grade | # of Males | # of Females | Grade Total |
|-----------------------|------------|--------------|-------------|
| PreK | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| K | 19 | 25 | 44 |
| 1 | 32 | 19 | 51 |
| 2 | 36 | 29 | 65 |
| 3 | 27 | 32 | 59 |
| 4 | 34 | 25 | 59 |
| 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 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 | 148 | 130 | 278 |

*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
 - 3 % Black or African American
 - 1 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 95 % 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: 3%

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

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

| Steps For Determining Mobility Rate | Answer |
|--|---------------|
| (1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year | 4 |
| (2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year | 5 |
| (3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)] | 9 |
| (4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019 | 295 |
| (5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4) | 0.03 |
| (6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100 | 3 |

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

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 100 %

Total number students who qualify: 278

8. Students receiving special education services: 21 %
57 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>3</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>9</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay | <u>14</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>1</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>9</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>1</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>1</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>19</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: 11
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to the nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below. If your current staffing structure has shifted due to COVID-19 impacts and you are uncertain or unable to determine FTEs, provide an estimate.

| | Number of Staff |
|--|------------------------|
| Administrators | 1 |
| Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher. | 15 |
| Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc. | 8 |
| Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students. | 8 |
| Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc. | 2 |

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 18:1

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% | 95% | 96% | 96% |
| High school graduation rate | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% |

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

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

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

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

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

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

Our mission is to ensure that every student receives a guaranteed and viable curriculum which will help us raise the bar and close the gap of achievement for all students.

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.

In the fall of the 20-21 school year our school opened with a hybrid model. Students with last names A-L attended Monday and Tuesday and M-Z attended Thursday and Friday. Wednesday was used as an online learning day. If students did not attend in person they learned online. Therefore, parents and students had the choice to attend 100% online or a hybrid model with a combination of online and brick and mortar. As the year progressed, parents and students were given the option to attend brick and mortar 4 days a week in addition to hybrid and 100% online. Wednesdays were consistently used as "online only" days. We built in flexibility so that students and parents could easily transition between online and brick and mortar attendance as needed due to circumstances surrounding quarantines, illnesses, and lack of achievement.

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

The Kiski Area School District, located northeast of metropolitan Pittsburgh in Westmoreland and Armstrong Counties, was founded in 1958 by the merger of Vandergrift, East Vandergrift, Allegheny Township, Bell Township/Avonmore, and Parks Township Public Schools. In 1966, Washington Township Schools joined the Kiski Area School District. The district is rural and encompasses 102.5 square miles.

South Primary is a school-wide Title 1 building located on the south end of the Kiski Area School District and comprises Washington Township, Bell Township, and Avonmore Borough. The school contains grades Kindergarten through four with a population of 278 students, 37.54% of whom are economically disadvantaged. The community is made up of rural townships intermixed with small, lower income towns and boroughs.

South Primary school was formed in the 2013-2014 school year by combining Mamont and Bell Avon Elementary schools. Although both schools consistently achieved well on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment tests receiving multiple Keystone Awards from the Pennsylvania Department of Education for "adequate yearly progress", it was not until 2016 that South Primary started to reach its fullest academic potential. In 2016, South Primary, along with all district schools, implemented Dr. Richard DuFour's Professional Learning Community at Work model and began to build a collaborative culture with a focus on learning for everyone within the organization. By definition, PLCs are a collaborative, inclusive group of people who continually share and question their practice in a reflective way that promotes growth (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006). As they relate to schools, PLCs are a group of teachers that meet regularly, share expertise and work collaboratively to improve their teaching skills and the academic performance of their students. To this end, PLC meetings occur daily at each grade level and consist of regular education teachers, special education teachers, specialists, counselors, and administrators. These meetings have transformed our building because teachers have embraced high levels of learning for all as our fundamental mission. Our cycle of continuous improvement focuses around four main PLC questions: What is it we want students to learn?, How will we know if each student has learned it?, How will we respond if some students do not learn it?, and How can we extend and enrich the learning for students who already know it? By working cooperatively in our PLCs, teachers are now able to clarify exactly what students must learn, monitor each student's progress in a timely manner, provide systematic intervention for extra support, and extend learning when students have mastered the intended outcomes.

The culture of South Primary has changed drastically over the past five years from a school of traditional teacher isolation to one where constant collaboration is woven into the very fabric of the school. Teachers have embraced this transformation of shared leadership and action research and have dedicated themselves to personal growth and student achievement through the consistent themes of mutual trust, data analysis and constant collaboration. In 2015-2016 and 2018-2019, South Primary received Keystone Awards from the state of Pennsylvania with the distinction of "Reward High Progress" for its performance on the PSSA tests. In the 2016-2017 and 2018-2019 school years, South Primary earned the distinction of "Pennsylvania Distinguished Title 1 School" by the state of Pennsylvania and was selected to be a presenter at the Improving Schools Conference in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. In 2019, South Primary became a National Model PLC School for its exemplary work in establishing a high achieving professional learning community. To date, South Primary is only 1 of 5 schools in the state of Pennsylvania to earn this distinction. It is a continued commitment to excellence and an unwavering dedication to the PLC process that is executed with diligence and fidelity that has led South Primary in its goal of getting students to learn at their highest levels.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

South Primary teachers collaboratively plan lessons that are aligned with the state standards as well as adhere to district guidelines. This academic year required all staff members at South Primary to be flexible, creative, and adaptable in order to provide students with an excellent academic experience. Teachers studied the most effective instructional practices involved in teaching hybrid, face-to-face, and virtual learning in order to incorporate daily live meets with students either in school or at home through virtual instruction. Families choosing the virtual model are able to participate and engage in the learning as actively and effectively as those sitting in the classroom. Technology is now used to make lessons deeper and more interactive for our students. It is possible for all students to access the virtual work through the Google Classroom platform that South Primary incorporates into the available academic offerings. Students are provided flexibility to log in at various times throughout the school day to meet with appropriate grade level teachers to learn the assigned core curriculum subjects. Students then complete interactive, online assigned academic work that reinforces learning and provides teachers with immediate formative assessment data. Data is used to identify students who require additional academic support to master core concepts contained in the lesson.

Grade level teachers at South Primary meet and review the Pennsylvania State Standards as a team in weekly meetings prior to planning their lessons. The standards are then incorporated into the curriculum, and lessons are designed to teach and assess power standards in all classrooms. Classroom teachers successfully merged the required state standards with the existing district curriculum to address the depth of knowledge in each lesson.

South Primary teachers maintain high academic expectations for all students and plan instruction to meet the diverse student academic needs inherent in each classroom and in each core curricular area. Teachers collaborate weekly to review student assessment data, which results in the development of student ability groups that are served through the school's enrichment and intervention (EI) program. Students meet daily for math and reading instruction during the EI period. Instruction is differentiated across the grade level and provided at the student's instructional level.

Students at South Primary are assessed in reading utilizing the Fountas and Pinnell assessment tool to measure the instructional and independent reading levels for each student. Students are then placed in guided reading groups according to their scores to become more independent and proficient readers. Once students are able to read at their independent reading level, they acquire self-confidence and develop an authentic love and appreciation for reading. Students who require additional support in reading receive Title I services. In order to achieve high levels of success in reading teachers use different techniques such as close reading, guided reading, chapter books, online vocabulary practice, and graphic organizers. Students use text dependent analysis to respond to questions by marking the text, making connections to the text, and questioning the author's purpose. The R.A.C.E.S. format is used to restate, answer, cite, explain, and sum up student understanding of a reading passage. For our younger learners the Heggerty method is used which focuses on phonemic awareness to help students sound out letters, blends, and digraphs in order to achieve reading success. In third grade our students create a 3D wax museum. For this project students research a famous person, create a formative writing piece, and rehearse a speech for their presentation. In fourth grade we created Genius Hour. Students research a topic that interests them and create a driving question. The end result is a research paper that is presented to their peers.

A variety of instructional strategies are employed by the teachers to integrate the math curriculum. Students are taught a variety of math strategies when problem solving such as cubing, identifying operations, and creating formulas and visual aides. Students also solve monthly math prompts by creating T-charts where they show, explain, box in answers, and label solutions. Manipulatives (protractors, fraction bars, numberlines, counters etc.) are used to make abstract concepts more concrete, tangible and attainable. Hands-on math projects are completed solving real-world problems such as area and perimeter house creation, fraction pizzas, and computer bar graph calculations for data interpretation. During faculty meetings throughout the school year, grade level teachers meet to discuss and plan to bridge the instructional

gaps that could result from year to year. Teachers create formative assessments for each math unit to monitor student progress and create student groups for EI. All students in each grade level are placed in groups of need. Additional support is provided to prepare them for the summative assessment after they demonstrate a clear understanding of the concepts and skills. Some students had their learning extended while other students were retaught the material in a different way to obtain proficiency in the desired skill.

Our teachers created lessons around the required standards and incorporated hands-on opportunities and experiments to make learning fun. STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) is an exciting hands-on approach to learning and teaching science concepts that can be seen in every classroom at South Primary. In second grade our learners complete an egg drop challenge creating parachutes and baskets to protect the eggs. In third grade our students create catapults to learn about velocity, lift and distance. In fourth grade students design bridges and create pulleys as part of a simple machines unit. This year, due to the pandemic, teachers are still able to make science fun by using technology. They are using different websites and programs such as Mystery Doug, Nearpod, Quizlet, and FlipGrid.

Social Studies at South Primary emphasizes instruction in citizenship, history, government, and geography which are also incorporated into the reading curriculum. Students are expected to model great citizenship and each month we focus on a character trait in our Kiski Cares Program. Students are recognized for their outstanding citizenship monthly per grade.

South Primary uses a number of benchmarks to ensure that the students' needs are being met. Dibels, teacher created benchmark tests, Kottmeyer Spelling Test, High Frequency Word Test, and Fountas and Pinnell tests are all administered four times a year. The grade levels then meet with administration to determine growth and need. SMART goals are created based on the summative benchmark assessment results. These goals are strategic, measurable, attainable, results oriented, and time bound. The objective is to establish goals that, if achieved, will result in higher levels of 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:

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

"It takes a village", perhaps cliché, but in our building it has become the creed. Not only does our building foster mutual respect and trust in our PLCs, but we also promote mutual accountability. We have removed all pronouns in front of "student" and replaced it with "our students". Each teacher is responsible for the learning of all grade level learners. The staff members plan lessons together and collectively instruct all online learners with live lessons. We view every person in the building as a stakeholder, to develop our students' essential skills and knowledge in all curricular areas. All students at South Primary receive art, music, physical education, and technology classes on a four day rotating schedule.

Itinerant teachers in the specialty areas of art, music, physical education, and technology met in PLCs to develop integrated lessons to weave the core subjects of reading, math, science, and social studies into their specialized areas. Physical education lessons integrate math and reading. For example, students climbed the rock wall and integrated reading by making words out of magnetic letters along the stops, as well as skip-counted as they dribbled in basketball. In technology, students were exposed to rigorous thinking as they used coding platforms. Coding promotes problem solving skills and fosters algorithmic thinking, which is essential in mathematical problem solving and technical text in reading. Finally, the music lessons integrated American history through the study of songwriting and musical style of the decades.

Our counseling department extends instruction into grades K-4. The focus of the in-class lessons is character building and career readiness. The counseling department also creates a character building

curriculum called "Kiski Cares". This program promotes the social, emotional development of our children. Every month, our building highlights different character traits. Then, school counselors teach relevant lessons that guide students through experiences that they may face in our school and community. Character traits are also discussed throughout the month in core subject areas such as reading as we integrate literature selections that model the traits. School counselors start early discussions of college/career readiness with students as they explore topics such as entrepreneurship, post high school career/schooling options, and a culminating career day for children to explore pathways to their future.

In terms of this past year, one would think that COVID would provide a challenge to these other curriculum areas in how they are carried out in the classrooms under new COVID restrictions. However, as with any challenge, our school developed a way to bring the lessons to the children within their homeroom classrooms, as well as pre-recorded lessons for virtual learners. Regardless of the learning model: hybrid, in class, or virtual, the students still had access to the guaranteed viable curriculum in these "other curriculum areas". Lessons were developed under new circumstances with more technology. As itinerant teachers made their way to the classrooms with carted materials, mini lessons would occur as the itinerant teachers saw core subject areas being discussed. Classroom and itinerant teachers worked cooperatively to transition learning from one subject to another emphasizing the connectedness between disciplines. Also this year, more cross-curricular conversations between itinerant teachers and homeroom teachers have occurred. This growth in communication that emerged has tightened our school culture and refined our school curriculum.

3. Academic Supports:

At Kiski South Primary, we believe that effective classroom intervention strategies equip teachers with structured methods for identifying areas of both strengths and weaknesses to help students increase and extend their academic proficiency. To enrich and extend learning, we provide challenging alternative assignments to our above and at grade level learners. To close the achievement gap, we are proactive with areas of need for our approaching and below grade level learners before they become a larger obstacle. We are flexible and adjust our teaching methods based on the needs of all of our students. All grade level teachers collaborate with special education teachers and all service providers. At Kiski South Primary we tailor instruction to meet the needs of all students utilizing various teaching strategies and interventions. Differentiated instruction is employed daily to provide all students with a range of different learning approaches. Teachers utilize modeling and demonstrations to deliver instruction while also specifically identifying students by name and need to participate in flexible groups, cooperative learning groups, and multisensory learning to master learning objectives. Graphic organizers and study guides serve as scaffolding tools to guide student thinking. The use of both peer and cross-age tutoring provides students in need with a daily remediation time.

At Kiski South Primary, we provide a variety of programs (before, during, and after school) to the entire student body. Enrichment/Intervention occurs daily in our school schedule (E&I period) to our various student ability groups: Exceeding Expectations, Meeting Expectations, Approaching Expectations, and Below Expectations. Weekly individual Google Meets are provided for our academically struggling students. The response to intervention (RTI) - multi-tier approach is utilized for early identification and support of student needs. Our Gifted program provides students with gifted individualized education programs (GIEPs) which are serviced twice weekly for forty-five minutes. English as a Second Language (ESL) students are serviced weekly within and outside of the classroom by a certified ESL teacher. Since the establishment of South Primary in 2014, this current school year is the first time that we did not have an ESL student. Curriculum and other educational materials are provided to parents/guardians in their native language. In the Life Skills program, students are taught using a direct instruction curriculum. Their lessons are differentiated based on their individual levels and IEP goals. Small group instruction (between 1-3 students) targets specific reading and math goals. Each student is provided learning opportunities that are tailored to their individual needs. Student confidence is built through the use of

differentiated instruction that is relevant and responsive to these needs. Frequent assessments are used to gauge progress. Students in the life skills program are also given instruction in functional life skills such as cooking, daily hygiene, and adaptive behavior skills. After school tutoring is also offered to students who had regressed academically due to the pandemic. Finally, counseling groups are available and allow students to meet weekly to discuss/interact to work out problems or emotional concerns with our guidance counselor(s).

In summary, we believe that it is our responsibility to educate our students and ensure that they are learning at the highest level while also supporting their emotional and social growth. We are committed to providing opportunities for every student to succeed and become a contributing member of society.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

Student engagement affects learning and achievement. It is essential for students to be active learners in activities that are meaningful to them. At Kiski Area South Primary we ensure that learning activities are relevant for all students. We connect with each student personally to support their previous knowledge, goals, and experiences.

As teachers, it is important to model and demonstrate activities. We implement the “I Do”, “We Do”, and “You Do” model. This active learning model requires students to fully participate which activates learning by thinking and doing. While using this model, teachers include many multisensory activities to maintain student engagement. For example, students are invited to participate in a before school program called I-RUN which activates learning by stimulating the brain through exercise. Students arrive at school thirty minutes early three days a week to run/walk around the school. South also fosters positive relationships between the students and the staff through school assemblies, field trips, family reading activities, and field day activities. Parents are invited to help read to students for Dr. Seuss week, and as homeroom guest readers. They are also instrumental in organizing our field day. The assemblies and field trips offer students the opportunity to experience real life, concrete learning that correlates to the classroom learning.

Our team also implements collaborative learning which helps actively engage students in learning activities. Specifically, our life skills students are incorporated into the general education classes for subject matter that correlates to IEP goals as well as socialization and cooperative group skills. These students are able to cooperatively interact with peers of the same age on cooperative tasks that promote positive peer interaction and socialization. We believe that when students work effectively with others their engagement increases and can lead to a higher level of thinking. When lessons revolve around students, it helps them feel more confident and promotes self-awareness.

During collaborative learning, the students and teachers engage in discussions that help the students share their knowledge and ideas. Our teachers use effective questioning to stimulate student thinking which creates rich educational dialogue that engages students, helps them maintain focus, reinforces participation, and connects new learning with skills that our students already possess. It promotes active learning and develops the students’ ability to work collaboratively while teachers assess student learning through observations and performance.

Students with academic, behavioral, and emotional difficulties thrive in an environment that fosters active engagement. When students feel supported, they grow in confidence and develop positive peer interactions. When they can teach a peer, they develop another level of understanding and feel proud of their accomplishments.

Throughout the school year, in coordination with classroom teachers, the counseling department works with students to deliver college and career readiness classroom lessons. Focus topics include: building resumes, character building, entrepreneurship, career exploration and a career day. These lessons give students the opportunity to work with their peers and counselors to develop a better understanding of career clusters, positive character traits and the chance to research career choices based on career inventory surveys.

Overall, we believe active learning is essential for student engagement because it helps cognitive achievement, increases positive peer relationships, promotes higher order thinking skills, and increases their attention, focus, and motivation.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

South Primary is devoted to helping our students achieve their highest potential through family and community engagement. Programs that bring involvement from our families and community are instrumental in our mission of creating a culture of learning for all. We have been successful in achieving

high levels of involvement prior to the pandemic and continued it throughout this year.

This year, communication with students and parents changed due to the pandemic. Therefore, as the school year began, we conducted small group meetings with families so they could learn how to navigate Google Classrooms. We felt family support was needed because of the new virtual challenge we were all facing this school year. Families were educated on how to complete and submit assignments virtually. These sessions helped to alleviate concerns and allowed the families to make a positive in-person connection with their teacher.

Since South Primary values parent and community input, we offer opportunities for their voices to be heard through parent surveys as well as our Parent Council and PTA Meetings. Parent council meetings are held throughout the school year by the principal and all parents are welcomed to join. These 90 minute meetings enable the school to produce in-depth presentations on topics that are selected by the school or our families. Another way we engage the community in our educational process is by holding PTA meetings. This year, the PTA was a crucial part to our new school experience produced by the pandemic. During these meetings, parents and community members were able to hear and provide feedback on the plan to return students to school safely. Furthermore, the staff was able to communicate updated policies on live Google Meets with parents.

Every year our school provides parent workshops for the students and families that focus on academics. These workshops are interactive and focus on ways that parents can work with students on foundational skills. This year the district's Title I teams worked very hard to create fun and engaging virtual family nights. Materials were provided and distributed prior to these family nights so the children could follow along, create, and share their activity. Families also enjoyed a virtual live concert where they sang and danced to songs relating to reading. These fun and positive activity nights engaged families throughout the district.

South students and staff also participate in a charitable Cav-A-Thon fundraiser, a student art show, and back to school/Meet the Teacher night. These events raise student morale, academic achievement, and promote social/emotional growth.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

At South Primary we are fully immersed in a Professional Learning Communities at Work model and have earned the distinction of being recognized as a "National Model PLC School." Research has shown that one of most important factors of a successful PLC is developing mutual trust among peers. Through our PLC meetings teachers have an open forum to share data, best teaching practices, and compile resources for action research. According to (Lencioni, 2003), the most important step in building a high-performing team is the establishment of vulnerability-based trust. Each year, as a building and as grade level teams, we develop "norms" for our meetings. These expected patterns of behavior are established by all PLC members. Each team member has an equal voice as they work together to form a consensus surrounding learning decisions. These ground rules are used to govern the group and help them in the process of collaborating, building shared knowledge, and developing mutual trust. The establishment of vulnerability and trust was first modeled by school administrators and team leaders in meetings. Professional training and in-services have occurred using outside professional trainers and district and building level administrators. Each team member received professional training through our coaching academy sponsored through Solution Tree Inc. in addition to reading and employing the strategies outlined in the book, *Learning By Doing* (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2013). Over the past five years, our staff has practiced and shown the ability to be willing to self-evaluate, model interpersonal understanding, and confront each other in a professional way to create meaningful dialogue.

This year due to social distancing guidelines and protocols we conducted our PLC meetings using Google Meets. Our teachers were supported in this endeavor by having training sessions over the past year on how to use Google Meets and all of its features. These professional development sessions were led by district teachers who were proficient in the Google for Education tools. Many of our staff members are now level 1 and/or level 2 certified Google educators. Teachers now have the ability to use these tools to gather student

data and information which can then be shared during meetings to positively impact student learning. In addition, our teachers researched new online educational tools and sites to use virtually. During PLC meets, teachers provide relevant, job-embedded, professional development to each other based on their research and experiences. Through our collaboration and sharing of data, best practices, and professional knowledge, our teachers continue to create a professional culture where they can share information in a supportive environment.

4. School Leadership:

At South Primary School, we are fully embedded in the PLC process and continuously collaborate in seeking the answers to our four fundamental PLC questions associated with improving student learning. As proponents of the PLC model, we understand that team meetings must occur as part of the daily routine in order to be effective. Therefore, our teachers meet in their grade level PLC for forty minutes every day. During the curriculum PLC meeting, the grade levels meet collaboratively with school administrators to ensure high level learning for all. In an effort to maximize the effectiveness of our teaming structure, each grade level team is led by a team leader, who serves both as a key communication link between the team and the principal as well as the building grade level team and their counterparts in the other two primary buildings. The school's team leaders and the principal meet on a regular basis to maintain consistency within the school and grade level as well as establishing the design for the work each team will accomplish for the upcoming week and month. Through this process each team, as part of an ongoing cycle: breaks down essential standards into student learning targets, develops common formative assessments and benchmark tests to track student progress and attainment of skills, analyzes the results to identify and implement improvement strategies, and develops SMART goals based on benchmark test results.

At South Primary, it is understood that leadership, at its highest level, requires increasing the capacity of every individual on the team. To this end, the principal engages the staff in "book talks" from articles and books where we seek to learn from one another and sharpen our professional practice. The "book talks" were started by the principal but has broadened out to other staff members finding articles and leading the discussions and presentations. To extend this learning, the principal has started an "action research library" where the teachers find resources to complete research and put learned theory into practice. Many of the resources found in the action research library were purchased and/or donated by staff members. They have now taken on the role of being the leaders of their own professional development.

This leadership model has also been put into place through our district administrative team that also meets monthly and engages in "book talks." The meetings at both the district and building level have changed/adapted this past year due to COVID 19 protocols. Although the meetings have taken a virtual format, the talks and presentations still continue through Google Meets and using screen sharing technology. The roles of the administrative leaders have shifted because there is less face-to-face interaction. Many of the teacher observations have been done through the use of the computers and live meets; however, the conversations and feedback are still rich and constructive for effective teacher growth.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

Culturally responsive teaching and learning is essential in the classroom especially during recent current events involving our country. As educators, we are often faced with difficult subjects that children want to discuss. The goal of increasing academic achievement and assisting students in feeling socially accepted is a priority. We believe that our classroom environments should create a place where students feel respected, safe, and a sense of belonging. Our district approaches this with a cross-curricular diverse curriculum that provides daily opportunities to promote cultural teaching.

Culturally responsive teaching does not focus only on curriculum. Various cultures require increased oral teaching such as rhyme, music, games, and social learning. Social learning has been a challenge with the pandemic because students are not permitted to work in groups. In order to meet this challenge, we utilize Google Meets which allow breakout rooms for students to

discuss content and socially interact with fellow classmates. We also utilize synchronous instruction giving students the opportunity to interact with teachers daily.

When the pandemic began in 2020, we immediately launched our distance learning program and offered chromebooks to every student in the district. Various students come from homes that did not have internet access; therefore, hotspots were provided to families without internet access in their homes. Every child was given an equal opportunity to learn.

Some culturally and socially diverse families need extra support assisting their children academically. Teacher guidance is always offered before, during and after instruction for struggling students. We carve out time during the school day to make certain that all students have access to extra time and support for learning. In addition, our principal and counselors complete home visits to encourage students to participate in online asynchronous instruction. As a building, we are flexible with student work by allowing students to make up assignments. We also understand that some families may need extra time with remote learning so teachers offer extended due dates.

At South Primary students receive instruction on subject matter that is relatable. When applicable, we incorporate diverse cultural celebrations with the current curriculum. Each month teachers create lessons developed to celebrate cultural diversity such as Black History Month, Cinco De Mayo, and holiday celebrations around the world. We also offer project based learning which fosters creativity and gives students a voice regarding their diverse backgrounds.

Although having students both at home and school was challenging this year, we have created an environment conducive for effective learning. Even with the challenge of remote learning, we were able to meet the students' needs academically, socially, and culturally.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

The one practice that has been most influential to our school's continued success in educating and supporting students are our professional learning communities. Our continued commitment to the PLC process has sustained our success throughout the past five years and has made the transition to distance learning seamless during the pandemic.

PLCs are a continual process which affect adult learning, student learning, and school culture. According to DuFour, DuFour and Eaker (2008, p.18), "PLC members work to clarify what each student must learn, monitor the learning on a timely basis, provide systematic interventions that ensure students receive additional time and support for learning when they struggle, and enrich and extend learning when students have mastered the outcomes." We have been able to strictly adhere to this process all year long regardless of the school structure. Our teachers still meet on a daily basis to unpack standards, convert them into learning targets, create common formative assessments, analyze student data, and scrutinize the delivery of curriculum as it pertains to student learning. Even during the pandemic this process has not changed. The meetings may look different due to "virtual meets", but the process remains the same. The teachers are still responsible for gathering evidence of current levels of student learning, developing strategies and ideas to build on strengths and address weaknesses, implement those strategies and ideas, analyze the impact of the changes to discover what was effective, and apply the new knowledge in the next cycle of continuous improvement. Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour (2002), contend that the process of a PLC must be cyclical and focused on student learning. Our Google Classroom and Google Meet format were a perfect fit for our PLC process because our teachers were already collaborating on lessons, assessments, and student data. Therefore, we maintained our continuity of education throughout the pandemic.

Our PLCs affect every decision in our building. At its most basic level, our PLCs can be categorized as applying a new way of thinking for every aspect of our building culture. We were able to build on the natural strengths of our teachers and school by reorganizing our resources effectively. Our teams became greater than the sum of the individual members to remove isolation and create collective ownership of our students' learning. With the support of all stakeholders including the school board, our central office administrators and our parents, we were able to effectively implement the PLC process to help improve adult learning, student learning, and school culture. Through our collective leadership, shared vision, and job-embedded professional learning, we are able to help our students thrive!