

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

Official School Name Penn Alexander School
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 4209 Spruce Street
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Philadelphia State PA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 19104-4022

County Philadelphia

Telephone (215) 400-7760 Fax _____

Web site/URL https://pennalexander.philasd.org/ E-mail loverton@philasd.org

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

Date _____

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent* Dr. William Hite E-mail hite@philasd.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name School District of Philadelphia Tel. (215) 400-4000

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. Joyce Wilkerson
(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.)

- Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
 - 149 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 16 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 49 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools

214 TOTAL

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

- 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

- 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	41	39	80
1	35	40	75
2	32	40	72
3	33	38	71
4	37	29	66
5	28	25	53
6	28	30	58
7	26	23	49
8	19	29	48
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	279	293	572

*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
 - 24.6 % Asian
 - 16.8 % Black or African American
 - 4.3 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0.5 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 42.3 % White
 - 11.5 % Two or more races
 - 100 % Total**

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

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

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

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

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	7
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	0
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	7
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	571
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.01
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	1

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

Bengali, Arabic, Chinese, Spanish, Kazakh

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 11 %
65 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 96 %

Total number students who qualify: 551

8. Students receiving special education services: 9 %

52 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.

9 Autism

0 Multiple Disabilities

0 Deafness

0 Orthopedic Impairment

0 Deaf-Blindness

10 Other Health Impaired

0 Developmental Delay

15 Specific Learning Disability

1 Emotional Disturbance

15 Speech or Language Impairment

1 Hearing Impairment

0 Traumatic Brain Injury

1 Intellectual Disability

0 Visual Impairment Including Blindness

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 1

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

	Number of Staff
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	29
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	13
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	10
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	0

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 20:1

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	97%	97%	96%	96%	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. 2016

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

The school's educational mission is to maximize the academic and personal competence of all its students to become successful lifelong learners and productive citizens in a diverse and highly technological society. A challenging research-based instructional program leads children to mastery of fundamental ideas, skills, and learning strategies, and prepares them to meet the highest academic standards.

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.

Our school year began with all children attending school virtually. In March, the district phased in a hybrid learning model for grades K-2 followed by grades 3-5 and grades 6-9 in the late spring. Students selected to remain learning virtually or select to attend school two days a week and remain virtual for the other three days. Our school had a 70% opt-in rate for in-person learning.

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

PART III - SUMMARY

The Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander University of Pennsylvania Partnership (PAS) is in its 20th year. The school was created through a partnership of the School District of Philadelphia, the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, and the University of Pennsylvania (Penn) to demonstrate urban school excellence for neighborhood children. PAS serves 572 students in grades K-8 who reflect the rich cultural and socio-economic mosaic of the West Philadelphia community.

Built in 2001, our school features sun-drenched classrooms, overlooking an atrium for large and small group gatherings. Our park-like setting with its large lawn, rain garden, orchard, vegetable garden, and a new playground is a popular gathering space for everyone in our community.

Penn's partnership with PAS is a university-wide endeavor. The University provides the school with an operating contribution of \$1330 per student—an amount that helps to keep the student-teacher ratio low (20:1 for kindergarten and 24:1 for grades 1-8). Also, a large number of university schools, departments, and programs are working with PAS to enrich the students' educational experiences.

Befitting this “first” public-private partnership, the school was named for Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander, a distinguished graduate of the University of Pennsylvania and a woman of many “firsts,” including earning a doctorate in economics, 100 years ago as well as a law degree in 1927. Dr. Alexander is the kind of person that we hope every Penn Alexander student will grow up to be. Alexander was a great American, a person who prepared well for life's journey and made the most of her opportunities in an age when women and people of color faced enormous obstacles. Guided by her model, the school bridges these gender, race and achievement gaps and helps our students make the most of their opportunities for generations to come.

Our diverse school community simultaneously strengthens and challenges us all. PAS received the National Blue Ribbon in 2016 for its exemplary work to narrow achievement gap, continues to be ranked as one of the top elementary schools in the city and was designated as the elementary school with the highest overall ranking for achievement, climate and growth in the last city rankings. The school has produced 11 Nationally Board Certified Teachers, has maintained a 98% acceptance rate to selective high schools and has earned numerous for student achievement in science, technology, music, history, writing, and more recently environment and racial justice.

While the school community is 60% students of color, the school has experienced a declining black population due to gentrification and an increasing Asian population silenced behind the facade of the model minority myth. This has propelled a specific mission, aligned to closing the achievement gap, and supporting a schoolwide strategic planning process in which equity has become a hallmark of our school's mission and vision. By providing an equitable and purposeful learning experience that pushes us to build a just community, the school ensures that all students are prepared for a vibrant future, responsible to each other, our city, and our world.

After winning the 2016 Blue Ribbon, which coincided with the retirement of the founding principal, the school celebrated its success but rolled up its sleeves to continue its growth. The school developed a set of Core Values to guide practice and provide a common language, created an Equity Circle to dismantle racist policies and white supremacy in our community, engaged in extensive anti-racism staff training, shifted to new curricular programs and instructional strategies of small group instruction and intervention.

Penn Alexander embraces building relationships with the family and community to further support our students. Ample opportunities are available for students to form positive bonds with adults and other students in a climate that models respect for learning, promotes appreciation for unique qualities and needs of each child and engages students in active participation and learning. Our school year typically begins with school uniform swap, followed by a free ice cream social, fall festival, Winter Concert, pancake breakfast, and family bingo night. In the spring, there are student author celebrations, a musical and our culminating community 5K run for Art and Science. Through building community, families and teachers alike can ensure that student needs are met and learning can flourish.

This work has only intensified during the COVID-19 closure and racial injustice our community experienced first hand and witnessed around the world. Our school immediately sprung in action with constant communication with parents, creating mutual aid programs, ensuring immediate access to technology and the internet, pushing the construction of a new playground to provide safe outdoor exercise and community building.

Our diverse student body has attained their full potential and been enabled to reach high academic achievement because of the intentional environment of parents, principal, teachers, and our university partners.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

Penn Alexander’s mission is to maximize the academic and personal competence of all its students to become successful life-long learners and productive citizens in a diverse and highly technological society. A challenging research-based instructional program leads children to mastery of fundamental ideas, skills, and learning strategies, and prepares them to meet the highest academic standards. The school strives to develop student’s abilities to be independent and self-directed in pursuing high standards of learning.

We follow the Common Core State Standards in literacy and math as well as the Next Generation Science Standards and the National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies. We recognize in order to meet the standards in all content areas we must be resourceful, use the best practices and supplemental materials.

Students at PAS engage in a minimum of one hundred twenty minutes of literacy instruction daily to develop foundational, critical, and analytical thinking skills. In grades K-1, there is an emphasis on mastery of foundational skills using a workshop approach. This includes concepts of print, alphabetic principles, phonics, phonemic awareness, foundational writing skills, and fluency. Instruction is designed to be systematic and explicit to address essential early literacy skills to foster lifelong learning. We have shifted our literacy curriculum to Great Minds Wit and Wisdom in grades 2-8 to allow students to be exposed to a more rigorous curriculum that encourages an inquiry-based approach to learning-centered around critical thinking and deepening understanding. It builds holistic language knowledge that provides exposure to complex text structures and strategically recurring topics to deepen student understanding.

Students are provided with 90 minutes of daily math instruction. The curriculum is presented with discovery, questioning, and application components. Students are not merely taught an algorithm to memorize and solve a problem. Rather they discover procedures on their own through the use of real-world application problems. Eventually, students learn procedures and algorithms but they know why they are employing these strategies demonstrating an understanding of numbers and not just how to solve the problem. In grades 3-5 we transitioned to a more rigorous curriculum that allowed us to maintain the same approach but with higher expectations for students. Once students have developed a strong foundation, students are then able to apply that understanding to topics such as geometry, algebra, probability, and statistics in grades 6-8. By using this approach students become lifelong learners of mathematics in the real world.

Our approach to social studies instruction includes the principles of thinking like a historian. We view social studies as an opportunity to reinforce literacy skills and support students as they analyze the complex and ever-changing world with a keen eye on bias. We teach children that sourcing, corroboration, contextualization, close reading, and geography are the key elements needed to thoroughly examine their community and the greater world. The curriculum starts with a focus on family in Kindergarten and expands to the state in 4th grade. From there, students learn about world history, ancient times and complete their course of study with a focus on American history in 8th grade. We utilize a variety of primary and secondary sources to expose children to historical and current events.

In Science, students are engaged in inquiry and exploratory learning which is introduced through a curriculum that builds foundational scientific knowledge. These skills are built upon and enhanced in middle grades as the curriculum spirals from the early years through middle school. Kindergarten students are introduced to science through the five senses. Grades 1-8 focus on earth, physical, and life sciences. Starting in second grade, students are introduced to the scientific method, which is then taught in great depth as students progress through the grades. Students also engage in project-based learning activities (such as robotics, recycling, and Science Olympiad) that promote STEM and environmental responsibility.

Across all grades and subjects, teachers engage with a protocol to assess the quality of assignments that students are asked to complete. This protocol practice is grounded in the questions: “Does this assignment align with the expectations defined by grade-level standards? Does the assignment provide meaningful practice opportunities for this content area and grade level? Overall, does the assignment give students an

authentic opportunity to connect academic standards to real-world issues and/or contexts? This practice allows for teachers to ensure that students receive quality opportunities to think critically and engage deeply with standards-aligned grade-level instruction and tasks. We have increased small group instruction to provide targeted skills. We have engaged in increasing student discourse to promote language acquisition, engagement, critical thinking skills.

We adapted to the nearly 100% K-8 virtual learning environment by engaging in a combination of synchronous and asynchronous learning activities which allowed us to continue the essential principles of incorporating explicit instruction, guided practice, and independent practice for our students. The amount of screen time was adjusted based on student grade level. The use of small group instruction is more heavily emphasized in the lower grades to replace the less effective whole-class instruction in the virtual learning environment.

PAS uses a consistent cycle of formative and summative assessments to monitor student's learning, to gauge curriculum effectiveness, and plan for instruction. For grades K-5 we use Aimsweb three times throughout the year to assess student early literacy skills. In grades 6-8 we utilize the STAR assessment quarterly to assess student achievement in math and ELA. In grades 2-8 we administer the ANET assessment which serves as a benchmark to determine students' attainment of standards in ELA and Math. We meet weekly during common planning time to disaggregate the data and determine the next steps for instruction. The data is used to better understand the group and the individuals so teachers can plan for the whole group and small group instruction.

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:

We provide all students in grades K-8 with at least weekly 45 minute classes in art, music, technology, library, and science taught by experts in these disciplines. By incorporating these subjects into the curriculum, students become well-rounded learners. During virtual learning, we have adapted schedules, switched to household items for learning materials, increased interactive lessons while providing optional lessons for students experiencing too much screen time.

The art program offers students a well-rounded visual arts education that teaches students the elements and principles of design so students can develop fluency in an artistic language of the visual arts, such as print-making, drawing, painting and sculpture. Art encourages students to translate the world around them and motivates them to create images inspired by poems, music, stories, and events.

Students learn the foundations of music literacy, performance, and appreciation over nine years - working to build a lifelong appreciation for the arts. Our program draws upon the students' shared identities and experiences as community experts in order to provide a high-quality, culturally responsive, and accessible music education that is project-based, with students exploring popular topics through a series of multi-week units. We offer a wide range of elective opportunities – including instrumental ensembles/lessons, choir, and musical theater. We are fortunate to have two part-time instrumental music teachers who provide lessons and ensemble experience to our students in grades 3-8. Our performing musicians travel to music festivals throughout the year, representing PAS at events such as the annual district-wide All-City Festival.

These activities have continued virtually, though in an altered format. In our performing ensembles and classes, we have developed a dual-focus, building the skills key to a high-quality performance as well as learning best practices for at-home recording and music production. This past year our 4th and 5th graders have completed multiple live performances, provided our community with numerous musical showcases,

and were even able to create a 30-minute virtual performance of our 2020 Spring Musical, Shrek Jr, with all cast members recording remotely. Our youngest students have embraced their spaces as musical realms, creating fully functioning instruments out of common household objects in order to continue building their musical foundations.

The goal of our physical education program is to develop literate and active individuals who have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to enjoy a lifetime of physical activities. The program combines health education for living a healthy lifestyle as well as units on individual and team games. Together we develop the skills necessary to participate in games or activities and to recognize the value of being physically active. Sports teams for track, basketball and volleyball are offered to all students in middle school.

Through the use of technology both as a weekly class but also woven throughout our classrooms, teachers have brought all content areas to life and have created a learning environment that promotes creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, communication, collaboration, and information and media literacy - skills required for the 21st Century and level the learning playing field. All classrooms have a smartboard and access to class sets of Chromebooks. During virtual learning, we provided all students with a Chromebook, implemented new software programs such as Nearpod, Seesaw, Imagine Learning for nonEnglish Learners, and Reading A-Z, along with all of the Google for Education suite products and Zoom.

The school library sits as the hub of the school, providing both information and technology-based instruction and access, along with a quiet space to do homework. The library at Penn Alexander works to nurture 21st Century learners who can develop and carry the lifelong skills of independent learning, and evaluative and behavior skills to their high school, college, and career experiences. In order to do so, the library provides access to both a rich collection of books, ebooks, and technological resources including online databases such as the Power Library, Grolier Multi-Media Encyclopedia, and Facts on File.

3. Academic Supports:

In addition to differentiating instruction and the use of small group instruction in the classroom the school employs a reading intervention program for grades K-3 and a math intervention program for grades 3-5 for students performing below grade level. Reading intervention provides struggling students the time and place to practice and increase their reading, writing, and phonics skills at their instructional level, which may be anywhere from a few months to a year/plus behind their peers. Students are selected for reading intervention based on our district reading screener (AIMSweb) data and classroom teacher input. Each group is designed to meet the individual needs of students within a small group setting (no larger than 6 students per group). Most groups meet daily for about 30 minutes a day. Though the level of instruction may look different with each group, the lesson plan format is the same. We work on phonemic awareness, phonics skills (phoneme and grapheme correspondences), decoding and encoding, practicing irregular and high-frequency words, reading connected text to our particular phonics skill, and end our lesson with writing.

Based on results of the AIMSwebPlus screener and classroom teacher input, students in grades 3-5 receive math intervention. The team identifies nine small groups of 3-6 students that would benefit from additional math support. These groups change quarterly to respond to the changing needs of students. The teacher meets with these groups twice a week to target number comparison and mental computation fluency. Students are assessed biweekly to monitor their progress on these measures.

To provide appropriate services, supports, and accommodations for our special education students, the team utilizes assessments such as the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test, KeyMath, Word Identification, and Spelling Test, STAR Renaissance Literacy and Math, among others. Utilizing data yielded from these assessments allows the team to develop specific programming to meet individual needs. Each student receives small group intervention that focuses on reading skills

(including reading comprehension, fluency, and word study) and/or math intervention (including fluency in basic skills and access points for grade-level concepts). Students are progress-monitored using a variety of assessment tools, such as STAR Renaissance Literacy and Math, Aimsweb, and teacher-created assessments.

Two special education teachers have achieved the credential of Wilson Dyslexia Practitioner in order to deliver prescriptive Tier Two and Tier Three interventions. Programs such as Wilson Reading System and Just Words provide intensive instruction to our learners with the most challenging reading and writing needs.

Our program for English Language Learners not only focuses on elevating student achievement but also seeks to address many of the challenges faced by immigrants, the pressures to assimilate into larger American culture, and the desire to maintain a unique cultural & linguistic heritage. Our school makes the conscious decision to make sure students know that their background and their linguistic ability are valued. As such, we use multimodal texts, lower the affective filter with the inclusion of the arts and drama, and create spaces for trans languaging when building vocabulary. Diverse mentor texts that are representative of the multicultural student body, along with including a variety of online intervention programs to help bridge the achievement gap with individualized attention to students' needs are used.

To complete the holistic approach to supporting students, we provide food, clothing, books, and supplies to families in need, coordinate translation and interpretation services, connect families to outside services, and serve as an advocate for families when they are navigating the American education system.

To address the achievement gaps respectively faced by our Black students, special education students, and English Language Learners, we employ six strategies: Building relationships by honoring and valuing the diversity of our students; Provide academic support for content classes; Collaborate with teachers to scaffold & modify the core curriculum so students have access to rigorous learning experiences; Make sure basic needs are met so students can come to school ready to learn; Engage, support, and advocate for families and community members; and, Help promote students' college & career readiness through building skills for life-long learning and English language development.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

The Penn Alexander Core Values that our school implemented in 2017 guide our community practices and language, ensuring every student is valued and respected. By providing an equitable space coupled with high expectations, all students have the opportunities to learn and grow to their fullest potential. These five values are Learning: we are creators and builders of our education; this is our priority; Collaboration: we work together and we have much to learn from one another; Responsibility: our words and actions matter; they create our community and our world; Equity-everyone matters, everyone is included, everyone listens, everyone leads; and, Reflection - we are lifelong learners seeking continual growth. Students are regularly recognized for demonstrating the values with their actions and words.

Complementing this practice is the intentional display of student work as well as student and school achievements such as Robotics Team's World Champion Core Values award, numerous regional awards, and numerous district recognition banners. To support the other aspects of student identities, we now use gender-inclusive terms when referring to students and have created gender-inclusive bathrooms on every floor. Our school uniform policy is also gender-inclusive. And we have created safe spaces for students from our LGBTQ+ community with the creation of a GSA afterschool club.

Students are given numerous leadership opportunities as well as access to explore new opportunities. The student council organizes student volunteers to run games at our Fall Festival for the young students, organizes student servers for our annual pancake breakfast that is cooked by teachers, gathers feedback from students, and organizes an annual Change for Change fundraiser to collect funds to support families in need as well as those in our community.

Extracurricular events like the annual musical, the Philly Starts Student Entrepreneurship Club, and the public television station WHYY documentary and film-making club give students the opportunity to explore their interests outside the classroom. When students need additional support, our teachers, counselor, and University of Pennsylvania social work team create safety nets such as small group sessions, one-one tutoring, daily check-ins, early morning or after school homework help.

As soon as the COVID-19 closure occurred we immediately engaged in constant communication in multiple ways with families to replace seeing them at drop-off/pick up. We started with checking in on each family. We followed up by centering on those most vulnerable in whatever way that presented itself. Each morning and throughout the day, we immediately called home when staff saw a student was not on screen; provided headphones for students who did not have private or quiet spaces at home to learn; allowed cameras to be off but chat on for students who did not feel comfortable sharing their living situations on screen.

We implemented a half-hour Social Emotional Learning block to address the well-being of our students. Teachers create lessons based on the needs of students or issues happening in our community. Especially this year we have incorporated mindfulness training. Our counselor and UPenn social work students model lessons and co-teach these lessons with our teachers. We adopted the Black Lives Matter Week of action and proudly shared the work of our students with our broader community.

We created the Penn Alexander Student Success Program, an afterschool program for students struggling with virtual learning. Students participated 2-3 times a week in a monitored space with our Dean, counselor, specialists, and teachers there to assist. A shared document was created for referring teachers to record missing student work, so as to inform the session monitors about what the students needed to accomplish during each session. As an incentive, students can earn points that the classroom teacher can use to improve grades.

So that students could still enjoy the many fun traditions of school we held virtual Field Day, virtual Spirit Week, virtual bingo with book prizes hand-selected by teachers, virtual lunch bunch that included sharing fun jokes, a Virtual Musical - High School Jr., and numerous clubs like Girls On the Run, coding instructed

by Penn students, WHYY- journalism and documentary filmmaking, PAS Press student newspaper, Sunrise Hub, debate and a Gender-Sexuality Alliance club.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Parents, teachers, and community members are pivotal partners in the educational process. Through shared decision making parents and community members have become aligned with the school's goals and high expectations. The principal maintains an open door policy enabling parents, students, and community members to resolve concerns immediately or to discuss ideas for supporting student growth. A science grant was written to purchase much-needed equipment and for students to learn about the biology behind planarian regeneration, learn how to design and perform experiments with planarians, and learn how to use microscopes.

Families receive the weekly Pony Express containing calendar reminders, upcoming activities as well as free community events and programs. Translations are provided to families for whom English is not their primary language. Back to school night is held in the fall for families to learn their teachers' s expectations, instructional approaches, and classroom policies. Each family receives a handbook of policies, programs, and resources that support learning.

Collaboratively, staff, parents, and the community have created a wide range of annual events that bring together our diverse population. These include the Fall Festival, a robotics competition, spring musical, a pancake breakfast and a community 5K run to end the year. These community-building events strengthen the social capital students need to be successful learners.

The school has a well-established parent association, Equity Circle, and school advisory council. These groups function with the sole purpose of bringing together parents and teachers to support student growth and to address issues of systemic racism in our school and community. Monthly meetings are conducted on topics such as how to cope with anxiety, supporting students at home during virtual learning, understanding holiday traditions around the world, and supporting literacy and math at home. Presentations are often made by parents as well as our partners at Penn. When students see parents giving their time and expertise to their school, they feel supported as well as proud for the contribution their family is making to help improve their school.

The community is our context for learning. After the attack in Christ Church, New Zealand, the faith leaders gathered with our community for a potluck dinner and neighborhood peace march. POWER, an interfaith group, collaborated with our Equity Circle to educate our community on the impact of gentrification. Our civic association, the Spruce Hill Communication Association worked integrally with the school to design and fundraise for a new playground so the entire neighborhood has a safe place to play, and neighbors upkeep our garden so students can have hands-on learning experiences.

When the COVID-19 closure happened, our parent association bought a large capacity Zoom account so that we could keep families informed as more information became available. We created google surveys to gather questions and feedback from parents in advance of the meetings. We contacted every family by phone or text just to check in and followed it up with a dedicated staff member for each class. We make extensive use of our District's language line when communicating with our non-English speaking families. We triaged absent students to determine the issue and work with parents to resolve it quickly (e.g., food security, internet access, computer) and provided multiple ways to get the resources families needed via home deliveries, expanded pick up hours of student learning materials from a neighbor's house and outdoor pickups /from a parking lot.

We partnered with the Church of Christian Compassion, the People's Emergency Center, and the Kol Tzedek Synagogue to provide weekly food and Halal chickens to our Bangladeshi community. Our parent association created a mutual aid virtual board, hosted book bins on porches, created an emergency fund with donations of the value of P-EBT cards.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

Our professional development cycle focuses on a collaborative and differentiated approach to teacher support. Once a week, teachers engage in common planning meetings that are facilitated by members of the leadership team. We focus on data analysis, student needs, and review of students' work. We also use that time to provide mini professional development sessions on issues of equity, standards-aligned instruction, social-emotional wellness, and best practices. Coaching is provided by our Math and ELA school-based teachers leaders to target individual teacher needs and transform instructional practices. Our team has been integral in supporting teachers during the transition to virtual and hybrid learning. We brought the support of outside agencies to provide professional development.

In the fall we engaged in an eight-part series called, "Designing at the Margins" which supported our teachers as they unpacked personal identity, the historical context of race, and the application to pedagogy. We partnered with Relay GSE to focus on student engagement in the virtual setting. We adopted Nearpod and attended professional development to enhance our use of technology. The district provided coaching for teachers that needed additional support with the adoption of new technology. Our school hosts BARWE (Building anti-racist educators) and a BIPOC group for teachers to get addition support regarding equity work.

To support the well-being of our staff, the school leadership team hand-delivered plants in the spring and holiday hot chocolate bombs made by our parents in December to show gratitude for the teachers and staff. Our parent association also provides teacher gift cards three times a year to show appreciation for all that our teachers do on their own to make PAS a special place for students.

We hold weekly staff meetings online and send a weekly newsletter to make sure teachers have the information and resources they need to be effective in the classroom. Our parents and Penn partnership coordinator have ensured students get materials from school that they need to complete their assignments.

4. School Leadership:

There are many layers to the leadership capacity at Penn Alexander. Our leadership consists of the principal, dean of students, counselor, school-based teacher leader for literacy in grades 4-8 and our Classroom Literacy Initiative Coach who specializes in early literacy. We also have a union building committee that is composed of teachers and staff that communicates regularly with the principal to facilitate a positive work environment for the teachers and students. Each week, our grade groups meet with members of the leadership team to review data and address instructional concerns.

Our collective work is guided by our mission and the common belief that collaboration will allow us to accomplish tasks needed to seamlessly weave together the type of school that we want for our students. We believe that cultivating leaders in our school benefits the organization as much as the individual. Our teaching staff takes on many different leadership roles, whether that is organizing events for students or leading professional development for colleagues.

During COVID-19, we have been fortunate to have weekly half-days for professional development and whole staff meetings. Our Dean has adapted her role to be regularly in virtual classrooms checking on climate issues of students including their attendance, cyberbullying/safety, and academic performance; holding virtual lunches, and regularly contacting parents to discuss issues -absenteeism, class performance, cutting class, cyberbullying/Cybersafety.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

We first recognize and see that our differences strengthen us all. The principal began the year with eight training sessions on unpacking one's racial identity and has continued throughout the year with sessions on how racial biases can impact classroom decision-making and grading. Our staff BARWE (Building Anti-Racist White Educators) and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous People of Color) Educators Collective meet regularly to continue our racial identity growth in a safe space. Our principal regularly shares culturally responsive resources that celebrate the joy and excellence

of the marginalized such as Dr. Gholdy E. Muhammad's Cultivating Genius lessons. Our day starts with a half-hour social-emotional learning session where teachers and students unpack these community challenges. In our academic program, we use gender-inclusive language, have inclusive libraries, and have chosen curriculum and curriculum supplements that reflect the diversity of our world and student body. We differentiate instruction, use targeted small groups and intervention sessions that are based on blind name data.

We have created spaces outside of the school day for students to reflect on their identity. These include a student-run town hall on racism in our community, principal-led Gender-Sexuality Alliance, and teachers-led Anti-racism Book Cub.

School leadership immediately emails staff after a current event has occurred with resources for discussing the event with our students. Often, optional space is provided by leadership to process the current event and/or to collaboratively plan for how to address the event with our students. The murder of Walter Wallace Jr, a black man in a mental health crisis who was killed by the police happened just a few blocks from our school but we have also addressed the insurrection at the capitol, the anti-Asian violence in Georgia. For the Black Lives Matter Week of Action, our teachers co-created a school-wide curriculum that we shared with other schools.

We honor the holidays and cultural traditions of our community by not only celebrating but explaining them and ensuring school events are not planned during these important occasions. Our Equity Circle of parents and staff hold bimonthly book discussions for parents to educate themselves on anti-racism and white supremacy. This year we selected the 1619 project. The EC group partnered with families to ensure everyone was food secure in a way that was mutually beneficial, transparent, and took into account cultural practices such as Halal meats, gelatin-free snacks as we have several families who are practicing Muslims. Our parents serve as experts who share their customs and traditions with our community.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

The one practice that we utilize at our school is the principle of designing at the margins. When we design our school programming to meet the needs of the most marginalized students, everyone benefits. This concept is applied to practices that occur within and outside of the classrooms. This work is informed by the concept of addressing Maslow's hierarchy of needs in a proactive manner. This mindset and practice have positively impacted our ability to identify the challenges met by our most marginalized students so we can provide solutions that improve their ability to actively engage in school life and give them the resources to work toward academic growth and achievement. Designing our school practices with these children in mind is crucial. Without support, many of these children would not have been able to be present for school during virtual school.

During the pandemic it was noted that roughly 100 of our families were struggling with issues of food insecurity, accessing stable internet, and safe low-cost child care. We gathered this data in the summer so we could better understand the needs that our families faced. As a result of our early surveys, we were able to coordinate efforts to get produce boxes and chickens from a local market into the homes of our most vulnerable families. We also were able to provide mobile hotspots for children that needed immediate access to wi-fi for school. Families were provided with support as needed so they could enroll in low-cost or free internet access programs. Families were provided resources and information in their home language regarding childcare.

We use this principle to guide our classroom practices as well. Our teachers have gone through diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development so they can curate lessons that are culturally relevant; providing ample opportunities for students to see themselves and others through windows and mirrors. We use this principle when purchasing texts for classroom libraries, and when planning for lessons. Our teachers engage in cross-racial dialogue with their peers to expand our ability to examine our personal biases and grow to have high expectations for all children. This work is evident in our cycle of teaching and learning, where teachers review standards, assessments, and student work. We review the work to look for and build access points for all children. Our small group instruction targets children at the margins that have been identified through regular progress monitoring. Our children are provided with equitable versus equal time with teachers.

We ensure that children have what they need for learning through regular supply pick-up days. During these times children get access to books, science supplies, art supplies, and technology needs. This allows us to provide students with the materials they would typically access in school. Students are able to request additional supplies as needed.

We also use the design at the margin's principle to support students' social-emotional needs. We have a sacred thirty-minute block per day to address the stress and trauma that the pandemic has elevated in our community. We also utilize this time to address issues of racial stress and injustice. With that in mind, we also started a GSA to support LGBTQIA+ students and their allies.

We believe this concept has improved attendance and engagement. In fact, our attendance is 5% higher than it was last year at this time. As we continue to grow through this challenging year, a focus on the margins is helping us focus on who needs the most support.