

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

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

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

Official School Name Meeting Street Academy-Spartanburg  
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 201 East Broad Street, Suite 110  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Spartanburg State SC Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 29306-3289

County Spartanburg

Telephone (864) 253-1800 Fax (864) 253-1802

Web site/URL https://www.spartanburg7.org/Domain/16 E-mail KHilton@meetingstreetschools.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\* Mr. Jeff Stevens E-mail Jstevens@spart7.org  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Spartanburg School District 7 Tel. (864) 594-4400

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

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

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

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

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

## **PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION**

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

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

## PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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

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

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 7 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 3 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 1 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 11 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
<b>PreK</b>	24	49	73
<b>K</b>	28	21	49
<b>1</b>	25	21	46
<b>2</b>	23	19	42
<b>3</b>	23	15	38
<b>4</b>	16	13	29
<b>5</b>	8	6	14
<b>6</b>	0	0	0
<b>7</b>	0	0	0
<b>8</b>	0	0	0
<b>9</b>	0	0	0
<b>10</b>	0	0	0
<b>11</b>	0	0	0
<b>12 or higher</b>	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	147	144	291

\*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
  - 1.5 % Asian
  - 90 % Black or African American
  - 2.4 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 3.2 % White
  - 2.9 % 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: 5%

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

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

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	5
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	9
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	14
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	291
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.05
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	5

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

Spanish

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 89 %

Total number students who qualify: 258

8. Students receiving special education services: 5 %

16 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>2</u> Autism                  | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>0</u> Other Health Impaired                 |
| <u>2</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>3</u> Specific Learning Disability          |
| <u>1</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>10</u> Speech or Language Impairment        |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment      | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>1</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: 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.

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	3
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	30
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	11
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	0
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	5

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 10:1

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

<b>Required Information</b>	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016
Daily student attendance	96%	95%	96%	95%	97%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

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

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

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

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

Yes  No

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

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

Meeting Street Schools is a school of innovation, founded upon the belief that all children deserve an excellent education despite their geographic or socioeconomic circumstances.

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.

MSA started the year with a hybrid model. Due to forty-three of our students starting the year as virtual students, we were able to have reduced class size - no more than 13 students in a class, and provided appropriate PPE, such as masks, plexiglass dividers, etc. Each class functioned as a "family" and did not leave the classroom. Related arts was a "push-in" model, and lunch was delivered to the classroom daily. Virtual students were provided laptops and online orientation. A virtual parent orientation was conducted for both in-person and virtual students, with safety protocols discussed as well as curriculum expectations. We decided to staff our own virtual school with our teachers instead of participating in the district's virtual option.

In October 2020, students were given the opportunity to return to face-to-face learning or remain virtual. Many scholars returned to face-to-face instruction. Throughout the year, we continued to allow students to return to face-to-face learning on a need basis. Currently, students in 2nd, 4th & 5th grades who receive virtual instruction are part of the classroom community, with teachers using Zoom to teach both in-person and virtual in real-time.

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

As a public school, Meeting Street Academy is a school of innovation that serves a neighborhood attendance zone. After students in the designated attendance zone enroll, openings are filled with students from the next concentric zones and those of our staff members.

## **PART III - SUMMARY**

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Meeting Street Academy (MSA) Spartanburg is the first Public School of Innovation in the Upstate of South Carolina. In 2010, MSA began as a private school, an outgrowth of the Meeting Street Schools (MSS) Network founded in Charleston, South Carolina. In 2016, MSA embarked on a partnership with Spartanburg School District Seven becoming its only Public School of Innovation. The goal was to become an authentic neighborhood school. This partnership allows us to function as a public school but have the freedom to be innovative in instruction, staffing, family engagement, and community partnership. We desire for MSA to be living proof that all students can succeed if given the right opportunities and support. Our unique dynamic allows us to live and operate in two worlds. We are one of the eight public elementary schools in Spartanburg School District Seven and we are also a part of the MSS Network that includes 2 other schools of innovation and a private school. We benefit from seeing firsthand what great teaching and learning looks like in different settings and with different challenges. We determine what innovations would be most beneficial and receive feedback and support from all parties on implementation. As a result of these partnerships and the unwavering commitment of our staff, students, and families, in 2019, we were ranked the 2nd highest elementary school in our county based on our state test scores and excellent School Report Card rating. Every day, through these partnerships, we discover more innovative ways to help our students, families, and staff members to grow.

At MSA, we develop a social/emotional and academic plan for every child based on data- age and grade level do not determine what students are ready to learn. Student data, anecdotal notes, and assessments tell us what students are ready to learn as well as what to reteach. Starting at the age of three, we employ creative, engaging, and hands-on strategies for students to learn through play, literature, art, and music. Our behavioral interventionists and play therapists teach students mindfulness, host restorative justice circles, and use Responsive Classroom techniques to equip our students with the strategies needed to navigate life in and outside of school. Many of our students are exposed to severe adverse childhood trauma and these tools help them combat the trauma and rise above it or use it as motivation to be even greater.

Our extended school day is another innovative structure that allows us to meet the needs of our students. Students attend school an additional hour every day of our one-hundred-ninety day school calendar. This equates to almost thirty-three additional learning days full of academic, social, and emotional skills and strategies. The additional hour is used to fill their academic gaps or extend their learning via small group instruction. We also build relationships through activities such as swimming, spending time with community mentors, and conducting group research on passion projects.

Our extended calendar provides staff members with additional learning time via twenty+ professional development days embedded throughout the school year. Faculty and staff participate in approximately two weeks of training before students ever step foot into the building. This year, via virtual sessions, we learned about our students and the community we serve, dived into the academic & social/emotional data, and became experts in the curricula that students use to learn to be great readers, writers, thinkers, creators, and history makers. We also tested our own growth by delivering lessons and receiving feedback from colleagues. We also hosted team-building activities that strengthen our co-teaching model and grade-level teams. Sessions included school and network-wide vision and mission setting sessions that invest everyone in the work. The relationships we have with each other are a core part of what motivates us. We are a team and family that works hard and works together for our students, families, and community. We believe in the motto, "One team, one family."

The success of our students is not achieved in isolation. Our parents and community members contribute tremendously. Starting with our 3K families, every family participates in a family interview which allows us to start building the partnerships that will continue over the next eight years and beyond. Every year we have one hundred percent of our families attend our PreK orientation. From that point, parents are continuously invited into the school for workshops, class presentations, and volunteer opportunities. This year we hosted our school-wide events virtually and had great participation in our Dance for Heart and Black History Month virtual programs. We also stay with our students and families once they graduate and



go to middle and high school and beyond. We guide them in navigating every sector of education and will be by their sides all the way through their first career. We are in this with them for life.

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

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

Here at MSA, Eureka Math and Wit and Wisdom as our core instruction for grades K5 through 5th. Both curricula address the needs of our elementary students by providing opportunities for students to develop their thinking, speaking, listening, reading and writing skills. The co-teacher model and other supports allow us to meet individual student needs.

Our core curriculum for ELA, Wit and Wisdom, includes four modules that build holistic knowledge through reading, speaking, analyzing, listening, and writing. Science and Social Studies are also embedded in our core curriculum and our upper grade students receive STEM classes that focus on hands-on standards based lessons. Wit & Wisdom follows a sequence of reading and thinking strategies that are essential for understanding increasingly complex topics and ideas that help them navigate the world around them. Students are led through a series of stages to reflect on how each text develops them as lifelong citizens. In the first stage, they activate their background knowledge and curiosity by noticing and wondering about each text before reading. After that, students experiment with the text by exploring the author's craft and structure. They dissect these creative moves, discuss their impact on the reader and use them in their own writing. The next stage, the execution stage, teaches students to use writing to express what they have learned and share the impact of their new knowledge on them as people. During the final stage, students excel by synthesizing their thoughts to uncover the essential meaning of the text. This helps them to understand the power of the actions of the characters and their impact on the world as well as helping them to see the power of reading and writing.

Wit & Wisdom builds in opportunities for students to be successful as they explore each stage. The repetition of the stages with each text helps students to build confidence as readers and writers. The curriculum also strengthens comprehension and collaboration through Socratic Seminars where students conduct independent conversations about the topics they explore. Each module also includes assessments used to determine needed support, reteaching, and extension. Some formative assessments, like “checks for understanding,” are embedded within the lesson. Text dependent writing tasks occur after deeply exploring the module texts over eight to twelve lessons. These tasks are used to check for content-specific knowledge and writing techniques. New read assessments are given at least twice per module as an opportunity for students to practice their newly learned comprehension skills with unfamiliar texts. Lastly, the end of module assessment is a cumulative task where students synthesize their ideas in writing and share their new learning about the world around them.

The K5-5th grade common core math curriculum, Eureka Math, is a rigorous math program where students are able to gain a deeper understanding of numbers as they learn the "why" while problem-solving. Eureka Math is scoped like a story and focuses on concepts that layer over time. The same models and strategies are used from grade to grade to increase mastery and understanding from grade PK-5th. Eureka math starts each lesson with a fluency protocol to build student confidence and fluency. Students also complete an application problem designed to build strategies for solving real-world problems. The core of the lesson uses models such as number bonds, place value charts, arrays, and tape diagrams to strengthen students' conceptual understanding by allowing students to hold the math in their hands. Once students have mastered the models, they are gradually released to work independently on the problem set. The problem set is independent work that consists of equations, word problems, and challenge problems that weren't explicitly taught but can be solved using critical thinking skills. Teachers monitor student work closely and address concerns in the moment. Formative assessments like the exit ticket checks for daily mastery giving teachers the data they need to determine next steps. The End of Module task is a summative assessment that includes all of the topics from the module.

This year, we opted to host our own virtual school taught by our teachers. Our curricula provided virtual resources and supplementary programs that aided in lesson delivery and differentiation for students. One program, Geodes, is accessible virtually for our emerging and developing readers. This program provides an opportunity for all scholars regardless of their reading levels to have the same opportunity for success through our already familiar curriculum. Another program that became available is Great Minds In Sync. It

is a flexible program provided to support students in Wit & Wisdom. This program was adapted to meet the needs of distance learners by providing high-quality virtual lessons. In Sync provides video features where expert teachers become accessible for teachers and students. The program includes digital assessments, digital implementation guides, slides for daily lessons, and assessment reporting to give online learners a more realistic learning experience.

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

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

The pre-K (three and four-year-old students) program of Meeting Street Academy uses rigorous, multi-sensory, and developmentally appropriate curricula to address the needs of our youngest scholars. Instruction is provided using whole group lessons, center-based play, and small group data-driven instruction. Areas addressed include literacy, phonological awareness, problem-solving, mathematical concepts, science, social-emotional skills, as well as motor skills.

Our curricula for literacy and math are directly aligned with our state early learning standards. Our literacy curriculum, Creative Curriculum, focuses on encouraging students to investigate questions that foster critical thinking in our young scholars. Students use play to learn about engaging topics. Both the pre-K and K-5 curricula allow students to make connections with the world around them through interactive read alouds and shared reading of authentic texts. Our math curriculum develops the foundational skills needed to solve complex problems; it is the base level of the curriculum that is used in K-5. Starting it early gives students a mathematical advantage; they are able to develop a strong foundation to advance their mathematical skills and understanding (e.g., not just learning how to identify a numeral but also strategies to count objects).

Due to COVID, our program shifted to half days (3 hours per day). Students were split into two groups (morning and afternoon sessions) attending school five days a week. Parents that were not comfortable with allowing their children to attend school in person were given the option of receiving printed materials and one-on-one sessions with teachers for approximately thirty minutes per week. Students also socially distanced and wore masks. Virtual field trips were provided to acquire background knowledge on various topics throughout the year.

Our pre-K program has proven successful as indicated on our kindergarten readiness scores. Eighty-six percent of our students scored ready and/or approaching on the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment.

**2. Other Curriculum Areas:**

K5-5th grade students participate daily in other curriculum areas. These areas include physical education, art, music, Spanish, science, and robotics. Special area classes help students develop essential skills that enhance learning through the integration of academic skills and the special area content. Due to COVID, students remain in their homerooms and the related arts teachers go to each classroom to teach. Additionally, we adapted a nine-week cycle per related arts class allowing students to complete more meaningful projects.

The visual arts play a significant role in the developmental stages of a child. Visual art disciplines broaden a child's ability to interact with the world around them and helps to develop skills of self-expression and communication. Students utilize what they learn in Wit & Wisdom about the importance of lines, color and size in their own art. They also incorporate school-wide foci like Black History Month into their art. This year our 5K students painted pictures of themselves as Kings and Queens with crowns adorning their heads.

Music encompasses all areas of child development and skills for school readiness. It helps the body and the mind work together. The music curriculum is taught through classroom instruction and a variety of musical performances. Through these avenues, students gain self-confidence and the skills needed to be successful musicians. The music learning scope of music goes beyond today's culture and expands into African

American music history and heritage, allowing students' a deeper understanding and appreciation of their cultural background. Our music students engage in numerous community events as guest performers, such as the Mayor's Martin Luther King, Jr. Day events, community partner events, and district-wide performances. These performances help in displaying the characteristics learned within the classroom.

The physical education curriculum is an essential piece to supporting a child's overall development. Physical education teaches intellectual skills, helps students learn to navigate complex social situations, and supports healthy social and emotional development. Activities include tennis, basketball, golf, soccer, bike riding, weekly running club, and basic exercise movements. At the center of the curriculum is the goal to build healthy minds, bodies, and hearts. Our students use these skills and apply them to our MSA Basketball team, our annual Chase The Maverick 5K family and community run, and participate in the First Tee program. Due to COVID, these events we replaced with virtual options like our Dance for Heart party.

At MSA, we offer Spanish to all our K5-5th grade students affording them the opportunity to embrace the learning of other languages and cultures. Research shows foreign language instruction enhances problem-solving, critical thinking and listening skills. It also improves memory, concentration, and the ability to multitask. Students learn Spanish through fun songs, art, reading and writing.

At MSA we believe in the power of mindfulness practices. Our staff teaches lessons to all grades using the MindUp curriculum and Zones of Regulation. Teachers practice the new techniques with their class weekly. In addition, our school counselor teaches our Social Emotional Learning curriculum to all students bi-weekly.

### **3. Academic Supports:**

To meet the diverse needs of our school's population, Meeting Street uses the frameworks of multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) and universal design for learning. Students are assigned to teacher-led small groups based on their achievement levels using several data points. Data is compiled from assessment scores, attendance records, behavior referrals, teacher observations, family input, and historical data (e.g., attendance records from previous schools, medical information, etc.). The MTSS team comprises the classroom teacher, behavior interventionists, special education teacher, school counselor, academic interventionist, therapists, and a member of the leadership team. Students are referred by the classroom teacher to address academic, social-emotional, or behavioral concerns after it has been documented overtime that traditional classroom supports are not meeting the needs of the student. Concerns are not limited to strategies for remediation but also include ways to challenge our high-performing students. Each student that is presented to the MTSS team receives a plan that describes supports that will be put in place and monitored for effectiveness. Plans are reviewed every four to six weeks based on the need of the student.

We currently have seventeen students on an Individual Education Plan (IEP). Our special education teacher pushes into classes to support students during core instruction. She also pulls students one-on-one or in small groups to deliver data driven instruction as needed. One program that is used and is extremely effective is Orton Gillingham (OG). It is a phonics curriculum grounded in the science of reading that addresses student's deficiencies in reading, writing and speaking. The goal of our special education services is to help students no longer need the services by addressing the challenges early, often and with precision to exactly what the individual child needs. Formative and summative data not only helps us to determine student needs and progress, but it also uncovers the effectiveness of the supports put in place. If they are not working, we modify them until we find what works best for each student.

MSA serves many students who have experienced childhood trauma. In order to meet their needs, MSA employs a full-time play therapist and two behavior interventionists. We also partner with

outside agencies for onsite speech and occupational therapy. This allows us to serve any student in need even if they don't qualify based on Special Education qualifications. Our therapists also provide professional development to our staff and meet frequently with teachers to provide recommendations and strategies to provide individualized support.

Our English Language Learner (ELL) student receives support directly from our district via an ELL teacher that assesses and meets with the student throughout the year to determine needs and supports. The ELL teacher partners with parents and teachers to create a plan for our ELL student population. While our ELL numbers are small, we know that strategies for ELL students benefit the entire school. Providing visuals, making the learning hands-on and connecting it to the real world are some of the great strategies that support our ELL student and our entire student population.

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

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

Meeting Street Academy embraces the whole child, to ensure every child is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged. Through shared responsibility by students, families, school, and the community, we seek to address the comprehensive needs of students.

Classroom culture creates a positive environment for students. It is cultivated, fostered, and maintained by the use of the Responsive Classroom (RC) program. The core belief is that for students to be successful, they need a set of social and emotional competencies such as self-control, cooperation, and responsibility and a set of academic competencies, such as academic mindset, perseverance, and sound academic behaviors. Integrating these two sets of competencies ensures students can do their best learning and feel safe and valued at school. The RC approach gives teachers and students a set of practices and strategies designed to build academic and social-emotional competencies. In addition, we hold the belief that strength of character is equally as important as academic progress in determining the long-term success of a child and their growth into a responsible, productive citizen. To that end, Path to Success traits are interwoven in every aspect of our students' academic education. They focus on the development of grit, gratitude, optimism, empathy, citizenship, integrity, self-control, and curiosity. The traits are not a curriculum, but rather a mindset. because mastery of these traits will heighten student success in school, work, and relationships. In addition, the staff includes a full-time play therapist, a school counselor, a school psychologist, and two behavior interventionists. They engage students regularly to support social and emotional growth and offer more intensive services to at-risk students. During the pandemic, these services were offered via virtual sessions. The support team offered daily journal prompts, check-in forms, book readings, and videos designed to help families navigate the challenges presented by the closure.

We believe educational opportunity is a fundamental right for all children and as such, our duty is to support academic achievement for all. Academic achievement depends on the ability of the school to instruct with a rigorous curriculum such as Wit and Wisdom and Eureka. In addition to classroom teachers, three academic interventionists, a special services teacher, four speech therapists, and an occupational therapist provide needed services to help at-risk students have added support to ensure the ability to achieve academic growth. As much as possible, these services were offered virtually during closure.

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

Upon reentering the building for the first time since the pandemic started, we wanted to ensure our families that safety was paramount. Small group walk-throughs of our building were offered to parents to observe new signage, social distancing protocols in classrooms, plexiglass partitions, and multiple sanitation stations. The tour and following Q & A session strengthened the partnership between family and school. Parental concerns were validated and addressed, questions were answered and together we found solutions that allowed us to start our school year as scheduled with over fifty percent of our students in person.

In addition to partnering with parents, we have dedicated community partners that help us meet the needs of our families and students. All discipline areas work cohesively to offer academic, social, and emotional intervention to students and families. A partnership with Kinsa gave each family access to a free smart thermometer during the pandemic. We also maintained our mentorship program this year by becoming pen pals and meeting for lunch via Zoom. Our play therapist offers counseling services to students, partnering with families to provide at-home strategies. The partnership with our local vocational school allows students to receive free vision and hearing screening every year. We also partner with the local Housing Authority and credit union. The partnership with the credit union provides savings accounts and weekly in-school deposit opportunities for our students. Our older students manage and operate the bank with the help of professional bank tellers. So far our students have saved over \$50K for college. As a community, we aim to take down any barriers that stand in the way of our students' success and education.

Our partnership with the Mary Black Foundation affords us a grant for our Positive Parenting Program

(Triple P), one of our most impactful programs for families. Triple P strategies directly support dimensions of social-emotional health as well as other issues like financial literacy and stress management. This year we continued to provide Triple P classes for parents monthly via Zoom. Our most successful one this year was around budgeting during a pandemic. Parents, presenters and a member from our local credit union shared ideas that parents put into practice immediately. Families also earned a free Thanksgiving turkey by participating in the class, and many deposited their savings in their child's accounts. These partnerships allow us to do much more than serve children; they allow us to serve families.

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

To create an environment of value and support for our teachers, Meeting Street Academy regularly seeks feedback from our teachers and adjusts policies and procedures in response. As the 2020-21 school year began, the Leadership Team (LT) polled teachers on the topic of safety with COVID-19. In response to the feedback, the LT requested a waiver from the state to reduce the required seat time for our four-year-old students; this allowed teachers to split their roster in half and reduce class size to allow for social distancing in their classrooms stretching from the three-year-old classroom to 5th grade. Teachers also provide feedback on decisions such as the curriculum or assessments that are used for students.

Teachers and staff receive continuous professional development based on their needs. Twenty professional development days are built into the school calendar each year. Topics vary based on the level of experience; for example, new teachers receive entry-level workshops where experienced teachers may receive advanced training and support. Teachers that master various areas are encouraged to lead professional development workshops for staff. When teachers expressed feelings of exhaustion and being overwhelmed, the LT brought in a licensed therapist to provide information on self-care, arranged for a chiropractor to discuss natural remedies for the body to handle stress and hosted a panel led by an experienced nurse to discuss healthy eating and self-care routines. Based on staff feedback, the meeting schedule was also adjusted to provide teachers with more time to plan lessons and interpret data.

All staff members also receive support via weekly coaching and feedback. Coaches provide feedback from observations on a weekly/bi-weekly basis. During feedback meetings, coaches model, allow the teacher/staff to view the model and give the teacher/staff member an opportunity to determine the gap between their performance and the model. This type of coaching supports the teacher's ability to develop one's own self-efficacy by naming the areas that need to develop. These areas become goals for the teacher/staff member and are worked on until mastery is met. The guided practice portion of our feedback meetings is essential in helping teachers to successfully execute the plan in the classroom. We practice with feedback until teachers are confident and feel prepared. Coaches also provide feedback and support in the classroom by teaching side-by-side with the teacher (when applicable) or modeling lessons with students.

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

The MSA Leadership Team (LT) follows a Participative Leadership model. The principal, assistant principal, curriculum instructional coach, preschool director, school nurse, and chief of staff are LT members who meet weekly and work with designated staff members to guide the school and its programs. The principal researches the concept or program, decides whether it will benefit the students academically or socially emotionally, and seeks input from the LT and teachers. If the concept is adopted, the LT conducts staff development around its philosophy and implementation.

Under the principal's leadership, student achievement is the top priority. All graduating fifth graders are expected to be in the eighty-fifth percentile on the reading and math portion of the NWEA MAP assessment. To meet this goal, reflection is a critical part of the LT philosophy. LT members conduct weekly One-on-One (O3) meetings with designated staff members reflecting on teaching and learning, analyzing student data, studying grade level and school-wide trends, and honing procedures for more effective school performance.

In the summer of 2020, the LT met daily to craft our COVID School Opening Plan. Input was solicited from parents, teachers, district administration, South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental  
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Control (SCDHEC), and local medical authorities. Using this plan, all students, virtual and in-person, were able to start on July 30, 2020. Due to COVID, each class was split in two, with no more than thirteen students in each classroom, allowing space for social distancing. The school nurse secured plexiglass partitions, masks, and hand sanitizer.

During the 2020-2021 school year, administrative roles have shifted dramatically. Administrators have embraced many roles such as; subbing in classrooms, serving as bus monitors, tutoring students, helping parents schedule a COVID test or vaccine, or leading professional development. The "Whatever it Takes" attitude ensures students are at school daily or learning virtually. Student achievement is still a priority. This year has looked very different, but the principal has tried to guarantee all students are reaching their academic goals by daily observing classes and offering feedback and goals for improved instruction.

"Inspect what I Expect" is the principal's motto. For example, the FUNdations curriculum was adopted this year. Teachers were trained, practiced with input from the instructional coach and principal, reflected on their lessons, reviewed student work, and made revisions as necessary. After mastering the curriculum, teachers were expected to implement the curriculum daily with fidelity.

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

MSA addresses the diverse needs of our students, families, and staff by providing an environment that is intentionally inclusive of the history, contributions, and culture of all who make up our student body, community, and our world. We strive to educate and expose our students, staff, and families by sponsoring events during Black History Month. This year we highlighted the contributions of African Americans through interactions with prominent Black leaders in our community. We introduced African American pioneers who paved the way for equality in America. We displayed portraits of famous African American Civil Rights leaders and current leaders, activists, entertainers, and sports figures. To engage our students they selected and dressed as their favorite African American leader and displayed them with their biographies in our MSA Wax Museum.

We also hosted events for Hispanic Heritage Month and National Women's Month. Students learned about the cuisine, art, music, fashion and influence of Hispanics and women from around the world. We celebrated Chinese New Year through food tastings, art classes, fashion, and history exploration. Female leaders were highlighted for their grit, impact and sacrifices made for change. These were celebrations that families, staff and students celebrated together.

Current events and social movements directly impacted our community this year and we embraced the challenges as an opportunity to look more closely at race and equality. Some scholars attended a field trip downtown at our local Black Lives Matter mural which was painted on Broad Street, just blocks from our campus. During the summer of 2020, we engaged in open conversations with staff regarding Race in America and shared our personal feelings and experiences. All teachers and staff also participated in a Network Professional Development session, led by our school therapist, which highlighted Adverse Childhood Experiences as they relate to race and poverty in our society. We ended the session discussing the impact on our classrooms, schools, and districts and ways to combat the effects. Just prior to the school opening, the Mary Black Foundation presented information and data on Health Inequities in our community with the goal of Achieving Health for all. As well, a diverse panel of community leaders shared their stories of economic mobility and how education, generational wealth, and family dynamics led to their current status. Race, equity and the celebration of differences are an extremely important element of our school culture and success.



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

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Our four core pillars are an early start, family partnerships, a holistic approach, and great teachers. All four pillars are equally important, but dedication to early start has been crucial in the school's ability to continue supporting and advancing students despite the closure of March 2020.

As cited by human development expert, James Heckman, "Early childhood education fosters cognitive skills along with attentiveness, motivation, self-control, and sociability- the charter skills that turn knowledge into know-how and people into productive citizens." Our three-year-old program provides a strong foundation in early literacy and numeracy skills, social and emotional development, and physical skills, such as gross and fine motor development. Pre-COVID, our three-year-old scholars attended a full-day program with eighteen students and two teachers in each classroom. This year, we created two sessions (morning and afternoon) and offered families with medical concerns an "alternative" option that includes weekly work packets and optional virtual one-on-one sessions. These young scholars form the bedrock of MSA as a result of their early start and access to a challenging, rigorous education.

As a neighborhood school we are very visible in the community we serve. Hosting community events in the neighborhoods where our children live provides the opportunity for families with children younger than three to learn about our school and programs. All three-year-olds in our attendance zone are encouraged to register at MSA. We screen each child with the Ages and Stages Questionnaire, and conduct family interviews prior to admission. These interviews set the stage for parental involvement throughout their time at MSA. Each year the needs of our youngest scholars change and we adapt to address those needs. This year, a play therapist was hired to address social/emotional needs. We have also strengthened partnerships with the housing authority to reduce the transitory nature of our student's living arrangements.

Once enrolled at MSA as three-year-olds, we do all we can to ensure these scholars will be successful. The rigor of our curriculum begins with our three-year-old scholars and continues to fifth-grade graduation. We recently graduated our first group of scholars that started in 3K, and they met their target of eight-five percent scoring in the eighty-fifth percentile or above on the NWEA MAP reading and math portions. Over fifty percent qualified for the DUKE Tip Scholars Program. Their success is a direct result of the partnerships, academic rigor, and social development that starts in 3K.