

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

Official School Name Arlington Elementary School - 02
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 306 South Main
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Arlington State SD Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 57212-9999

County Kingsbury

Telephone (605) 983-5597 Fax (605) 983-2820

Web site/URL https://www.arlington.k12.sd.us E-mail lisa.parry@k12.sd.us

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. Brian Sampson E-mail Brian.Sampson@k12.sd.us
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Arlington School District 38-1 Tel. (605) 983-5597

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

Date _____

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board President/Chairperson Mr. Justin Petersen
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

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

Date _____

(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

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

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

PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION

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

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

PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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

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

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 1 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 1 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 3 TOTAL

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

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

- Urban (city or town)
- Suburban
- Rural

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

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	7	10	17
1	8	13	21
2	11	11	22
3	10	8	18
4	9	14	23
5	8	11	19
6	6	11	17
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	59	78	137

*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
 - 0 % Asian
 - 0 % Black or African American
 - 5.1 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 94.1 % White
 - 0.8 % Two or more races
 - 100 % Total**

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

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2019 - 2020 school year: 3%

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

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

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	2
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	2
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	4
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	133
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.03
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	3

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

Spanish

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 16 %

Total number students who qualify: 22

8. Students receiving special education services: 18 %
25 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>1</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>1</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>4</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay | <u>9</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>7</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>0</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 3
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to the nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below. If your current staffing structure has shifted due to COVID-19 impacts and you are uncertain or unable to determine FTEs, provide an estimate.

	Number of Staff
Administrators	3
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	7
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	5
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	5
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	1

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 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%	96%	97%	96%	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.

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

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

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

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

The mission of the Arlington School district is to educate all students in a safe, challenging, and disciplined environment and to provide each student the opportunity to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to be a productive citizen in an ever-changing society.

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.

Except for a weeklong departure to remote learning the week prior to Thanksgiving, Arlington Schools staff, students, and families have enjoyed in-person, traditional learning in 2020-2021. (We do have a few long-term remote learners who chose this model out of an abundance of caution.)

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

Arlington School District 38-1 serves the communities of Arlington, Badger, and Hetland, South Dakota. Arlington is “home base” for the district and has a population of approximately 900. (Both Badger and Hetland are less populated.) Our proximity to popular lakes and the “big towns” of Madison, Watertown, and Brookings make Arlington a desirable place to live. Many adults commute to work in these larger communities, and while they spend their weekdays out of town, they take tremendous pride in our school and its people. Even our street signs and water tower display a red cardinal head in a nod to our mascot. We are rural, and that label provokes a number of stereotypes: hard working, independent, proud, family-oriented, and outdoorsy. Frankly, everything positive you have heard about people like us is true...and our students are much the same.

Our success (Arlington Elementary School was named a 2020 National ESEA Distinguished School and Arlington High School students posted the top ACT composite scores in the state of South Dakota in 2019 and 2020) comes back to a school culture rooted in, among other principles, the relentless pursuit and appropriate support of our students. The academic excellence we have achieved is not the result of some “teaching method of the month” or even of our carefully selected curricula. Instead, we can trace our student achievement to the day-in, day-out hard work of planning for, engaging in, and assessing student learning. Every district can commit to this, and while improvement can take time to demonstrate, in time it will certainly become evident.

Having said this, I must recognize some of the systems we do have in place. They include, but are not limited to, Arlington Elementary School’s Title reading and math programs. Our staff of one full-time and one part-time Title teacher as well as one full-time Title paraprofessional devotes itself to students who need individualized support but do not qualify for special education. These students benefit from small group and one-on-one instruction during the school day. They also have the opportunity to work with support staff as part of an after-school program. We believe deliberate and dynamic student grouping is foundational to effective student support. Using formative and summative assessments, we determine student needs and create small groups for our teachers and paraprofessionals to target. Especially important is our willingness to recreate groups as new information emerges, new opportunities present themselves, and new academic expectations are imposed.

Academics are the foundation of all we do, yet we are also charged with meeting students’ social-emotional needs. Our school counselor has established a number of unique programs to address this including, but not limited to, an elementary Lunch Bunch. Small groups of students meet to eat with her and a few classmates, and she takes this time to discuss heavy topics—stress, friendship, conflict, body image, media, etc.—in a light manner and atmosphere. Opportunities like these are so important to our students’ development. Frankly, if we do not meet these needs, then the academic pieces will never fall into place. (Think Maslow here.)

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

Reading/ELA:

Curriculum: Our elementary school has utilized the Wonders/Journeys series for the past five years. While this text (published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt) is the centerpiece of our ELA curriculum, teachers supplement it with a variety of materials they create, lots of books, and online programs like Reading Plus, Accelerated Reader (AR), and IXL.

Our elementary classrooms devote from 90-120 minutes daily on literacy (reading and writing) instruction.

In response to our school closing last year, our teachers learned to use SeeSaw (PK-3) and Google Classroom (4-6) to support online learners. While only a small number of our students have opted for ongoing remote learning this year—their families have medical issues that prevent them from attending with us—we are able to support students gone for a variety of reasons using these platforms. Frankly, the availability of content online helps students get and stay caught up in the classroom.

Our teachers use a variety of techniques to meet their students' needs. In kindergarten, students are working with manipulatives, charts, whiteboards, and other tools as they master the letters, their sounds, and even some rudimentary words. Meanwhile in sixth grade, students are reading novels and recording their reactions or creating new content via Flipgrid or another app. In each classroom, though, there is an emphasis on what works: small group instruction connected to level-appropriate content. (There is no substitute for this. Yes, web-based programs can provide individual students with what they need, but the social part—a non-negotiable—is lost. Small groups with caring and competent leaders are the only way to go.)

Because we have the luxury of small class sizes and ample staff, we are able to offer seemingly continuous formative assessments. Someone is always sitting down next to a student and working to get information about that kiddo's present levels. "Will you read to me?" "Why do you think the character did that?" "Let me see what you wrote." "What questions do you still have?" These conversations pepper our ELA sessions, and it is in these moments we learn most about our students' mastery (or lack thereof). We administer summative assessments, too. These include teacher & textbook-created end-of-unit exams, NWEA Maps tests, and, for grades 3-6, the Smarter Balanced assessment.

We use the assessments mentioned above to help us determine how well our instruction is helping students master the learning standards. Because these tests are just one snapshot, we rely on our own tracking. All teachers create and update curriculum maps and non-tenured teachers document their standards in their daily lesson plans to ensure accountability.

In addition to providing our Title and SPED students individualized, targeted instruction to help them master the standards, we have instituted a K-2 phonics program designed to address the needs of advanced, proficient, basic, and below basic students. Three days a week, our K-2 elementary teachers, our Title teachers, our SPED director, and a number of our paraprofessionals lead small groups through phonics instruction intended to build their ability to tackle challenging texts. This is unique as the advanced students enjoy the full attention of the classroom teacher who is there to be sure they are challenged and pushed further than possible in whole-group instruction. Meanwhile, proficient and basic students work in small groups, too, with materials and activities chosen for them. We are tracking progress and expect to see gains from this approach. We used anecdotal evidence from staff and the NWEA Maps scores to create our initial groups, and we are experiencing the need to alter groups along the way. (Being responsive to what we are seeing—both in terms of successes and setbacks—is critical to the success of this phonics program.)

Math

Our elementary school is in the second year of utilizing the Eureka math series. We are pleased with this
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choice as it requires reflection while presenting rigor, the two keys to a valuable math curriculum. While this text is the centerpiece of our math curriculum, teachers supplement it with a variety of materials they create and online programs like IXL.

Our elementary classrooms devote from 60-90 minutes to daily math instruction.

In response to our school closing last year, our teachers learned to use SeeSaw (PK-3) and Google Classroom (4-6) to support online learners. While only a small number of our students have opted for ongoing remote learning this year—their families have medical issues that prevent them from attending with us—we are able to support students gone for a variety of reasons using these platforms. Frankly, the availability of content online helps students get and stay caught up in the classroom.

Our teachers use a variety of techniques to meet their students' needs. In kindergarten, students are working with manipulatives, charts, whiteboards, and other tools as they master their numbers and ways to work with them. Meanwhile in sixth grade, students are huddled in groups working through the stages of solving a complex problem. (Of course, sixth-grade students use manipulatives, too, when they are helpful. One would see them utilized less often, though, and would likely see a greater reliance on traditional instruction and individual & group work.)

As in ELA, we formatively assess students' math understanding/mastery all day long. Teachers and support staff meander through the classroom looking at papers, checking in with students, asking probing questions, and intervening when someone has gone astray. We administer summative assessments, too. These include teacher & textbook-created end-of-unit exams, NWEA Maps tests, and, for grades 3-6, the Smarter Balanced assessment.

We use the assessments mentioned above to help us determine how well our instruction is helping students master the learning standards. Because these tests are just one snapshot, we rely on our own tracking (all teachers create and update curriculum maps and non-tenured teachers document their standards in their daily lesson plans) to ensure accountability.

Small group intervention is our bread and butter! Classroom teachers pay attention to who is swimming, who is floating, and who is sinking...and then we act accordingly. Those who are struggling with a concept enjoy targeted intervention while those who have mastered the skill tackle a challenge problem. IXL works well to provide problems at each individual student's current level, but as with all web-based programs, it lacks the social aspect students need and often crave. This means that while IXL is a piece of what we do, it does not take the place of person-to-person cooperation.

Science & Social Studies: Our K-6 teachers use a variety of resources to bring science and social studies to life for their students. Often, science finds itself intertwined with math while social studies and ELA share the spotlight. Our students really enjoy Mystery Science, and we find a lot of meaningful questions and conversations are born of these videos. In fourth grade, students take a deep, deep dive into South Dakota history with a SD History Book and a wax museum presentation capping off their experiences. These students and their teacher also participate in an Oregon Trail simulation that is a hit year after year.

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 know school is about more than reading, writing, and arithmetic! Students need to be exposed to experiences outside of "traditional academics," and we have a number of classes to meet these needs.

Arts: Our K-6 students average 45 minutes in art (sculpting, painting, drawing, weaving, etc.) and 50 minutes in music (vocal) each week. In addition, our fourth, fifth, and sixth-grade students are invited to participate in band which averages 45 minutes per day.

Physical Education: Students in K-6 participate in PE from two to five days per week. (Our kindergarten students go for 20 minutes twice a week while our sixth-grade students—who do not go to recess—have PE each day for 20 minutes.) This teacher introduces students to popular and traditional games and discusses issues related to health and safety.

Library: Our school librarian holds a thirty-minute class with K-5 students once per week.

ACES: Our school counselor holds ACES (academic, career, emotional, and social) classes with K-6 students. Their focus depends on the age level and the needs of the group. Some cornerstones are bullying, self-advocacy, kindness/friendship, cooperation, stress, conflict resolution, and, for older students, substance abuse.

Keyboarding: Students in grades 3-6 spend time with the art of keyboarding. (This is born of the requirement that students type responses to Smarter Balanced writing prompts. We found that students with a lot of good things to say were quite hindered by their inability to type. This focus is designed to meet that need.)

3. Academic Supports:

Because what is true and appropriate for a student in math or ELA could be one thing today and another tomorrow, our team assesses and reassesses and assesses students again. When we know if students have/have not or will/will not master a concept, we make decisions in that students' best interest. For example, when the fourth-grade fractions unit rolls around, some students who have been fine in math won't be fine any longer. They need us to get through this complicated concept, so we swoop in! Our classroom teachers are the first line of defense, and they—along with the help of their available paraprofessionals—work alongside students to provide the scaffolding necessary for success. When the student gains some understanding and independence, we can remove the scaffold and let that student try on his or her own. Title and SPED students are provided for by a dedicated staff. With a district SPED director, an elementary SPED teacher, 1.5 Title teachers, and a number of SPED and Title paras, we can get to the students who need us and implements strategies we think appropriate for them. Our test scores do not reveal any achievement gaps. Here is an overview of our most recent results: 2018-2019 % of students proficient or advanced in ELA: 76% in math: 81% attendance rate: 98% The school routinely scores in the 65%+ proficient or advanced in ELA and 70%+ proficient or advanced in math on the Smarter Balanced exam. We do not have data for 2019-2020. Though documented gaps do not exist, we do support students who perform below (Title, SPED, intervention based on formal and informal formative and summative assessments) and above (phonics enrichment, IXL, and other individualized web-based programs) grade level. A team of SPED professionals including a director, a highly qualified SPED teacher, and highly qualified paraprofessionals supports students with disabilities. In addition, we have a certified EL coordinator to drive the curriculum and instruction for our Spanish-speaking students.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

We have been fortunate to enjoy in-person learning this year, so we have daily access to our students. This is certainly a blessing. Our students begin their school day being greeted by our lead teacher who stands by the door and tells each of them she is happy to see them and that she hopes they have a great day. This routine is repeated at the end of the day when another teacher stands by the door to tell them all we were glad they were in school and wish them a great afternoon and evening. While these practices are important (and we execute them without fail), it is what happens between the hello and goodbye that matters most. Because we are a small school of 141 students in a small community where we know families and their backgrounds, we can develop close relationships with our K-6 kids. What does this look and sound like? Calling them by name, asking about their sister who just went to college in nearby Brookings, remarking on the new garage going up on the property, giggling with them about the funny library book they are reading, embracing them when their dog dies, telling them to say hi to their mom and dad... This list goes on and on. Students at Arlington Elementary know they matter. We want them here every single day, and we tell them that. If someone arrives late to school, the message is clear: we are glad you made it, and we would have missed you if you were gone. Belonging is the foundation of Maslow's Hierarchy for a reason, and we take this reality quite seriously. We also have a committed and compassionate school counselor who works with all students to help them realize their value. One particularly "cool" program she initiated is Lunch Bunch. This involves a small group of students eating with her so she can drive the conversation and keep the focus on topics like friendship, kindness, and self-love. This has been such a hit with our kids, and I see these lessons coming to life in them.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Our various communication systems help bind us to our families and stakeholders. Each Wednesday, we send home a paper or digital folder (patrons indicate their preference) that includes grade reports, classroom updates, district information, and even community notices. This, coupled with access to updated online grades, makes it easy for everyone interested in academic performance to stay up to date. In addition, we utilize a School Reach phone program that allows us to disseminate time-sensitive information. This was especially helpful when we were forced into remote learning from March to May last year. We also invite our families in several times a year. Traditionally, our year kicks off with an Open House/Curriculum Night. On these evenings, we welcome students and their parents/guardians to find their classrooms, meet their teachers, drop off their school supplies, and learn a little about what lies ahead. This is well-attended, and we always receive great feedback indicating this helps our students—especially the very young or those new to town—feel more comfortable as the first day of school approaches. Later in the year, our teachers invite families in each fall for conferences. We spend this evening discussing students' triumphs and challenges, and we work on building partnerships that will benefit the kids when they are here and when they are home. Truly, if we are not teaming with Mom and Dad, we are not meeting our students' needs. Finally, our Title team hosts a Fun Night each winter. These revolve around a fun theme—the Olympics, at home on the farm, camping in the woods—and allow us to "Sesame Street" (the term I like to use for disguise) learning. Sometimes our older students help with this endeavor, and that adds to the value of the experience for all involved. These opportunities help us build and maintain relationships with our stakeholders.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

In the recent past, our professional development has been best characterized as "hit and miss." We talked about something, made valiant attempts to act on new information, and then fell back into old habits. Frankly, much of it was a waste of time and money. This year, though, we embarked on a PD journey around student engagement and effective feedback that we hope to sustain. We rolled out the first session in February of 2021, and we expect to revisit these critical topics in May and August of 2021 and in February, May, and August of 2022. If necessary, we are open to revisiting and adding on and revisiting and adding on... As long as these topics serve us—and I cannot foresee a time they will not—we will invest in them. We have also semi-focused on ACES (adverse childhood experiences) and their impact on our students (and

perhaps our staff), technology for distance learning, and extracting data from NWEA MAPS testing. Each of these provides a different lens through which we can examine our district, and because these focuses are quite varied, there is something for each staff member to embrace. Some of us gravitate toward the social-emotional aspect of teaching and learning, and the ACES training gave us new insight and empathy. Others are looking for ways to effectively and seamlessly incorporate technology into our teaching—especially in this new dawn of forced distance learning—so we explored Google Classroom and SeeSaw. Still others are data-driven, and the MAPS satisfied our appetite for objective information useful in decision-making.

4. School Leadership:

Our school’s leaders believe any change—for the better or the worse—is incremental, and those striving for improvement must show patience. As James Clear notes in his bestseller *Atomic Habits*, change does not come as some cataclysmic event. Rather, it is the result of hundreds...maybe thousands...of little changes over time. As a district, we adjust our teaching practices, our curriculum, our technology, etc., and then we give these changes time to produce results. The same is true when thinking about our people. We recognize we may not see great gains right away in our students or staff members, but this cannot provoke us to abandon our interventions or professional development commitments. It can take time for the proverbial light bulb to turn on, and when it does, the waiting seems well worth it. This fundamental philosophy is directly connected to our two PD goals of better understanding & cultivating student engagement and providing effective feedback. We are taking these ideas on slowly, asking for incremental change, and adding more and greater expectations as we successfully establish new habits. It is fortunate the leadership team members most closely connected to student achievement are on the proverbial “same page” when it comes to this and other ideas. The principal, special education director, two Title teachers, and lead teacher all embrace the need for pausing to recognize seemingly insignificant milestones as they pave the way for significant improvement. This is evident in the inception and subsequent evolution of our K-2 Phonics Focus program (discussed in greater detail above).

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

Our school and community may appear quite homogenous, but each of our students, staff members, and stakeholders is unique. Some enjoy economic security while others face scarcity. Some lean heavily on religion while others feel no such calling. Some value education while others see school as a required nuisance. No matter their background, we are obliged to serve all of our students and to do all we can to meet their unique needs. With two EL students on our roster, we supported a staff member who desired to earn an endorsement in this area, and she now serves as our point-person in their education. Teachers collaborate with her to adjust assignments for these young men so we can ascertain their prior and newly acquired knowledge. It is quite gratifying to know these learners have someone devoted to their success—both academic and social—here in school.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Our success boils down to two words: relentless pursuit. As I noted in the summary above, there is no magic teaching method or curriculum behind the school's success. It can all be attributed to working hard and to working smart on behalf of our students.

This begins with determining students' present levels; continues with using those levels to determine appropriate content, instruction methods, and groups for the students; and concludes with revisiting present levels and making changes to the established content, methods, and groups. It takes the time and committed staff members to do this, and we are fortunate to have such people on staff.

This is, in part, because of our district's response to being forced into remote learning last spring. We all feared students would be adversely affected by being out of their classrooms and away from their teachers for a quarter of the school year, so our board acted and authorized us to hire a full-time Title teacher (we had relied on a half time teacher in this role) and two regular education paraprofessionals. With these three professionals poised and ready to join forces with our existing staff, we got to work.

First, we set out to establish a baseline score of our students' performance (this happened K-12) by administering the NWEA MAPS test. With this information in hand, our Title, special education, and regular education teachers joined forces to support students struggling at grade level, meet the needs of those performing at grade level, and challenge those achieving above grade level.

Title students and students on IEPs receive services as they always have; they meet in small groups with highly qualified teachers both during the school day and, if they wish, as part of an after-school program offered to all. In addition, we commit 90 minutes per week to small groups for all of our K-2 students. During these 30 minute blocks, students work with either a teacher or a paraprofessional on reading exercises targeted to their present levels and intended to build their capacity as text consumers and creators.

We are excited to retest our students at the end of the year so we can gauge the impact of our interventions. This will surely help us plan for next fall and beyond.