

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

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

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

Official School Name Thrasher Elementary School
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 1301 James Boulevard
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Signal Mountain State TN Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 37377-2627

County Hamilton

Telephone (423) 886-0882 Fax (423) 886-0888

Web site/URL https://thrasher.hcde.org E-mail paulson_jeff@hcde.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. Bryan Johnson E-mail johnson_bryan@hcde.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Hamilton County School District Tel. (423) 498-7020

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. Marco Perez
(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):
- 41 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 21 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 22 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 84 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	37	37	74
1	52	41	93
2	31	45	76
3	41	55	96
4	53	36	89
5	53	42	95
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	267	256	523

*Schools that house PreK programs should count preschool students **only** if the school administration is responsible for the program.

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 1 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 3.8 % Asian
 - 1.3 % Black or African American
 - 4.6 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 1.3 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 88 % White
 - 0 % Two or more races
 - 100 % Total**

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

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2019 - 2020 school year: 4%

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	13
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	8
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	21
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	526
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.04
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	4

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

Spanish, Chinese

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

0 Total number ELL

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

Total number students who qualify: 38

8. Students receiving special education services: 12 %

63 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>7</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>1</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>10</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>6</u> Developmental Delay | <u>11</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>28</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>1</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>2</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 4

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	2
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	25
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	10
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	6
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	8

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 21:1

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%	99%	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. 2004

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

Thrasher's mission, through high expectations, is to develop children with active and creative minds, compassion for others, and the courage to act on their beliefs.

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.

Thrasher has been serving students in-person since August 12, 2020, with the exception of three weeks when the number of county Covid cases peaked. We have also been serving students virtually through our Thrasher@home program for the same period of time. Our second and third grades have had a designated virtual teacher all year, while the rest of the grades were teaching in person and virtually. For the second semester, we partnered with another school to gain two more designated virtual teachers for first and fourth. As of now, only our kindergarten and fifth grade teachers are teaching both in-person and virtually.

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

Thrasher is a neighborhood school nestled on Signal Mountain, a suburb of Chattanooga. Parents, staff, and community are very supportive and are committed to Thrasher's success. All stakeholders are invited and encouraged to contribute to Thrasher's mission to engage every student every day. Thrasher strives to meet every student's needs in a variety of ways.

Academically, we always are up for challenges. We sponsor Science Olympiads teams, robotics teams, chess competitions, Math Olympiad teams, spelling bees, Young Southern Writer's contestants, Design Challenge teams, Carson Scholars, and almost any opportunity to advance students academically. We have a competitive spirit at Thrasher and expect students to work hard to succeed in these challenges.

Emotionally, we have an amazing Guidance Counselor who supports every student in a wide variety of ways. She teaches every class social-emotional (SEL) lessons addressing character traits from perseverance to honesty and issues that matter to elementary students such as bullying and study skills. She meets with students in small groups and one-on-one to talk about how things are going in her Lunch Bunches. She gives guidance to teachers and staff in matters of students needing emotional support. For the community, she organizes Parent Seminars. This year parents have been invited to Zoom seminars that have addressed dealing with defiance and pre-teen usage of social media. She is available to everyone and proactive in finding students with emotional needs. Our students' social needs are routinely attended to through our Guidance lessons and during classroom instruction. Our Guidance Counselor gives lessons on topics such as How to be a Friend and What to do if You're Feeling Sad or Mad. Role play and discussion help our children get along with peers and understand how to deal with some of life's situations. In the classroom, our teachers use best practices in instruction and this involves teaching students how to engage in productive conversations.

Physically, Thrasher students are presented with many opportunities to keep physically fit. Health and fitness are taught directly by our Physical Education teacher and supported by our classroom teachers. We sponsor a cross country team and a track team, which compete in many county-wide events. Students also participate in the American Heart Association's Jump Rope for Heart. Our teachers take their classes to our outdoor classrooms and for frequent hikes on our mile-long nature trail. Our students are highly involved in sports and dance classes in the community.

A wide variety of cultures are represented at Thrasher and we recognize and celebrate them all. Our Music Teacher's monthly program for the community features a grade level each month, performing musical selections from around the world. Our Librarian leads each grade level through month-long dives into special history months, different genres of literature, and Tennessee culture. In addition, students are encouraged to share their cultures through different projects in class.

Thrasher sets itself apart by maintaining high expectations for all students and by seeking ways to keep students highly engaged and motivated. Thrasher was the first school in our district to implement a STEM Lab, providing high interest, hands-on lessons involving science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Every student, K-5, was involved in learning in the STEM Lab. Our STEM Lab is now being replaced by an E-Lab. Thrasher was recently selected to receive a grant that would provide for the installation of a fabrication lab that will be made part of the curriculum for every student.

We were honored to be named a Blue Ribbon School in 2004. This honor brought a lot of pride to Thrasher and increased the community's awareness of Thrasher's commitment to our students' success. The Blue Ribbon Award conveys an expectation of excellence to current and future staff.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

Thrasher’s curriculums in literacy, math, science, and social studies begin with Tennessee State Standards, utilize the programs chosen and created by teachers and leaders, and are presented using high leverage instructional strategies outlined in the Hamilton County Schools (HCS) Instructional Framework. Every content area is carefully planned by grade level teams with support from our instructional coach. Goals are set, clear learning targets (CLTs) are created, common assessments are written and aligned to standards, and formative assessments are planned. Daily, our students read, think, connect, and respond critically, in writing and through student discourse, in all subject areas.

The EL Literacy curriculum, adopted by HCS this year, closely matches Thrasher’s expectations that our students become independent critical readers, listeners, thinkers and communicators. As we enhance and accelerate the EL program, to maintain the rigor that our students are accustomed to, we strive to build content knowledge, vocabulary, stamina and curiosity. We dedicate 2 blocks each day to literacy. In the Module block, grade-level appropriate complex texts are paired with regular opportunities for student discourse and purposeful writing tasks. During the second block of literacy, we have shifted away from guided reading groups and now focus on EL phonics-based Reading Foundations Skills Block in grades K-2, and ALL block (Additional Language and Literacy) in grades 3-5. These blocks offer differentiation through teacher-led small group work, independent reading, fluency work, purposeful writing, research, and language and usage practice. The flexibility of tasks assigned in Skills and ALL blocks, allow daily opportunities for our students to read, think, connect, and respond critically, in writing and through student discourse, to multiple types of complex texts and media. Additional texts are chosen to build knowledge, vocabulary, promote fluency and stamina, and to engage the students.

In mathematics, our teachers are dedicated to creating an environment that develops mathematically literate students who are confident in their abilities to reason and communicate in authentic situations. As the teachers unpack the Tennessee State Math Standards, they internalize concepts and practice strategies. In grade level teams, they set goals, create CLTs and flexibly adapt the lessons from the HCS Curriculum Guide. The guide suggests lessons from the TN-Ready curriculum, offers supplemental lessons, and suggests strategies for teachers to implement. Our teachers consistently use Habits of Mind and Habits of Interaction, manipulatives, purposeful questioning, and implementation of performance tasks. Student discourse, entwined into the lessons, follows protocols that teachers have further incorporated into student conversations in all subject areas. Teachers are consistent in the use of the Launch-Explore-Summarize delivery method of teaching their lessons.

Implementation of a strong science curriculum is an integral part of our success at Thrasher. Teams build their CLTs on Tennessee Academic Science Standards and design 3D Science lessons, emphasizing the Science and Engineering Practices (SEPs), and the Cross-Cutting Concepts (CCCs). STEMscopes, our online curriculum adoption, provides access to a variety of media experiences, but the core learning takes place when teachers implement the 5E-based science lessons (Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, and Evaluate) that have the students doing science, making claims about their experiences, and supporting those claims with evidence. Science provides Thrasher students an engaging venue to practice critical thinking, questioning, communication, and to develop their curiosity.

Social Studies is often integrated with our literacy program. Following the state standards, complex texts combined with opinion and persuasive writing tasks give students the opportunity to become informed and engaged citizens. Thrasher teachers also integrate social studies into many of our Project Based Learning (PBL) units.

Thrasher is dedicated to Project Based Learning (PBL). Each grade-level completes two PBLs. The guiding questions and supporting goals and activities are social studies or science based, and the supporting activities are literacy based. A social studies PBL is our Civil War living history museum. Students research characters, write and perform short vignettes, design and create costumes, and perform at the historic McCoy Farms for the community of Signal Mountain.

Our teachers rely on formative and summative assessment data to drive all instruction. Quarterly, district Benchmark Assessments, provide detailed reports of student performance by standard. Results drive instructional goals for the next quarter. Mastery Connect quizzes are created as common assessments and provide checks for mastery throughout the quarter. EasyCBM and iReady are two diagnostic tools used for literacy and math. Daily formative assessments are planned into daily lessons. These checks for understanding can be student hand signals, antidotal notes, exit tickets, or listening to a student discussion. Analysis of these assessments dictates the differentiated instruction in small teacher-led groups.

Our Thrasher community adapted quickly to virtual learning. Technology had been highly integrated into all of our teaching methods prior to the pandemic; it was a fairly smooth transition to virtual learning. Our curriculum and expectations were not compromised. Grade level teams collaborated in creating short videos to teach concepts and used Zoom meetings with students to build community, formatively assess, and to continue small-group instruction. Canvas, Google Classroom, and ClassDojo platforms were quickly learned and used to deliver and collect assignments. Minimizing programs and keeping our teaching methods on Zoom as consistent as possible produced the best results. Less than ten percent of our students remain virtual. Assessment results predict that academically, these students will not have fallen behind when they return for the next school 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:

Thrasher provides five Related Arts classes to all students from Kindergarten through fifth grade. Each week, every child participates in Library, Music, Physical Education, Art, and Technology classes for 50 minutes each. Art and Technology classes are provided through parent and community support. The schedule of Related Arts classes is arranged so that each grade level team has time and space for collaboration each day. Students also benefit from STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) instruction each year, except for this year due to COVID-19 and staffing restrictions. However, we intend for this to resume for the 2021-2022 school year.

In Physical Education, not only do students learn more about maintaining healthy bodies and continually build endurance in aerobic activity, they engage in games and exercises that are designed to foster collaboration, problem-solving, and critical thinking. The teacher also designs games and physical activities in which students practice or review academic content – math facts, phonetic patterns, and science content to name only a few examples.

In Music class, students learn the concepts of music (including its vocabulary) and participate in creating music through singing and exploration of instruments from different families. Students also perform with their grade level (K-5) in one community performance each year. The performances include speaking, singing, playing instruments, acting, choreography, and costumes or coordinated outfits. Music class has also been integrated into grade level project-based learning units. For example, in fifth-grade's Civil War Living History Museum, civil-war era songs are performed in some of the exhibits.

In Library class, students learn how to research, engage with media, and select independent reading. The librarian coordinates with grade level teams to explore current academic content while students learn and practice how to access a variety of media. The library is also a regular resource for grade level project-based learning units.

In Art class, students are exposed to artists, techniques, and materials. Students emulate styles and

techniques, explore the various media, and apply these tools for their own self-expression. Sometimes, we learn a lot about our students and their hopes and dreams as well as their concerns and fears through their art.

In Technology class, students learn how to use technology as a tool and not merely a vehicle for consuming entertainment. As children progress through the grade levels, they engage in using the technology to create art, to code, to program, and to design. They learn to evaluate the information they find, and to use powerful tools respectfully and responsibly. They also learn how to be digitally responsible citizens.

The STEM class gives students a tangible way to practice high-level skills of collaboration, critical thinking, communication, problem-solving, and innovation. In STEM, students are the scientists, the engineers, and the artists as they explore a problem and work together to create and implement a solution.

3. Academic Supports:

Thrasher uses the State of Tennessee's Tiered model of instruction and intervention. All students are part of Tier 1 instruction in the general education classroom. Each classroom has structures for differentiated instruction through small-groups, strategy lessons, and levels of texts.

Each grade level is responsible for Tier 2 instruction as well. Through the Response to Intervention and Instruction process, students receive differentiated supports. An RtI2 team uses a universal screener, data, and professional collaboration to provide targeted instruction to students performing in the lowest 25th percentile, the upper 10th percentile, and those on grade level. Regular progress monitoring helps guide the decision-making process each month.

Tier 3 instruction is provided for students performing in the lowest 10th percentile through an Interventionist that we titled Extra Reading Support Teacher. The RtI2 team uses a universal screener, data, and collaboration to identify students that will most benefit from this limited resource. Regular progress monitoring helps guide the decision-making process each month.

Tier 4 instruction and supports are provided through the Exceptional Education team.

ELL services are provided at a neighboring school. Students that are recognized to benefit from more than one language are screened for proficiency in English. If a student qualifies for ELL services, the parents can opt for the child to attend the neighboring school with transportation provided by the school. Parents can waive the ELL services to stay at Thrasher. An ELL teacher visits Thrasher regularly to support teachers and administrators in supporting English language learners.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

The focus of all we do is for the benefit of students. Our first avenue for motivating students is to engage every child every day in classroom lessons. Teachers and administrators at Thrasher build relationships with students and families. Thrasher maintains an identity of being a school made up of people that only seek to do their best in everything – schoolwork, friendships, games, etc.

A full-time school counselor teaches lessons in each classroom about making beneficial choices, speaking up for oneself, protecting others, and choosing kindness. While all of the teachers work to excite elementary students about attending college in the future, the school counselor also facilitates this college-minded approach through College Week each year and taking 5th-graders to tour the local college campus.

Students in 4th and 5th grade are highlighted each quarter for achieving honor roll (As and Bs) and star roll (all As).

Each week, we hold a school-wide assembly. The only focus of every assembly is students. We celebrate students' character through weekly Panther Pride awards. Students share their talents with each other by playing musical instruments, demonstrating a gymnastic move, showing how they taught tricks to their pets, etc. The purpose of the assembly is to build community, to help students grow a strong identity as a Thrasher student and Signal Mountain community member, and to remember that there is more to school than academics.

Students are also highlighted in the morning announcements. Part of our behavior model is that students stop and ASK themselves if what they are doing is Appropriate, Safe, and Kind. Students submit tips for being appropriate, safe, or kind in a variety of settings and situations around school, and these are read each day in the morning announcements.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

We believe our academic success is due in part to keeping the community and parents engaged with the teaching and learning process. Homework is given for extra practice and for parents to stay connected and involved with what is happening in each classroom. Last year, we began a series of Parent Seminars. The seminars are led by expert guest speakers and by Thrasher personnel. Seminar topics have included Stress, Anxiety, and Worry, Oppositional Behaviors in Children, and Social Media and Screen Time as well as math and literacy events and a science night.

The Project-Based Learning units become parent and community events as well. The Civil-War Living History Museum was held at the historic McCoy farm, and the community attended this free event. Kindergarten's study in Native American history brings parents to the campus. The Grade Level Performances (led by the music classroom) always require 200+ chairs to be put out. In October, the PTA helps us put on a Monster Mash, which is a community evening event simply for building community. It's not a fund-raiser, it's free to attend, and parents sign up to bring foods and drinks. Each April, faculty, staff, and community volunteers host an Earth Night on Thrasher's campus -- an event that educates, entertains, and inspires people about conservation.

We depend heavily on parent volunteers to listen to children read, to serve in the workroom, to maintain the grounds, and to accomplish special projects. Keeping the community invested in the school keeps a sense of pride and ownership outside of the school walls. It also keeps us accountable to a community that values the education of its children.

Parents started the Mountain Education Foundation to streamline fundraising that directly supports students' education. The relationship between Thrasher, the other mountain schools, and the MEF is reciprocal and

focused entirely on the benefit to students. Thrasher uses funds from the MEF to pay for an art teacher, a technology teacher, and extra reading supports (interventionist).

3. Creating Professional Culture:

Thrasher strives to create a highly professional environment, where teachers and staff feel valued and know that Thrasher wouldn't be the great school that it is without them. We all know that our number one priority is the success of our students and that we are here to do all we can for them. The voices of teachers and staff are respected and part of almost all decisions that are made.

Our staff has been involved in professional learning communities focusing on what makes a great team by engaging in team building professional development by Mike Mattos. Through self-reflection and conversation, grade level teams rated themselves on a rating scale and discussed why they rated themselves as they did and evaluated how they individually contribute to the team and how the team communicates. As a result of the training, participants understand the importance of valuing team members' strengths, realizing that all students are OUR students, and having expectations of team members.

This year, as we have been shifting and adjusting to teaching in-person and virtually, teachers have been empowered to work in teams to manage, design, and deliver both formats of instruction. The responsibility for students at home and in-person is huge, and administration acknowledges that this year requires a great deal of extra time and work to meet the needs of all of our students. Grade level teams work together to lighten the load and share ideas. During the second semester, we formed a partnership with a nearby elementary school to combine online classes when the number of virtual learners decreased.

Our teachers are valued as professionals. We celebrate their successes and call on their strengths. When a teacher recognizes that he or she needs support in a new program or in anything else, our Instructional Coach is ready to support that teacher with planning, modeling, resources, and feedback. Our teachers are encouraged to continuously self-reflect, to visit other classrooms, as well as to choose and attend professional development which meets their needs. Administrators routinely meet with teachers to talk about how things are going. Walk-throughs are carried out among grade levels and feedback is given to the group. The focus of the feedback is to communicate the great things happening in the classrooms that were observed.

4. School Leadership:

Thrasher is a school of leaders. The leadership philosophy is one of servant leadership and to continually build capacity in those around us. Servant leadership focuses on the growth, empowerment, and well-being of students, parents, faculty, and staff. Each role at Thrasher has specifically defined ways to improve student outcomes.

The role of the principal and the assistant principal is to provide the best resources, structures, and training to the teachers for the benefit of the students.

As teachers ask the principal and assistant principal for resources, training, schedule tweaks, etc., the administrative team asks "How can we say 'yes'?" The ask is then vetted through the vision statement of the school, which is focused on the best results for students.

The assistant principal's role is a collaborator of the principal to fully realize the vision of the school so that students are well-prepared for the next grade level and to have the most choices in life.

The leadership team is a fluid entity. Each grade level or department has a chairperson. The chair position rotates to a different member of the team every two years. The chair position is a servant-leadership position that takes on the administrative work of the team and acts as facilitator of the PLC work. When a project, problem, or task is at hand, it is promoted to the team, and those that have skills or exceptional interests in the task volunteer to accomplish it.

The school counselor is the point person for all social-emotional related topics and the 504s, which remove barriers between children and curriculum. The instructional coach is the point person for developing faculty and staff, handling data, and all things related to teaching and learning. The PTA is a support organization that focuses on supporting the student experience. Student council members are nominated 4th and 5th graders that seek ways to improve the school experience and talk with administration about student concerns.

During COVID-19, we made several shifts to keep children safe and protect the strength of Thrasher as a community school with high standards in behavior and academics. Water fountains were closed. Parents and community members funded the installation of contact-less water bottle filling stations. The Related Arts schedule was changed to a one-week rotation so that each RA teacher only saw 18% of the school each week to reduce contacts. The playground was divided into zones with each class assigned a zone to reduce contacts. Four outdoor classrooms were created. Protocols were created for sanitizing spaces before, during, and after contacts, restroom breaks, etc. Lunch was moved to the classroom. The dismissal procedure was completely reworked to keep children distanced from each other. Assemblies were moved to a video stream. Thrasher only closed its doors when the district was closed; Thrasher did not have to close a single day due to COVID cases spreading on campus.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

Thrasher Elementary promotes a caring and inclusive school culture by embracing each student and staff members' individual needs. We recognize that each individual in our school community is an important member of our family of learners and should be treated as such. Kindness and respect are both an integral part of our school culture. We continually ask our students to think about their choices and to ask themselves if their choices are appropriate, safe, and kind. As for diversity, our teachers and our school librarian work diligently to inform our students about the history of our great country and important current events including the good and the bad. Discussions are held and opinions are shared about what could be done differently in the future and how we can all work together to do better.

Research has shown that when teachers feel valued and supported by the administrative team, they are more likely to form better relationships with each other and with their students. This is shown to be true in the collaborative school culture at Thrasher. Our teachers feel supported by our principals, and this in turn promotes a positive school culture, which directly affects our students. Strong relationships between our teachers and students enhance both social and academic well-being. Because our students feel safe in an environment of mutual respect, they are much more apt to be ready to learn and absorb the knowledge that our teachers are imparting. The lessons taught at Thrasher help to promote compassion and creativity, and our students are empowered with the courage to try harder even in the face of adversity.

We also work with our community partners to help provide food, tutoring services, and financial support for our students and their families when needed. As for outreach, classroom newsletters and an email from our principal are sent to parents weekly, and Panther Pride Assemblies are held each Friday to recognize students for excellent character choices. Parent Seminars are also held in order to equip our parents with the skills needed to help them navigate through the sometimes-difficult parts of parenting, such as the worries and anxiety caused by the current pandemic and the problems caused by the recent increase in social media usage by our students. We value our parents and work to include them in their child's academic and social-emotional learning journey. We really are better together!

Emotionally, we have an amazing Guidance Counselor who supports every student in a wide variety of ways. She teaches every class social-emotional (SEL) lessons addressing character traits from perseverance to honesty and issues that matter to elementary students such as bullying

and study skills. She meets with students in small groups and one-on-one to talk about how things are going in her Lunch Bunches. She gives guidance to teachers and staff in matters of students needing emotional support. For the community, she organizes Parent Seminars. This year parents have been invited to Zoom seminars that have addressed dealing with defiance and pre-teen usage of social media. She is available to everyone and proactive in finding students with emotional needs. Our students' social needs are routinely attended to through our Guidance lessons and during classroom instruction. Our Guidance Counselor gives lessons on topics such as How to be a Friend and What to do if You're Feeling Sad or Mad. Role play and discussion help our children get along with peers and understand how to deal with some of life's situations. In the classroom, our teachers use best practices in instruction and this involves teaching students how to engage in productive conversations.

A wide variety of cultures are represented at Thrasher and we recognize and celebrate them all. Our Music Teacher's monthly program for the community features a grade level each month, performing musical selections from around the world. Our Librarian leads each grade level through month-long dives into special history months, different genres of literature, and Tennessee culture. In addition, students are encouraged to share their cultures through different projects in class.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

One thing Thrasher did extremely well when COVID struck and schools closed was to maintain our most important function: To keep students and families engaged in what matters every single day.

Above all else, teachers worked diligently to keep lessons interesting, engaging, and focused on state standards. Flexibility increased. “Penalties” for late work disappeared. Relationships were capitalized. Teachers calmed parents down, got children excited, and encouraged each other in important work.

We constantly viewed the school from the student and parent perspective. We entered the school (in person and virtually) as students and families would. When we saw that parents of multiple children were going to be accessing education from two, three, or four entry points, we unified our process and appearance across grade levels and teams as a courtesy to our parent community. We redesigned our website to make access to learning easy. We checked in with parents through surveys regularly to see how the educational experience was working. The principal, assistant principal, librarian, and teachers read picture books and chapters of books daily. Assemblies continued on schedule virtually. We increased live instruction through technology avenues when other schools were scaling back.

When we noticed some students were not engaging remotely with the school, we contacted each family individually to solve barriers to the education -- barriers to the education we were providing to our students, the children of our neighbors.

The district did many things that aided our efforts – provided meals, provided devices, provided technology platforms, provided internet access, etc. We made sure to make use of every one of these resources in order to engage our students every day.

What is interesting is that the vision and mission of this school are so strong that the only thing required to operate in this way was the equipping of faculty and staff with new technologies. The methodology didn’t change. The pedagogy didn’t change. The plans, instruction, assemblies, identity, and culture didn’t change. The shifts we made were in the technology – the vehicles – for how we accomplished the work, the schedules, the routines, and the way we do what we do.