

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

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

School Mailing Address 102 W Avenue C
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Valley Mills State TX Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 76689-0518

County BOSQUE COUNTY

Telephone (254) 932-5526 Fax (254) 932-5861

Web site/URL https://www.vmsd.net/ E-mail chris.dowdy@vmsd.net

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. Mike Kelly E-mail mike.kelly@vmsd.net
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Valley Mills Independent School District Tel. (254) 932-5210

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. Mike Jones
(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	21	14	35
K	30	22	52
1	20	24	44
2	20	20	40
3	20	20	40
4	24	21	45
5	19	25	44
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	154	146	300

*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
 - 0.3 % Asian
 - 1.3 % Black or African American
 - 25.4 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 69.7 % White
 - 3.3 % 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: 12%

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	20
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	15
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	35
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	300
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.12
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	12

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

Spanish

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 9 %
27 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 52 %

Total number students who qualify: 156

8. Students receiving special education services: 12 %

37 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>0</u> Autism | <u>7</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>1</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>2</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay | <u>7</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>1</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>29</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>1</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>5</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: 6

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.	19
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	6
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	3
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 16:1

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yes No

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

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

In partnership with our families and community, VME is dedicated to empowering our students to be socially, emotionally, and academically successful, now and the future.

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.

Valley Mills Elementary (VME) strives to be a relationship first campus, which puts the socio-emotional needs of students, staff, and families first. This mindset guided the decision to operate under a hybrid model consisting of asynchronous remote instruction and on-campus instruction during the 2020-2021 school year. VME utilizes the See-Saw learning platform for remote students in grades Pre-K through 2nd grade. Students in grades 3rd through 5th are utilizing Schoology as their remote learning platform. These learning platforms were chosen based on the individual needs of students, and the developmental appropriateness of each platform's interface. On-campus learners have also had the opportunity to engage in these learning platforms while receiving face to face instruction. VME Teachers work tirelessly to ensure learners, at home and on-campus, are gaining the skills needed to be successful scholars, compassionate classmates, and productive members of society. These operational adaptations enabled VME to meet the unique needs of students and families while also attending to students’ educational goals throughout this challenging school year. Although this school year has presented the VME campus with many unique challenges, the students, staff, and families have risen to each challenge together; Every Step Eagle Pride.

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

Valley Mills Elementary (VME) is located in Valley Mills, Texas, a community that may be small in size but is big at heart. Perseverance and teamwork has been at the center of the community since it was founded in 1867. Named after the flour mill and located near the Bosque River, the town's residents found that by pulling together and working hard their town would succeed. This notion was tested in 1881 when the Santa Fe Railroad bypassed the town by a mile. Knowing the railroad could help everyone in town, they banded together and moved the town closer to the rails. Just a short year later, a tornado would destroy much of the new location. Not to be deterred, the townsfolk worked together to move the town once again. While time may have changed many things in this rural Texas town, it has not changed the kind spirit of the people who live here.

The elementary campus in Valley Mills is a testament to the belief that working hard and being kind can accomplish much. This approach is exemplified by community and campus leaders who work collectively to make these values a priority at VME. This is evidenced by daily announcements, which end with the motto, "Listen, work hard, and be kind." This clear direction is modeled by administrators, staff members, parents, and community members.

Community members support the school in countless ways. The Valley Mills Education Foundation - established by community members to help support innovative programs through grants - personifies our town's unwavering support of the school district. Generating funds in a small community is no easy task, and the foundation's efforts and contributions exemplify the generous spirit of our community. Within the community, many are faced with food insecurity, which is why VME students and staff make the annual food drive such a big event each year; The elementary campus alone often raises enough to support the local food bank for an entire year.

Serving as role-models, VME principals and counselors encourage students to perform various acts of kindness each week. Moreover, the entire school celebrates World Kindness Day each year by writing thoughtful notes to each other, and school administrators engage in random acts of kindness for both students and staff throughout the school year. Over the years, students have been surprised with picnics, brain break days, afternoon ice cream, and glow-in-the-dark assemblies, while VME staff often receive surprise lunches, small gifts, and notes for their dedication to the profession of education. Character development activities emphasize positive peer interactions, pro-social problem solving, and appreciation of diversity. By getting to know students and staff on a personal level, administrators send a clear message that they value the social and emotional well-being of the VME school community.

Kindness is evident in the classroom as teachers are encouraged to focus on the whole child. They know that it is acceptable to shift focus from academics in order to help address an emotional issue or to stop and use a teachable moment to encourage kindness to self or others. Teachers take the time to get to know students and their families. Classroom projects often center on helping others. For example, many teachers send care packages and letters to those in the armed services, and the local nursing home.

Although kindness is a major focus, school leaders also emphasize hard work and perseverance by modeling that no job is too big or small for administrators. Students see leaders taking out the trash, cleaning tables, and disinfecting the school on a daily basis. Administrators open car doors each morning and ensure students are safely sent home each afternoon. Providing care for sick children and tutoring students in need of extra one-on-one help are also activities embodied by VME administration. Students and staff know what is expected, which is evidenced in their collectively exceptional work ethic.

In order for work to be effective, it must be goal-focused. In Professional Learning Community (PLC) and Data Driven Meetings, administration focuses on growth for all students in all areas rather than overemphasizing those who are above or on target to meet their learning goals. In turn, teachers have high expectations for all students and continually communicate this focus to students. Individual conferences between teachers and students focus on areas in which students improve. Students can frequently be heard asking, "Did I grow?" instead of "Did I pass?" This allows teachers and students to use mistakes and failure

as learning opportunities to form new goals instead of becoming discouraged.

Challenges will always be a part of life, and the Valley Mills community is no exception to this reality. Although, Valley Mills is proof that challenges can be overcome when people join together to support each other. The students of VME are presently using this knowledge to change their school and community for the better.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

Valley Mills Elementary believes it is every child’s right to live a literate life. A strong literacy foundation is imperative for student success in school and beyond. The elementary school library is the core for this foundation. In 2018 the VME library was flipped, making the shelves come to life with enticing browsing boxes set up by student interests and different genre categories. Students are presented with a variety of popular and culturally diverse books as well as a multitude of award winning selections. Students in grades Kindergarten through 5th grade visit the library weekly for time devoted to enhancing literacy and growing the students’ love for reading. The campus librarian often coordinates with classroom teachers when making read aloud selections to support the learning taking place in the classrooms. Students are often engaging in a curriculum that covers the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills as well as locally developed learning objectives and expectations throughout their read aloud time. Students are encouraged to check out two books within their independent reading levels. However, they are not stifled by their reading levels. If students express interest in a book outside of their reading level, they are encouraged to make a request to the librarian to check the book out. VME feels allowing them to experience freedoms in their book selections facilitates more authentic and enjoyable reading for all.

Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math (STEAM) Lab is also offered to students once weekly for 45 minutes. This is a locally designed curriculum that encompasses project based learning where students solve problems and explore new challenges in a collaborative and hands-on method. The STEAM lab is facilitated by a certified paraprofessional that works with grade level teachers to develop lessons based on the TEKS being covered each grading period. Through the STEAM lab even the youngest learners are introduced to robotics, coding, budgeting, financial literacy, business planning, and many other complex activities.

Valley Mills Elementary utilizes the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) as the core curriculum in reading/ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies across all grade levels. The campus follows the path of learning outlined in the TEKS Resource System for scope and sequence of instruction in each content area. The ideas and concepts for instructional emphasis are based on a thorough analysis of the individual content area TEKS outlined in each unit. The instructional approach to ensure student success emphasizes a partnership between teacher team planning and reverse-engineered instruction based on the TEKS aligned assessments utilized for each individual unit.

Formative assessments include, but are not limited to the following: entry/exit tickets, quizzes, polls, summaries of learned, Venn diagrams, student explanations, visualizations, metacognition exercises, running records, etc... For summative assessments, the campus utilizes the end of unit exams through Eduphoria and cumulative work throughout the duration of the grading period. VME also utilizes beginning, middle and end of year assessments in all core subject areas in order to gather data that is used to inform instructional spiraling of content, response to intervention, and differentiation for individual students.

Adaptations to the instructional approach during this unprecedented school year included offering both in-person learning, and asynchronous online instruction for all students and grade levels. In doing so, VME has strived to provide the same quality of learning experience to both sets of students, regardless of which type of instruction they have chosen. To accomplish this, VME uses two different learning management systems, and teachers have worked diligently to make sure that the instruction provided to in-person learners is mirrored as closely as possible for their remote counterparts. Utilizing two different learning management systems enabled VME to provide appropriate learning platforms to students based on their age and technological experience levels.

When first faced with the need for a remote learning environment in March of 2020, the campus scrambled to find the best ways to provide effective instruction to students while still maintaining the safety of all staff members. Initially, the campus utilized a combination of physical material pick-ups with weekly synchronous classes in order to help struggling students complete work and to facilitate ongoing communication with students and parents regarding questions and/or concerns that the students or parents

had at that point. Following the summer break VME leveraged various software programs and pedagogical techniques in order to align the instruction that is provided in classrooms with that of remote learners. Processes and practices are now more organized, streamlined, and effective due to the extensive planning and preparation of VME administration and staff.

Learning standards are categorized within each specific subject area and aligned vertically by grade level according to developmentally appropriate progression of skills and expectations. Student learning expectations are long-term in scope and overarching based on the many stages of the student's educational journey. As a campus, VME has chosen each of the curricular approaches based on scientific research and evidence-based practices in conjunction with the professional judgment and experience of staff and administration. Emphasis is placed on practices that are effective and equitable for the student population, and methods, programs, and materials that have been proven to engage students and close learning gaps.

Instructional approaches are a combination of direct and indirect instruction, interactive and experiential learning, and collaborative and independent study. Methods include, but are not limited to: explicit teaching, traditional lecture, drill and practice, problem solving, project-based inquiry, reflective discussion, educational field trips, learning simulations, role playing, learning contracts, learning centers, essays, debates, tutorials, etc...

Teachers use formative assessments daily in order to track student progress toward individual and overall goals. Discussions, quizzes, group work, reflections, creative projects, and many other data collection methods are utilized to inform future instructional planning and delivery. VME teachers work together daily to plan cross curricular activities that address individual student achievement levels in all subject areas. Monitoring practices are designed so that the students are responsible for their own progress tracking to ensure they have a clear understanding of their performance criteria. This method provides students with reflective data that can be used to focus on low performing areas, as well as giving feedback that students can use to take control of their own learning.

For summative assessment data, VME uses standardized unit assessments, state standardized assessments, final grades, essays, and instructor created exams aligned to daily instruction and state standards. In addition, teachers use several benchmark assessment systems to collect beginning, middle, and end of year data. This data is disaggregated and compiled into different formats so that teachers and administrators can see the percentage of students performing on, above, or below grade level in each subject. This and other data sources are then synthesized and analyzed in grade level data meetings in which the campus staff develops small groups based on achievement levels and provide targeted interventions that are effective for student progress.

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

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

Valley Mills Elementary operates Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) for early childhood learning for children 4 years of age. Teachers facilitate learning in language acquisition, communication development, emergent literacy reading, writing, mathematics, science, social studies, social and emotional development as well as fine and gross motor development through a variety of pedagogical approaches including peer-play, hands-on-activities, educational games, and songs. Students engage in explicit and systemic whole group and small group instruction, which builds the foundational skills needed to be successful in their early years of school. While COVID-19 has created many barriers with respect to play based opportunities students would normally experience, teachers have worked diligently to adapt their normal routines and classroom layouts to ensure students still have the opportunity to explore different manipulatives and play based learning centers. VME Pre-K teachers have developed station rotational plans and sanitation processes that allow for safe play based learning.

ensure students will have the necessary foundational skills to experience success in Kindergarten and beyond. Pre-K classroom literacy and math routines and norms are sequenced and aligned with other grade level curriculum, so students will later be able to successfully grasp the grade level appropriate standards set forth by the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills. VME Pre-K teachers also play a key role in class assignments as students transition to Kindergarten by providing crucial information regarding student progress and areas of need with respect to academics, social, and emotional learning. It is evident through Children's Learning Institute (CLI) assessments, TX-KEA data, TPRI screening information and teacher observations that students who engage in the early learning of the Pre-K program, experience significant levels of growth toward their academic success in the primary and formative years of their educational journey.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

The staff at Valley Mills Elementary (VME) strive to develop students into well-rounded learners that find joy and excitement throughout the school day. Core curriculum plays a key role in developing these learners, but the campus also places importance on other curriculum areas. All students in the school participate in Physical Education, Digital Citizenship, and Character Education.

Students at VME participate for 45 minutes 3 times a week in physical education, movement, music, health and nutrition education. The TEKS aligned curriculum helps students' social development, promotes physical fitness, and provides foundations for a healthy lifestyle. Through direct instruction and station work, students focus on sport specific-skills, movement and music as well as develop communication skills and teamwork as they engage with their peers.

Technology is integrated throughout all grade levels and across all curriculum areas. Students utilize Chromebooks and iPads for various lessons, research projects, and passion based learning opportunities that enhance what is being taught in the classroom. In addition to these innovative technological materials, VME also provides virtual reality field trips that provide students a window into an otherwise inaccessible world. We use these virtual expeditions as a means of providing unique perspectives and opportunities to actually visit the places that they are learning about in the classroom. VME also strives to teach students foundational technology applications and digital citizenship skills they will need to be successful in the ever-changing digital world. Providing ongoing lessons in digital citizenship has become a top priority when it comes to our technology curriculum. The first part of our curriculum in digital citizenship is information literacy. VME strives to help students understand how to navigate their way to reputable sites in a space where information on any topic can seem limitless. The next part focuses on the prevention of cyberbullying. This has become an increasing concern nationwide, and our campus views this as a school responsibility to address and constantly reinforce. Teachers model online etiquette in order to show students the proper way to communicate responsibly and respectfully in a digital space. Kindness and empathy are always at the center of any discussions involving our standards for digital citizenship. Student health and emotional wellness in a digital world is of the utmost importance for the community of Valley Mills.

Students at VME also receive character education classes by a counselor, making sure that students develop strong core values such as justice, respect, and citizenship are a shared responsibility in our community. Character education is not only explicitly taught, it is also woven into the very culture of the school. Students deserve more than a one-dimensional education. In addition to academic learning, the character education program provides students with emotional, intellectual, and moral values that will carry them through the rest of their lives. These values lay a foundation for empathy towards the condition of humanity. The youth of VME will grow with wisdom and virtue and in turn become beacons in the society they will inherit. The benefits of such an education cannot be overstated.

3. Academic Supports:

VME students receive exceptional classroom instruction from determined and dedicated teachers. The teachers and staff at VME strive to ensure that students receive strategic differentiated instruction that meets each child's unique learning needs. The rigorous instruction delivered in the classroom is derived from research based pedagogy and systemic planning to meet the needs of

each student. Specific curriculum, direct interventions, and individualized instruction tailored to students needs each contribute to student success.

The campus utilizes a meticulously designed response-to-intervention system known as What I Need (WIN). This system is designed to ensure that each student has specific interventions according to their distinctive needs. Data teams meet to analyze benchmark assessments, unit assessments, and teacher observations to develop unique plans for each child. Interventionists and classroom teachers work together to analyze and respond to data during forty-five minute sessions five times a week. Plans are developed to provide specific intervention in math and reading for students performing below grade level and enrichment activities tailored to meet the needs of those working above grade level. Campus leaders meet each six-weeks to analyze data to ensure students - regardless of performance levels - are receiving appropriate instruction.

At VME, students that qualify for special education services are served in a variety of ways to meet their unique learning needs. The special education teacher and educational diagnostician work closely to determine the best instructional plan for students with disabilities in the development of Individual Educational Plans (IEP). Students with disabilities receive the benefit of a full continuum of educational settings at VME. Students in all settings receive individualized instruction and a vast array of services to meet their educational needs.

The students identified for dyslexia services and/or classified as English Language Learners (ELL) also receive specialized instruction to help master their specific goals. Students identified as having dyslexia are pulled for forty-five minutes four times a week by the campus dyslexia specialist to work on specific multi-sensory instructional techniques designed to assist students master their learning goals. ELL students receive classroom instruction from English as a Second Language certified teachers, who report progress of language goals to the campus ELL pull-out teacher. Students that need additional support outside of the classroom are provided target instruction based on their language acquisition.

In order to meet the needs of students performing above level, VME allows opportunities for students to compete in academic competitions. Students are able to participate in events such as; creative writing, chess, art, spelling, mathematics, and more. Students are allowed time during each school day leading up to the competition to prepare for these competitions, which helps them learn and develop organizational skills, self-discipline, and higher-order thinking.

VME provides a Gifted and Talented program where qualifying students can explore a diverse world of self-directed learning. Students are exposed to a variety of intellectually stimulating topics and projects such as advanced coding, architecture, abstract mathematics, and much more.

The culmination of these systems, strategies, and programs allow the campus to deliver specific and individualized instruction to meet the unique learning needs of the students.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

Much work has been done over the last few years to promote a positive environment throughout the campus to help improve the academic, social, and emotional growth of every student. The entire staff of VME takes great pride in the programs and activities that have been established to promote student engagement.

The campus has implemented several strategies and programs to assist in positively impacting student behavior and learning. The initiative that has been highly successful is the creation of the Eagle Club. The Eagle Club is a student incentive program that rewards students each six-weeks for good behavior and being kind to others. In order to be a member of the Eagle Club, students must not have any behavior infractions during the six-weeks period, and they must be kind to their peers and teachers. Campus administrators reward the Eagle Club students with various prizes and/or activities at the end of the period, and if the student has earned the reward for all six cycles, a field trip is taken at the end of the school year. Implemented six years ago to reward students for positive achievements, the Eagle Club has been a very successful motivational tool for all students.

Another way the campus engages students is by broadcasting campus announcements every morning via YouTube Live. In the past, pre-COVID, every student and staff member would gather in the gym for morning assembly upon arrival to campus each day. This was a time for the entire campus to be together, and it was an opportunity for highlighting accomplishments and student successes. Since the implementation of COVID mitigation protocols, gathering in a large group in a confined space has not been an option. Being able to conduct live announcements on YouTube each morning has allowed students to stay connected and engaged. It also allows the campus to include remote learners and the community. Announcements begin with the pledges and a moment of silence followed by a celebration of student and staff birthdays, and the daily lunch menu. Announcements also include some sort of fun and engaging segment, such as random fact or joke of the day, and student of the week. Gathering as an entire group in the gym for morning assemblies each day can be fun and engaging, and being able to broadcast live announcements for the campus and the community has been a successful alternative to keep school stakeholders updated and informed.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Collaborating and working with families and the community of Valley Mills has been a foundational asset to Valley Mills Elementary, and the relationships have grown stronger during this time of COVID-19. For the past several years, the campus has made it a priority to ensure that students and families are at the forefront of all decisions from all campus personnel. It is the campus's mission to improve not only the quality of academic preparation for each child, but also see that their social and emotional development is successful.

One program that has been the staple in making sure that students and families are supported outside of the classroom is the implementation of the Bags of Blessings program. With support from several local businesses and organizations, each Friday, VME students in need have the opportunity to take bags of food home for the weekend. For many of these students, the highlight of their week is receiving their bags of food items and snacks to aid in their nourishment for the weekend, which is evidenced by their smiles and joy when receiving their food bags. With the continued assistance of community partnerships, Bags of Blessings is a program that has proven to be extraordinarily successful and will continue to be a pillar of support for VME families.

VME has had to adapt and implement numerous protocols to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Although the campus has not been able to “open” the doors to families and visitors on campus like in the past, teachers and staff members have still been able to maintain relationships through various methods. At the beginning of the school year, each teacher conducted a Virtual Meet the Teacher presentation to ensure all students and their families had the opportunity to get to know their teachers and become familiar with their routines and expectations. Although it didn't take the place of the normal Meet the Teacher night, which is a very successful event that garners almost 100% participation from families, the campus was very

fortunate to offer this option in order for students to feel more comfortable beginning the new school year.

Another resource that VME has utilized to connect and maintain relationships with stakeholders is the consistent use of the campus Facebook page. This social media platform has proven to be effective in the announcement of events and activities, highlighting student accomplishments, and keeping families informed of their student's success.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

VME creates a supportive and beneficial environment for teachers by always prioritizing their humanity. Part of being supportive is caring about the teachers' personal and family lives as well as their professional ones. Campus administrators express love and trust for all VME staff, which is evident at the campus level in things like baby showers, birthday celebrations, and monthly meals to show employees of VME that they are not just workers, they are family. Creating and maintaining positive relationships has been and will always be the number one priority at VME.

The campus also promotes healthy professional partnerships by allowing teachers to observe one another in the classroom setting in order to gain ideas and techniques and grow each other in a proficient and adept manner. In addition to this practice, VME has many master teachers who video their own instructional situations such as small-group, intervention, and read alouds in order to provide staff training that can be watched again and again. This provides quality professional development to new staff, while also serving as an archive of best practices that teachers can access at their leisure. It gives teachers autonomy in their own development allowing them to grow in their profession without feeling administrative pressure.

Another way that a supportive culture is provided is by having the interventionists provide mini-lessons. Instead of telling teachers how lessons should be presented, the interventionists provide real life examples of best teaching practices and techniques so that there is a concrete model of campus expectations. The interventionists also assist in developing targeted instruction for each student. This allows students to reach their learning goals and meet high standards. Valley Mills Elementary interventionists play an integral role in student achievement and teacher professional development on this campus.

In support of VME teachers during this uniquely difficult school year, campus administrators restructured the role of one of the campus interventionists. In addition to small group intervention support, the reading interventionist role was expanded to include a remote learning coordinator component. In this new role, responsibilities included responding to technical issues with online learners and assisting teachers who are feeling overwhelmed when trying to support in-person students while having to expediently respond to parent and student concerns and problems that would arise throughout the school year for online learners. This proved beneficial to parents, students, and teachers in alleviating the unavoidable stresses presented by the implementation of these challenging new learning models.

4. School Leadership:

The leadership team at VME consists of a principal, assistant principal and counselor. This team leads with a servant heart. The team works together to ensure budgetary items, curriculum, and all student socio-emotional needs are all met. The principal and assistant principal work beside teachers to research and develop curriculum that will meet the needs of their diverse student population. Developing and maintaining positive relationships with teachers and students are placed at the forefront of the campus administrators' philosophies. The administrative team on campus has maintained an open door policy, and all staff members are welcome to visit throughout the day.

A cornerstone of support provided by administration is the implementation of weekly PLC meetings. During these meetings, the team discusses upcoming units of study, identifies needed materials, reviews assessment data, and determines the area of focus for intervention and enrichment for all students. Teachers are able to plan their WIN time for their students based on their recent assessments. These meetings have proven extremely valuable and ensure the staff and administrative team are connected and aligned. These specific strategies focused on targeted instruction have greatly increased student achievement in math and reading.

The district developed and implemented a mentor program for all teachers new to the district. Newly hired teachers are paired with veteran teachers who are available to answer questions as they arise and guide the teachers through a successful school year. Other relationship builders include monthly catered luncheons, staff morale boosters such as raffles and contests, and a consistent presence throughout the building during the school day.

During the summer of 2020, the district formed a COVID committee to solicit feedback on protocols being discussed for the upcoming school year. This committee included district administration, staff members from each campus, nurses, and custodial staff. Together, everyone assisted with the development of the COVID Return to School Plan. With newly implemented safety protocols, VME has ensured that staff and students have a clean and safe environment daily. All district stakeholders have worked tirelessly throughout this pandemic to ensure the school has remained open for in-person learning and support all students' academic, social, and emotional needs. Remaining open for students and maintaining a safe and caring environment has been the top priority during the pandemic. Although the focus this year has been maintaining a safe and clean environment, building and maintaining positive relationships has and always will be key to success at Valley Mills Elementary.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

The VME campus addresses the diverse needs and backgrounds of stakeholders by providing an equally diverse and inclusive learning environment that fosters approbation to all students, families, and staff members. For students, one example of this includes inviting community members to share, encourage, and inspire during career day. The campus carefully selects guests from as many different backgrounds and fields as possible in order to ensure a broad view of society is presented. The same approach is used when selecting guest speakers for Read Across America Day each year. This event is an annual keystone in including people from all aspects of society an opportunity to connect with the student body in a meaningful way by sharing stories, themes, and experiences from their own lives. The campus also celebrates diversity by incorporating Black History Month into the curriculum each year. While this is by no means the only time teachers and staff focus on the contributions of African-Americans, it is an opportunity to highlight those figures and further discussions with students to ensure that they are empathetic toward America's robust and dynamic overall culture.

In addition to these more traditional outreach events, the campus also provides many unique experiences to students such as the annual Food Truck Day. This assignment extends throughout the school year with students planning, organizing, developing, and executing a business plan for their own food truck. Students learn the financial, developmental, and marketing aspects of opening their own business. Then, at the end of the school year, the food trucks are set up on campus and the students take orders and provide a dining experience to parents and other community members. This truly is a wonderful, real-world experience for students.

In addition to providing exciting events such as the aforementioned, the literacy curriculum at every grade level is embedded with culturally rich texts that provide students with information that helps them develop responsive thinking regarding current events and social movements that they witness in the world around them. The campus feels it is important to provide a wide range of perspectives from authors of diverse backgrounds. Students will carry this knowledge forward with them as they become adults in society and learn to navigate a complex and ever changing world. At VME, it is the priority and responsibility as a campus to present students with materials that represent not only the diversity in the classroom, but in the world.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

There are numerous strategies that the staff at VME strives to do in order to give the students the greatest opportunity to be successful in life, but the driving force behind each and every strategy is the desire to foster positive relationships with students and their families. The administration, teachers, and staff members thrive on the philosophy of relationships first. VME knows that in order for students to meet the high expectations that are set before them, they must feel safe, loved, encouraged, and challenged to do so. This mentality was not new to VME during the school closures; however, it was magnified at the moment the doors were physically closed in March of 2020 due to the spread of COVID.

Administrators and staff members immediately began to brainstorm ways that the socio-emotional needs of students could be met during this time, while still providing rigorous academic support to propel the students into the next school year. In turn, Zoom meetings were established, multiple food distribution sites were set up, Easter baskets for each student were donated, counseling groups were moved to an online platform, and weekly broadcasts were aired to help students feel connected. The staff at VME put all of these things at the forefront of all planning because the philosophy of relationships first is what has always proved successful.

Positive relationships are the foundation for all academic strategies and successes. The school stands firm behind the knowledge that students have to feel encouraged and enjoy coming to school in order to produce positive results. VME has implemented multiple positive behavior incentives as well as Character Ed classes that help students learn to be intrinsically motivated to make good choices and be successful. VME teachers and administrators strive to provide the students with experiences and memories they might not receive otherwise.

Relationship first mentality is the root of all success at VME. From the development of appropriate and personalized interventions to the delivery of instruction models, the desire to empower students of VME always takes precedent. The administration and staff at VME knows that the diverse experiences and varied perspectives that come into the school building are an asset to the school community, and by keeping relationships at the forefront of all the campus does, VME will continue to create high levels of learning and achievement by strengthening students' connectedness and establishing a collaborative desire to reach high standards.