

**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 Mrs. Heather Lynne Grant  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

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

School Mailing Address 2800 22nd Street  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Parkersburg State WV Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 26101-3800

County Wood County

Telephone (304) 420-9522 Fax (304) 420-9541

Web site/URL https://www.woodcountyschoolswv.com/o/ce E-mail hgrant@k12.wv.us

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent\* Mr. William Hosaflook E-mail whosaflo@k12.wv.us  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Wood County Schools Tel. (304) 420-9663

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board President/Chairperson Mr. Justin Raber  
(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):
- 16 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 6 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 3 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 25 TOTAL

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

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

- Urban (city or town)
- Suburban
- Rural

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

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
<b>PreK</b>	15	14	29
<b>K</b>	15	17	32
<b>1</b>	19	18	37
<b>2</b>	17	22	39
<b>3</b>	18	22	40
<b>4</b>	21	19	40
<b>5</b>	15	20	35
<b>6</b>	0	0	0
<b>7</b>	0	0	0
<b>8</b>	0	0	0
<b>9</b>	0	0	0
<b>10</b>	0	0	0
<b>11</b>	0	0	0
<b>12 or higher</b>	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	120	132	252

\*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
  - 2.4 % Asian
  - 2 % Black or African American
  - 1.6 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 88.9 % White
  - 5.1 % 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: 11%

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

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

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	16
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	14
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	30
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	265
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.11
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	11

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

Chinese, Hindi, Japanese

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 48 %

Total number students who qualify: 122

8. Students receiving special education services: 21 %

52 Total number of students served

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional conditions. All students receiving special education services should be reflected in the table below. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- |                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| <u>1</u> Autism                   | <u>1</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                 | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>1</u> Deaf-Blindness           | <u>6</u> Other Health Impaired                 |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay      | <u>0</u> Specific Learning Disability          |
| <u>2</u> Emotional Disturbance    | <u>29</u> Speech or Language Impairment        |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment       | <u>1</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>15</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.

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	13
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.	4
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 19:1

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

<b>Required Information</b>	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016
Daily student attendance	95%	95%	94%	95%	95%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

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

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

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

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

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

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

Developing Lifelong Learners and Problem Solvers.

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.

During the current 2020-2021 school year, Criss Elementary has operated under 3 different models of instruction. To begin the year, school opened under a blended/hybrid model. Students with the last names A-K attended on Mondays and Wednesdays while students with last names L-Z attended on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Fridays were used for remote instruction for all students. As the Covid-19 infection rate and percent positivity rose dramatically in the state of West Virginia, the school moved to entirely remote instruction using Schoology and Microsoft Teams. The staff reported to the building and utilized Teams to teach live lessons to their students in core subjects. Specialists and interventionists also assisted students virtually. In January, students returned to the building for in-person learning, once again under the blended/hybrid model. Finally, on February 19, 2021 all students returned to a full, five-day in-person model for the first time since March 3, 2020.

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**

---

Criss Elementary School (CES) is centrally located in Wood County, West Virginia and is one of sixteen public elementary schools in the district. Opening in 1955, with grades one through three, fourth through sixth grade was added by 1960. In the ensuing years, six grade was moved to the middle school and pre-K was added to the campus. Currently, Criss Elementary houses approximately 260 students annually. Students come from nearby farms and in-town homes which are within walking distance. The majority of the students are dropped off and picked up by their parents with a small percentage who ride the bus. It is a close-knit community where many of our students' parents and grandparents attended Criss Elementary themselves. It is a school full of memories and traditions.

There is something very special and unique about Criss Elementary. During the past ten years, the school's poverty rate has risen from twenty percent to as high as fifty-two percent due to the opioid crisis and rise in unemployment. We now have many students who come to school without basic skills and often have little or no help from home. Additionally, many students are being raised by grandparents who lack the technological background to help a student in this digital learning age. However, over the past ten years, our academic ranking in West Virginia has gone from 220th out of 400 elementary schools to 8th in the state with a five-star ranking. This success is attributed to the hard work and dedication of the staff, students, parents, and community stakeholders. The school thrives because of strong leadership from the principal, dedicated school curriculum teams, as well as many opportunities for the students to serve in leadership roles.

The school day begins with our students receiving an enthusiastic greeting from the principal and several other teachers when they are dropped off. During pre-pandemic years, students would then proceed to the gymnasium where the entire staff would gather to begin the day with a morning celebration. Teachers would share successes within their classrooms, student leaders announced birthdays, the cook made an appearance with her chef hat to report the lunch menu for the day, and finally, announcements were made by the principal. Occasionally, there would be guest speakers and readers from members of the community to celebrate special events. Every Tuesday was "Terrific Writing Tuesday" in which teachers read exemplary writing pieces students submitted in their classroom. This encouraged writing across all content areas as well as demonstrated our belief that strong writers make successful students. Morning celebration always concluded with the entire student body and staff chanting our beliefs, "Criss students are: Caring, Responsible, Intelligent, Safe, and Super!" Before exiting the gym, all students would rise and a special student would be selected to lead all others in reciting the pledge. While we managed to continue some of the same routines over the intercom in the morning, we eagerly await the day the restrictions are lifted which will allow us to resume our daily morning celebration in the gym.

Daily instruction at Criss Elementary is provided by a professional, well-educated staff, utilizing best practices to ensure the students are learning the West Virginia College and Career Readiness Standards. Several years ago, the third-grade teachers decided to implement departmentalization because one had a passion for ELA instruction while the other had a strong background in math. It was found that it gave each of them more time to focus on quality instruction and data analysis for a specific subject area. Achievement began to rise in third grade, and the fourth- and fifth-grade teams followed suit. This year we took the bold step of departmentalizing in first and second grade as well. The teachers love it and early indicators show an increase in student engagement and achievement as well.

After our school day ends, students do not stop learning. We have many extracurricular activities which include basketball, track, and chess, as well as opportunities to participate in musicals, band, and choir. Criss Elementary has a strong connection to our local community and a state-recognized, award-winning Parent Teacher Association (PTA). The PTA sponsors many after-school experiences for students which range from the annual Back to School Bash to educational programs such as visits from the Columbus Zoo and the hands-on Center of Science and Industry (COSI). The PTA organizes fundraisers which raise money to pay for these programs as well as finance much-needed upgrades to the school such as new bleachers in the gymnasium, custom-cut blinds for every window, iPad charging stations, and much more.

The Covid-19 pandemic has posed many challenges; however, Criss Elementary has remained steadfast in providing our students with as many of the same opportunities as in the past. Our PTA has continued their efforts to support our school by having online fund-raising auctions. The staff has continued to provide quality lessons on a virtual platform during remote learning. The high standards we set for ourselves and our students did not diminish during the pandemic. The students and staff of Criss Elementary are still expected to always conduct themselves with integrity. Our school is a place where it is cool to be smart and to do the right thing!



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

---

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

Criss Elementary is departmentalized in all core curriculum areas in grades one through five. This allows each teacher to focus and become exemplary in two content areas versus four. Departmentalization was key to effective virtual instruction while students were learning remotely. With the district adopting a new learning management system, teachers had to only integrate two content areas into Schoology which allowed for more time to prepare quality virtual lessons. Whether in-person or virtual, grade-level teachers met with the principal weekly to analyze various assessments, review standards, and make data-informed decisions for instruction. Data from formative and summative assessments, i-Ready reading and math diagnostics, guided reading levels and attendance data are used during collaboration time. Monthly, the interventionists join the collaboration meetings to adjust the intervention groups as needed. Additionally, all teachers belong to one of three curriculum teams that meet on continuing education (CE) days. They are the English Language Arts (ELA) team, Math team, and Student Leadership team. This allows teachers to meet vertically to analyze data and make decisions regarding what students know and what students need to learn to be successful when they move on to the next grade level. Also, during this time, enrichment events are planned by these teams which include I Love Reading Weak, March Math Madness, and new leadership opportunities for our students.

Quality reading instruction begins with a strong (county-selected) core reading program. This year was an English Language Arts (ELA) adoption year, and Criss was well-represented on this committee with three classroom teachers and the principal being selected by district leaders to participate in the process. Due to departmentalization, each grade level (grades one through five) has one classroom teacher who delivers high-quality instruction for all students at their grade level. This ensures a consistent and high-quality level of instruction and provides the teacher with the ability to focus on her area of strength. For writing instruction, the school utilizes the Four-Square method. Additionally, we were chosen to pilot the Ready Writing program for the county and have continued to use it as our rigorous writing-instruction model. We also received training this year on MI Write which blends well with Ready Writing. Classroom ELA instruction also included the use of read aloud, The Daily Five, Secret Stories, and time for self-selected reading, which has proven critical to creating lifelong readers. We have a large collection of books in our library, a book room with leveled readers for guided reading instruction, and all ELA classrooms have their own personal libraries.

Criss Elementary's math program is taught by seven well-trained teachers. Each has received training above and beyond the regular professional development opportunities. The second-grade math teacher was recently invited to attend the National Math Conference along with the district's math leadership team. They utilize Ready Math for core instruction; however, they have been trained and supplement with Number Talks daily to enhance each student's ability to do mental math. Our teachers follow the West Virginia College and Career Readiness Standards to guide their assessments and instruction. They work together vertically to align instruction so that each grade is teaching the foundational skills that are critical for success in the following grades. Students use manipulatives, technology, and real-world experiences to build their capacity to solve complex math problems. The i-Ready math diagnostic is given three times a year with growth-monitoring tests given to students who are struggling. Based on their diagnostic test, each student is then set a pathway designed for their i-Ready lessons. Each student completes forty-five minutes weekly of lessons that are tailored to their specific needs based on their performance on the i-Ready diagnostic test.

The social studies teachers work to develop students that are very civic minded. They often supplement the newly adopted "Teacher Created" core program to enrich student learning. For example, third grade students tour the city building and meet their elected leaders while learning about local government as well as speak with bankers while learning economics. The fourth graders build Native American homes, and fifth graders complete haunted-history projects on local folklore. Many students compete annually in the Criss Social Studies Fair, and several have gone on to compete at the county, regional, and state levels.

Science is provided at all grade levels. Students are encouraged to explore the world around them through an inquiry-based approach. Our teachers provide a wide variety of STEM opportunities taught in conjunction

with the science curriculum. Students are also provided with multiple opportunities to experience real-world experiences beginning in kindergarten and continuing through fifth grade. For example, in kindergarten, chicken, duck, and guinea eggs are incubated and the students get to watch the development of the eggs until they hatch. In intermediate grades, students are provided opportunities to participate in engineering challenges such as creating levees and buoyancy competitions as well as many others.

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

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

Criss Elementary houses two pre-K classes for three- and four-year old students. One is located on the campus of the school, and the other is an off-site location called Precious Angels. The district's pre-K program is run by a district coordinator. It is a universal pre-K program as outlined by the West Virginia State Department of Education in collaboration with the WV Head Start program. The instructional approach for all preschools in West Virginia is based on the Creative Curriculum. Instruction is assessed through the Early Learning Reporting System (ELRS). Pre-K teachers provide multiple opportunities for their students to develop healthy relationships through peer interaction and role modeling. Students have opportunities for hands-on exploration of technology, experimentation, and work play. Our teachers utilize the playground area and gym to foster growth of fine motor coordination and gross motor skills. Each pre-K program is instructed by a teacher with an early childhood endorsement and a paraprofessional aide.

**2. Other Curriculum Areas:**

Our students are provided with a wide range of opportunities to experience the arts from the time they enter Criss Elementary until the time they leave the school in fifth grade. One of our kindergarten teachers is a part-time instructor at the Art Center. She often coordinates activities for the primary students. For example, at Christmas, our school selects a famous artist to study and creates ornaments reminiscent of the artist's work to display on a tree at the local art center. When students enter third grade, they are taught about great masters and are provided opportunities to create art in the same technique. Finally, Artsbridge sponsors performances for all grade levels throughout the year as well as the Art Cart program which provides instructors for weekly art lessons for our fourth- and fifth-grade students.

Music is provided by a certified music teacher who comes to Criss Elementary twice a week. All students receive weekly music lessons. In addition to those lessons, the music teacher plans a Christmas program for intermediate students and a spring program for the primary students which incorporates singing, dancing, and acting. Fourth and fifth grade students are also given the opportunity to participate in choir with weekly lessons which culminate in the annual music festival where our school joins sixteen other elementary schools in the district for an evening of performances.

Physical education is provided by a full-time certified teacher. Physical activity is an integral part of students' overall well-being and the start of building habits for lifelong healthy living. All students attend physical education class three times a week for forty-five minutes each session and are provided lessons that focus on movement, games, and organized sports based on the West Virginia College and Career readiness Standards. Annually, all fourth- and fifth-grade students are assessed with the Fitness Gram. In addition, the teacher organizes the annual Jump Rope for Heart as well as a field day to end the year. During remote instruction, the physical education teacher utilized the Open Physical Education curriculum to provide students lessons on Schoology. When instruction is live, on campus, every student also has a minimum thirty-minute recess daily and are provided brain breaks throughout the day.

Criss Elementary students have the opportunity to attend library twice a week for forty-five minutes. During library, they check out books as well as learn grade-level library standards. The librarian also works closely with the grade-level teachers to enhance the library experience and to build student comprehension and instill the enjoyment of reading in students. During remote instruction, private- and small-group tutoring opportunities were offered for struggling students. Our librarian also collaborated with the local library to

obtain the Sora app so that all students would have access to the entire selection of eBooks for free of cost. Additionally, she also recorded herself reading books with the use of iMovie and provided the link for the accelerated reader test. For primary students, she incorporated their weekly spelling and vocabulary words into story writing. Finally, for intermediate students, she would provide a quote from a famous person as well as a link to bibliographical information for students to read. After reading the information, the students would participate in a discussion board with regard to the meaning of the famous quote.

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

Criss Elementary has multiple academic supports in place to meet the needs of all students. There are many factors which can cause a student to struggle; therefore, children struggling with attendance, behavior, or academic issues enter the Student Assistance Team (SAT) process. This team consists of a SAT chair, the principal, classroom teachers, parents, and any other professionals who work with their child/children. Any stakeholder can request a meeting. It is an extremely effective way to bring "heads together" to help our students. This team works with the parents to create a positive outcome for their child. Follow-up meetings are scheduled every six weeks to closely monitor student progress and make changes as needed.

To support ELA, every grade level has thirty minutes of intervention daily in the master schedule. Reading specialists assist each grade level to ensure students receive support or enrichment opportunities in small groups to meet their individual needs. Guided reading is a major component of this time. All ELA teachers and specialists utilize high-interest, leveled books for below- to above-level learners. This time is used to fill gaps in student learning or to challenge students who are working at or above grade level.

Students who have qualified for special education services attend class daily with our multi-categorical teacher for support. Individual Education Plans (IEP) are written based on testing results, teacher reports, observations, and class work. While with the multi-categorical teacher, students work on personal goals and skills they are missing to help them close the gap. Communication flows both directions between the multi-categorical teacher and the general education teachers as well as the parents on a weekly basis. Progress reports are sent home to the parents during midterms at the end of the nine weeks.

The math teachers have time allotted in their daily schedule for math centers and intervention. For centers, students are placed in a group, based on i-Ready data, that is tailored to their specific needs. Students also complete forty-five minutes of individualized, computer-based i-Ready lessons each week. When a student encounters a lesson they have difficulty passing, the teacher intervenes with additional support to make sure the student understands the concept and can then pass the lesson.

Our gifted students are supported through the Wood County TREK and SAIL program. Students in grades three through five are bussed to the gifted center one day a week where they take advanced classes in robotics, theatre, advanced math, as well as several other options. Our kindergarten through second grade students have a gifted teacher who comes to the school every Monday and provides those students with two hours of enrichment.

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

---

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

At Criss, it is our belief that student engagement is critical to our success. We begin our day by engaging students in our morning celebration. At this time, students are recognized for achievements in and out of school, birthdays are announced, class attendance awards are announced, as well as other exciting daily or weekly activities.

During the day, teachers work together to deliver high-quality, high-interest instruction, utilizing various research-based strategies. Beyond classroom instruction, the entire staff works together to create shared learning experiences for all of our students. These include schoolwide events such as the One Book, One School, One Community program, 100 days celebration, Dr. Suess' birthday, science days, musical performances, and a field day with athletic events. These activities provide a family atmosphere for the entire school.

Criss Elementary is dedicated to ensuring students feel important and valued. Each year, every few weeks, teachers select several students in their classroom to write a "Warm Fuzzy" note and mail it to their parents. By the end of the year, every single child has received at least one positive affirmation letter from a staff member at the school. At the front of the school, there is a glass showcase where exemplary student work from all subject areas is displayed. We want our students to know that quality work at school is just as important as athletic trophies.

Not every student can be the star athlete or straight A student. We want to make sure that each student feels valued just for doing the right thing. The Principal's Integrity Club recognizes students who are honest, hard-working, and positive role models for their classmates. Students are nominated by teachers but then voted on by their peers. Winners become part of the Principal's Integrity Club which includes being able to choose a friend and have lunch with the principal.

Keeping students engaged during remote learning was very difficult. It was accomplished by constant communication with our families as well as having daily high-quality live virtual lessons for the students. If a student started missing the lessons, the teacher as well as the administrator, would contact the family immediately to see if there was a problem and find out how we might assist in helping the child attend meetings regularly. Teachers worked to connect to each student personally, so each child knew he or she was missed and also that attending the virtual lessons was important not only us but to the student's own success.

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

The staff at Criss Elementary knows family and community engagement is an important key to a school's success. Keeping our stakeholders engaged in our school requires year-round planning. Criss connects with parents, guardians, and community members by coming together for a multitude of family-friendly events. These events include, but are not limited to, Open House, One Book, One School, Once Community program, Mother and Father's Day teas, Christmas and spring programs, family movie nights, and field day. These events allow the staff of Criss Elementary, our parents and guardians, and students to interact and build bonds with each other outside the structured classroom setting.

Communication is a key factor in keeping families and community members engaged with the school. A variety of tools are used to make sure everyone is informed of events and what is happening at the school. The principal utilizes Aptegey, which allows her to send messages to parents through the school's website, live feed, texts, and posts on Facebook. She also communicates important news and upcoming events through a monthly newsletter, the "Criss Chronicle." Finally, she also creates videos which are shared with parents and the community via the website and on Facebook. These videos provide snapshots of events held at school and a look at student activities and successes.

Teachers keep open lines of communication with parents through the use of Schoology, weekly newsletter, Remind, and various other communication tools. If parents have questions or concerns, they are welcome to call the school and know their phone calls will be returned the same day or within twenty-four hours. Our parent engagement is evident in our yearly parent-teacher conferences. Every year, Criss Elementary has almost one hundred percent participation in the event. However, parents are not limited to this one-time conference. Anytime there is a concern, they may meet with the teachers, principal as well as any other relevant professional, utilizing the SAT process.

Covid-19 did not diminish the need for communication or engagement; however, it required the school to find alternate ways to keep the high level of parental and community involvement that we have always enjoyed. After the district went to full remote instruction, the first urgent need we encountered was the need to provide our families with breakfast and lunch. With the aid of the Child Nutrition Department, the school quickly assembled a schedule for staff to come in and hand out food to our families. Many staff members also went to alternate locations and businesses to assist in meal distribution. Unable to have our usual face-to-face events, the staff at Criss Elementary still wanted our students to enjoy safe parental involvement activities. One of the events this year was a reverse Christmas Parade. The entire school participated by decorating all of the windows, hanging Christmas lights, as well as displaying a multitude of inflatables so parents and their children could drive by to look at the school, drop off letters to Santa, and see the staff waving from the sidewalk, all in a safe manner.

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

The teachers at Criss Elementary are a part of several teams which play a vital role in the decision-making process. First of all, every teacher is a part of our Faculty Senate which meets six times a year. Members discuss schoolwide initiatives, how to distribute and utilize funds, and also discuss information that pertains to all employees such as a new legislative matter being addressed at the state level. Additionally, each teacher is on one of the three vertical collaborative teams: math, literacy, or student leadership and school climate. These teams meet throughout the year to plan schoolwide projects and events with regard to their area of expertise. This includes I Love Reading Week for the ELA team and March Math Madness for the math team. Finally, one teacher from each grade level plus two special area teachers comprise the school's leadership team. This team works closely with the principal to set school policy, determine professional development needs, and plays a strong role in the overall decision-making process for the school. The leadership team has been an integral part of the school's success over the past few years by developing the new mission statement and aligning it with curriculum goals.

Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings occur regularly throughout the school year. Weekly grade-level collaboration meetings are scheduled with the principal to discuss various forms of data such as i-Ready math and reading scores, attendance data, other concerns and successes, and issues regarding distance learning when the school was having to instruct students utilizing solely virtual means. Throughout most of this year, a majority of the collaborative meetings occurred virtually with the use of Microsoft Teams and Zoom. Weekly collaboration meetings have also been utilized for more individualized professional development needs. During this time, teachers may visit other classrooms to watch exemplary lessons, classroom management, or they may receive support from the district office with professional development opportunities tailored to their specific needs. Professionally, the teachers are always striving to perfect their skills in the content areas in which they teach. They are more than willing to observe other teachers so they may strengthen their own performance. This allows teachers to reflect upon their own teaching and make adjustments to their own approach.

With the knowledge that a portion of the 2020-2021 school year would be conducted virtually, the Criss staff participated in numerous staff development opportunities provided by the Wood County Board of Education. They learned how to utilize the new learning management platform, Schoology, to teach live lessons, assign work, take grades, and communicate with parents. Many teachers also received individualized assistance from the county technology specialists to address any need they had with regard to using Schoology to conduct their daily lessons.

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

The principal of the school believes the best resource in the school is the staff and with that mindset, works to take care of their needs, as well as encourage and support each individual while pushing them to be the best version of themselves. She has high expectations for all staff and will provide the support for a staff member that is struggling and holds everyone accountable for his or her actions. The principal creates a positive work environment by taking the time to give employees notes of encouragement, positive affirmations, as well as tokens of her appreciation. During times of conflict, she excels at conflict resolution and involves all parties when seeking a solution to a difficult problem. The staff feels supported and valued by her. It is very important to the principal that the school feels like a family and the staff be coworkers who can be trusted and depended upon in times of need. She encourages the staff to form bonds outside of school through regular social events including Christmas dinners, paint parties, and photo scavenger hunts. With regard to the entire school community, when any decision is made, the focus of that decision is always what is best for the students.

Teachers are also given multiple opportunities to be leaders as well through collaborative teams, curriculum teams, and Faculty Senate. In these teams, teachers assist with creating policies that will affect the entire school and each department. The teachers have opportunities to demonstrate best practices and exemplary teaching to fellow teachers as well as the college student observers. Several teachers also serve on the hiring committee which meets to interview candidates for new positions within the school.

Leadership opportunities do not stop with the principal and teachers, but are also given to students as well. Students have multiple opportunities to assume leadership roles within the school. The fifth-grade leadership roles include morning celebration leaders, office assistants, and bus dismissal coordinators. There is a multitude of leadership opportunities at each grade level for students to serve as leaders within their classroom. Finally, there are schoolwide leadership roles in which students are selected for being outstanding individuals: the Principal's Integrity Club and the Young Entrepreneurs' Club. Students who are selected for the Principal's Integrity Club have lunch with the principal in an advisory capacity and discuss what they love most about the school and what they would like to see changed to make the school a better place to work and learn. The Young Entrepreneurs' Club consists of students who excel in the art of sales. These students work together to plan, organize, and run fund raisers such as Penny Wars. They also discuss and vote on what to purchase with the funds that are raised during their endeavors.

To keep the school safe during Covid-19, the administrator and leadership team had to change many of the day-to-day routines of the school. When students returned to in-person learning in January, adjustments had to be made to make sure the school was adhering to the safety guidelines set forth in the West Virginia Schools' reentry plan. These changes included opening more morning entry locations and after-school dismissal locations to spread out the student population entering and exiting the school. Lunches had to be moved to the classroom where students eat with their core groups. Mask wearing is mandatory for all individuals who enter the building and dots have been placed in the halls and classrooms to assist with social distancing. Hand washing and sanitizing are a priority and monitored daily. Finally, all staff members and any visitors to the building are screened for a temperature as well as any symptoms of Covid-19.

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

Criss Elementary strives for every student and family who enters our doors to feel they are welcome and part of our Criss family. Many efforts are made to build positive staff, student, and parent relationships. This begins when students enter the front door in the morning and are greeted by name by the principal and teachers. During the day, students are supported by various staff members and the students know that everyone cares about their success. Each staff member makes a point to connect to each student on a personal level and works to ensure he or she always feels included.

The counselor is an important part of ensuring students develop culture awareness regarding the world around them. She stays abreast of current events and social movements and addresses those topics in her weekly lessons with students. She has been vigilant in educating our students with regard to issues that have arisen from the Covid-19 pandemic. She is aware of the trauma the

pandemic has caused many families and has worked to either provide them with any support needed or to help connect with outside agencies which could help the families.

With a fifty percent free- and reduced-lunch population, we have a diverse economic community. We have half of our students living below the threshold set for poverty, yet the other half come from middle-class to upper-class families. Criss Elementary implemented a Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) program to teach students lessons with regard to rule following, respect for others, and to ensure each child feels safe and supported when he or she comes to school. When a student does not follow school rules, or is disrespectful to other students or adults, the intervention component of the PBIS plan is implemented, and the student receives additional instruction, remediation, and support with regard to appropriate behavior. Through the PBIS plan, students who are good classroom citizens have the opportunity to participate in exciting events at the conclusion of each nine weeks.

The staff at Criss Elementary have worked tirelessly to ensure that when you think of our school, you think of family. That means every student, all parents and guardians, and our community members are a part of our decision-making process and activities. All voices are heard, and all input is appreciated.

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

---

The 2020 school year was one of continuing evolution. The one guarantee you could depend upon was that things could and would change. Therefore, the one practice that was the most successful for academic success during the pandemic shutdown was supporting parents through excellent lines of communication. When students first went remote in March of 2020, little did we know that we had just closed our doors for live classes for the remainder of the school year. Initially, instruction was provided in the form of paper packets. Then, shortly after, students who had internet access could obtain their assignments through the use of a website created by the district. This continued through the end of the year. School resumed in the fall on a blended schedule. By this time, the district had purchased the learning management system, Schoology. To ensure students were able to access their assignments, all students were issued an iPad which they could take home. Additionally, hot spots were provided to families without internet so their children could also participate in live lessons when the entire state of WV went to fully remote instruction.

Open, two-way communication was instrumental to supporting our parents through these constant times of change. Each transition was difficult on all stakeholders. Our first challenge in the spring of 2020 was getting instructional packets to students and also providing meals for our families. Messages were sent out to parents as well as each teacher personally calling their students' families to make sure they understood what was happening, what their pick-up schedule would be, and to answer any additional questions.

As one school year ended and the next began, it was a time of change once again. With the purchase of Schoology, the students and teachers now had many more options with regard to instruction and live lessons. Before school even began in the fall, a schedule was created where parents brought their child to an outdoor station, received their iPad along with instructions and guidance on how to access their new Microsoft Office 365 account, navigate Schoology, and how to attend live lessons through Microsoft Teams. Each parent was given the individualized support he or she needed to assist the child at home. Additionally, at this time, we were reaching out to our families who chose fully virtual learning, letting them know that Criss Elementary will always be their home, and helping with any difficulties they might be having utilizing the WV Learns digital platform.

By November, the Covid-19 numbers increased to the point where our school had to move from blended instruction to fully remote. We quickly discovered that we had families who were struggling with at-home learning for a variety of reasons. Again, the teachers, administrator, and support staff reached out to the families to assess their problems and worked to find a positive solution to each family's needs. We had instances where some parents were essential workers and their children were in day care centers without internet. The principal worked to get hotspots for those day care facilities so that students could attend their live lessons with teachers during the day. We also had students with disabilities, as well as regular education students, who were struggling with learning new content. The teachers reached out to those families and provided private Microsoft Teams meetings for those students.

Open lines of communication for parental support has continued throughout the pandemic. The staff was available all hours of the day and evenings for phone calls and emails because many of our parents work during the day. The principal made videos to assist families with new procedures that had to be put into place to adhere to Covid-19 regulations to keep students safe when they were at school. The teachers made multiple videos which included how to utilize all of the remote-learning options as well as recording their lessons so that students could review them later or watch the lesson if they had missed the live lesson. Encouraging and maintaining parental support has always been a priority at Criss Elementary. However, during the constantly evolving situations during the pandemic, this practice was critical to our success.