

***U.S. Department of Education***  
***2022 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program***

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

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

Official School Name Carmenita Middle School  
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 13435 166th Street  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Cerritos State CA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 90703-2301

County CA

Telephone (562) 229-7775 Fax (562) 404-7807

Web site/URL https://www.carmenitams.us E-mail robert.castillo@abcusd.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\* Toan Nguyen E-mail toan.nguyen@abcusd.us  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name ABC Unified School District Tel. (562) 926-5566

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 Mrs. Soo Yoo  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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

## **PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION**

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The signatures 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 2016 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 or 2021.
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. The nominated school has, or is subject to, a nondiscrimination policy (provide either a link to the policy or submit a text of the policy), is committed to equal opportunity for all students and all staff consistent with applicable law and does not have any outstanding findings of unlawful discrimination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school’s nomination and/or rescind a school’s award if unlawful discrimination is later discovered.

12. 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.

**The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's nomination and/or rescind a school's award if one of these eligibility requirements is later discovered to have not been met or otherwise been violated.**

## PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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Data should be provided for the current school year (2021-2022) unless otherwise stated.

**DISTRICT** (Question 1 is not applicable to non-public schools. For charter schools: If a charter school is part of the public school system, information should be provided for the public school district. If a charter school is considered its own district or part of a charter district, the information provided should reflect that.)

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

**SCHOOL** (To be completed by all schools. **Only include demographic data for the nominated school, not for 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 in the school as of October 1, 2021 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent at the school. Include all students enrolled, in-person, participating in a hybrid model, or online only. If online schooling or other COVID-19 school issues make this difficult to obtain, provide the most accurate and up-to-date information available:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	0	0	0
1	0	0	0
2	0	0	0
3	0	0	0
4	0	0	0
5	0	0	0
6	0	0	0
7	158	122	280
8	169	149	318
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	327	271	598

\*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):
- 0.7 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 52.8 % Asian
  - 6.2 % Black or African American
  - 27.1 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0.6 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 5.4 % White
  - 7.2 % 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 2020 - 2021 school year: 1%

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, 2020 until the end of the 2020-2021 school year	2
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2020 until the end of the 2020-2021 school year	7
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	9
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2020	674
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.01
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	1

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

Arabic, Hindi, Korean, Spanish, Telugu, Pilipino (Tagalog), Urdu, Chinese-Mandarin, Tamil, Thai, Gujarati, Bengali, Marathi, Vietnamese, Chinese-Cantonese, Khmer (Cambodian), Italian, Punjabi, Ilocano, Kannada, Indonesian, Japanese, Nepali, Russian, Amharic, Portuguese

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 5 %  
32 Total number ELL

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

Total number students who qualify: 290

8. Students receiving special education services with an IEP or 504: 9 %  
54 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 with an IEP or 504 should be reflected in the table below. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <u>6</u> Autism                  | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>9</u> Other Health Impaired                 |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>21</u> Specific Learning Disability         |
| <u>2</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>24</u> Speech or Language Impairment        |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment      | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>1</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 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	3
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	25
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	2
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.	7

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 24:1

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

<b>Required Information</b>	2020-2021	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017
Daily student attendance	99%	98%	98%	98%	98%
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 2021.

<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. 1991

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

Carmenita Middle School is a diverse learning community where everyone works together to provide a nurturing and safe environment that fosters academic excellence, personal success, civic responsibility, and a life-long desire to learn. Our mission at Carmenita Middle School is to ensure successful progress for all.

16. Provide a URL link to or text of the school’s nondiscrimination policy.

ABC Unified prohibits district employees from discriminating against or harassing any other district employee or job applicant on the basis of the person's actual or perceived race, religious creed, color, national origin, ancestry, age, marital status, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sex or sexual orientation.

<https://www.carmenitams.us/>

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

## **PART III – SCHOOL OVERVIEW**

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Carmenita Middle School (CMS) can best be described as the "ideal middle school" in the heart of Cerritos, California. Situated approximately 35 minutes from Downtown Los Angeles, Cerritos (Little Hills in Spanish) is considered one of the Gateway cities in southeast Los Angeles. Originally known as "Dairy Valley" due to the high number of Dairy farms in the community in the '50s and '60s, Cerritos is now a flourishing city with award-winning schools, safe communities, performing arts programs, youth sports programs, an award-winning library, and a small-town feel where everyone feels welcomed. Carmenita Middle School is a direct reflection of our community.

Carmenita provides a quality instructional program to approximately 630-670 students in any given year, but this number has steadily decreased over the past two years. Our school staff of 25 certificated teachers and an additional 18-22 support staff provide our 7th and 8th-grade students with various special programs tailored to their needs. Besides the standard support for students at every level, Carmenita Middle School also provides the following: enrichment through our unique and replicable Distinguished Scholars Program (English, Science, History MUN, Math, Band, Spanish, and Art); high functioning Fitness Center (via our PE program) that is available to all students where students learn that "Healthy bodies = Healthy minds;" an award-winning Band and Art program; Guided Study Intervention programs, including a Peer Assistance Support Program (PASS); foreign language access to our 8th-grade students (Spanish I elective); a balanced, inclusive approach to include the under-represented students in Student Leadership programs; and Mental Health Support Services are accessible to all students.

Carmenita is dedicated to ensuring the progress of our community and readily gives back in the form of volunteer support and various donations. Our Associated Student Body (ASB) and Where-Everybody-Belongs (WEB) advisors and the students work in unison to create a community for our kids to grow socially and emotionally to be the best versions of themselves. This year our ASB students were responsible for collecting over 560 toys for the Toys for Tots foundation (12/2021) and pre-pandemic, they collected over \$4,000.00 with the Pennies for Patients drive. Annually, our AVID and WEB program students hold annual canned food drives, and between the various groups, our students have donated countless community service hours.

While the surrounding area may best be described as middle or upper-middle class, our students come from various backgrounds and communities outside our attendance zone. For this reason, we do all we can to help students feel comfortable and safe on our campus. In addition, we encourage all students to be involved with on-campus activities such as spirit days, culture week cuisine sampling, after-school sports, WEB, CJSF, and a variety of clubs.

The staff and student community believe in each other's success, and we believe in helping our students grow incrementally in a safe and fostering learning environment. Therefore, our students are encouraged to work in small groups, process information, and share safely within the classroom to ensure a balance of student's voice and teacher-directed instruction to reflect the value of our student's learning. Students' voice is vital since our students have returned from online learning and must acclimate to the classroom setting.

Carmenita also has high family participation in school events. We "over-communicate" when we have events such as Back to School Night, Open House, Math Night, band performances, and AVID Family Nights. Parents enjoy attending Coffee with the Principal/Counselor, PTSA meetings, and Parent workshops, and during these specific events, we integrate guest speakers whenever possible to increase participation.

During the school closures that impacted learning in March of 2019, students with limited technology at home were provided with a school Chromebook device. During the 2019-2020 online learning program, every student was issued a school-issued Chromebook. In addition, that year, Carmenita teachers volunteered their time to open more than 18 student clubs that were available outside of the instructional day! These online clubs helped students find a caring, safe space to help them connect with others. It is clear that the students and families of Carmenita value learning and academic success as well as character



development and social-emotional health.

Carmenita Middle School was recognized as a National Blue Ribbon School in 1990-1991, and while it has been many years since it has been renominated, Carmenita has continued to remain committed to accelerating excellence and has garnered several other state and national recognitions; CA Gold Ribbon (2017), CA and National Schools To Watch (2014, 2017 and 2020), CA Golden Bell Award (2011), CA Distinguished School Award (1992, 2003, 2009) and for more than ten consecutive years, Carmenita has received recognition by the CA Educational Results Partnership Honor Roll Distinction (2008, 2010-2020). The students are held to high expectations and readily meet their goals. The school community's culture encourages all students, regardless of their achievement level, to put in their best efforts so that we may align with our belief; "Our mission at Carmenita Middle School is to ensure successful progress for all."

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

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

#### **1a. Overall approach, which may include overarching philosophy or approaches common across subject areas:**

Teachers at Carmenita utilize the data-driven strategies based on Marzano's research to focus on Learning Goals, provide practical and immediate feedback, and regularly check for understanding to enhance instruction and engage the learner. Instructional practices utilized in the classroom include "I do, We do, You do," cooperative learning groups, manipulatives, Socratic Seminars, technology-based lessons, cross-curricular performance tasks, actual-world application (garden and projects), and an emphasis on providing differentiated instruction to help students at all levels. In addition, every staff meeting and department meeting begins with our mission; "Ensuring successful progress for all."

Our teachers meet during their common planning periods to review their lessons and make adjustments based on the data collected from both formative and summative assessments. Teachers utilize various in-class assessments to check for understanding; however, they also utilize multiple online learning platforms such as NoRedInk, CommonLit, ReadWorks, StoryboardThat, EdPuzzle, Pear Deck, STAR Reading, and many other programs.

Over the past two decades, teachers have consistently voted to bank instructional minutes, providing minimum days for designated professional development time. Minimum days allow teachers to meet entirely in a large group, by grade levels, or by departments to collaborate and discuss student data. Carmenita teachers continue to work, plan, analyze, and collaborate to create a nurturing and supportive environment for students.

During the 2021-2022 school year, Carmenita teachers made adjustments to the pacing guide, focused on creating safe spaces for students to interact with each other and their curriculum, developed strategies to increase "student voice," and re-established routines for two grade levels that had never set foot on our campus. After 18 months of online learning, our staff quickly realized and were reminded that they teach people first and content second. In addition, our staff realized that our students required accommodations and basic socialization skills that they lacked. While we realized that it was necessary to provide instruction, our staff also recognized the importance of developing relationships with our students; its basis for our instruction and interaction with students and their families.

#### **1b. Reading/English language arts curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:**

In English language arts classes, our 7th and 8th-grade students will be able to expand their knowledge in the following: literature, composition, character analysis, grammar, and literacy skills. The English language arts (ELA) department uses the district-adopted text, McGraw Hill (StudySync) program, multiple enrichment platforms, and the district pacing guide to provide our students with the necessary components for a comprehensive overview of the curriculum.

The ELA teachers at Carmenita utilize Google Classroom to keep students informed of their daily Learning Goals, lessons, and they provide instructional videos and links for students to access when they are in class or at home. Many of the assignments are collaborative, and while students often work with others to establish a foundation for learning, they are each required to submit their own assignments unless it is a group project.

Students enhance their reading comprehension and thinking skills through reading, discussing, and analyzing novels in class. Our teachers are willing to take the extra time and effort to submit requests for updated novel approvals to the district office to ensure that our students access relevant and rigorous literature. For example, our 8th-grade team received approval this year for a new novel called *Drums, Girls, + Dangerous Pie* by Jordan Sonnenblick. This modern Young Adult novel was challenging and engaging for

our 8th-graders as it grappled with topics such as family illness, guilt, and how to be a good friend. On a post-reading survey, students gave the new novel rave reviews, with many commenting that they finished the book early and one writing, “I did not know books as this existed. It’s the first book I ever really read at school.” We are proud to be a school that teaches full-length novels, plays, biographies, and memoirs.

The staff at Carmenita is also provided with professional development time on select days to observe quarterly data from STAR assessments, and they often use this data to help them determine which students require additional support from our Guided Study program or celebrate those that have been “exited” from the after school support program. Based on the data accumulated over the years, the staff at CMS has provided additional learning opportunities for students who benefit from additional challenges through our Distinguished Scholars Program for ELA. Our English Distinguished Scholars program encourages students to choose their own paths. Our program is divided into quarters, exposing our students to the various writing genres, giving them the freedom to discover their preferred styles. Students are allowed to enter a writing contest in a genre that they appreciate and want to explore further. The writing process is utilized to generate a finished piece of writing which is then submitted to the chosen contest. The creative writing and structure of poetry is another genre students explore. Teachers will guide students to create original poems using literary devices taught in their English classes. This program allows our students to bring their learning to “real-world experiences” outside of the classroom. Students will read their poems on Carmenita’s television morning broadcast, providing students with the speaking component standard, which is an essential part of our DS program. Poems will also be displayed on a bulletin board at the ABC District Office, and students will participate in various competitions sponsored by the city or other national organizations.

### **1c. Mathematics curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:**

Carmenita follows the Integrated Math Pathway within the California Common Core State Standards. The math content taught in each grade level introduces concepts that will be explored the following year. For example, in 7th-grade math, the main ideas that students focus on are proportionality, operating with signed numbers, reasoning algebraically, analyzing populations and probabilities, and constructing and measuring. During their 8th-grade year, students learn about transforming geometric objects, developing function foundations, modeling linear equations, expanding number systems, and applying powers. The Math Department uses the district-adopted text, Carnegie Learning Middle School Sequence, and other resources to teach concepts in daily lessons.

Daily lessons are developed by each grade level team based on the State Standards, the State Standards for Mathematical Practices, and pacing guides. Through backward planning, the main ideas for each course are paced out throughout the year in which one, or more, state standards are assigned to each lesson. As the activities are designed for each lesson, one or more of the Standards for Mathematical Practice is incorporated so that students can practice these critical processes and proficiencies.

Instructional approaches within daily activities include differentiated instruction through guided questioning adapted to each student’s skill level. Teachers scaffold and spiral content as necessary based on student content knowledge evidenced through assessments, homework, and engagement during daily lessons. Two online programs are used to differentiate extra practice to meet the needs of each student best. The textbook includes the online program MATHia, which allows students to practice problems associated with the current content learned in daily lessons. The other program, ALEKS, is a computer-adaptive program to bridge the learning gap from previous content knowledge for each student. Students’ current and previous content knowledge is supported as they work on these programs weekly in class.

Each grade level team develops common assessments that are given to students throughout the school year. Teachers work together during their common planning periods to analyze results that guide the next steps in instruction and assessment. Formative assessments include engaging students in problem-solving through whole-class, group, and pair discussions. Quizzes on current topics are given regularly. Summative assessments are a common practice given on paper or online, including Fall and Spring final exams.

The school offers different math programs that serve students of all levels. Our enrichment program, Math Distinguished Scholars, allows students to go above and beyond their regular math lessons through weekly

teacher-led lessons of higher-level math questions to prepare students for math competitions, including AMC8 and MathCounts. In addition, there are two support programs that we refer students to when they are struggling with specific math concepts where students can receive support. The Guided Study program is teacher-led lessons to guide students through a review of math topics from elementary school, current homework, and other review activities to strengthen essential math concepts. The Study Hall program is student-driven and is a place to work on math and receive help from math teachers or student tutors.

#### **1d. Science curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:**

The Science department participated in the K12 Alliance Early NGSS Implementation of the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). They created and implemented NGSS lessons and activities to engage and allow students to explore the new science standards through mastering Science and Engineering Practices. The Science curriculum is focused on project-based learning and the 5E learning module, utilizing local examples to allow the students to better connect with the content and their community.

The Science department follows the District-wide pacing guide and utilizes resources from the district-adopted curriculum, STEMscopes. Through collaboration with grade-level partners, adjustments are made to the plan according to the needs of the students. Each teacher can adjust their pedagogy to maximize the potential of their students by utilizing hands-on activities, scaffolding content together, and creating a narrative to connect various units. Lessons include the use of comparative examples, partner and group work, informative discussion, guided notes, and digital platforms for scientific simulations.

Summative assessments are given digitally to students to efficiently collect and analyze data to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the unit. Assessment data is shared with partner teachers to compare and determine any disparities and identify possible causes. In addition, grade-level teams identify commonly missed problems to allow for targeted reteaching before students retake a different version of the assessment.

Technology is embedded throughout the science curriculum through the use of interactive PearDeck presentations, PhET Simulations, Gizmos, Formative Worksheets/activities, Quizizz, and the use of the Google Educational Suite. Students can access digital content and work collaboratively with their table partners within the classroom and individually at home if needed. During this unique time, if students had to quarantine or recover from COVID infections, they can still access the digital lessons at home to continue working and keeping up with the rest of the class.

#### **1e. Social studies/history/civic learning curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:**

The History Department utilizes a variety of pedagogical strategies to ensure successful progress for all students. For example, we have incorporated frequent Short Answer Questions (SAQs), reference primary sources routinely, teach geography skills and engage in performance tasks through Document Based Questions (DBQs). In addition to these skills, we use philosophical chairs, Socratic seminars, and classroom debates to facilitate learning and teach more effective communication skills.

We incorporate technology in our classes by using Edpuzzle, Kahoot, InsertLearning, Socrative, Pear Deck, and Nearpod to enhance engagement and increase interaction. The department also sponsors the Distinguished Scholars Program (Model United Nations), which is popular among students and has high enrollment. Through this program, students compete at conferences against other middle schools, but primarily high schools, to solve real-world problems in their respective committees. The students in our Distinguished Scholar program also assist with our Peer Assisted Student Success (PASS) program to create support for students who need further tutoring/assistance. Furthermore, we develop programs beyond our curriculum to have the students participate in social and emotional lessons designed to prepare them for life in high school and beyond. It should also be noted that our school was awarded the California Civic Award of merit for engaging our students in civic activities.

Our learning standards for history are addressed by using the district pacing guide based on the California History Standards. Through our digital textbook, American Stories (National Geographic), teachers can

differentiate the reading levels to provide appropriate instruction. There is also a text-to-speech feature integrated into the textbook. Students sit with table groups to maximize cooperation, discussion, and collaboration in history.

Our department is highly collaborative, as we have common planning periods that allow us to use real-time data to develop shared assessments per grade level (formative assessments, warm-ups, and exit tickets). This collaboration further enhances the cohesion of the department and the effectiveness of instruction. Students track progress, reflect on current data points in their learning journey, and participate in error analysis at the end of every unit.

### **1f. For secondary schools:**

Every school's mission and the overarching goal should focus on preparing our students for the next challenge and the next chapter in their lives. Pathways are the road of the future. While many students are still trying to figure out what they want to do with the rest of their lives, we believe that our mission is to make any option accessible to them.

Our students have access to enrichment programs and electives such as AVID, Associated Student Body (ASB), California Junior Scholarship Federation (CJSF), accelerated math courses, honors English courses, social studies classes that prepare them for civic engagement, and a structured Distinguished Scholars Program that provides opportunities and experiences outside of the classroom setting.

Over the past six years, our staff has participated in various training opportunities to ensure that 100% of the Carmenita staff is AVID Certified and can provide our students with specific skills to prepare them for the future. Our current format for learning involves Socratic Seminars, philosophical chairs, four corners, and focused note-taking through AVID and other content area courses (History and English) to help our students obtain the skills that will prepare them for high school and beyond. Beyond AVID, our 7th and 8th graders can select TV Broadcasting or ASB as their year-long elective course. We also offer Project Lead The Way for our students interested in engineering; all of these classes are offered as Pathway courses at the high school level.

Our campus also offers a rigorous Distinguished Scholars Program (DSP). Our staff created DSP to accelerate learning for students who strive for excellence in a specific subject area, such as English language arts, mathematics, history, science, music, and art class. DSP allows students to participate in more extensive, hands-on projects and competitions in the subject area they are passionate about to go beyond the regular classroom instruction. Students are selected based on their submitted application, which includes a personal essay and two teacher recommendations. After being selected into a subject area, students accelerate their learning by participating in meetings, extra-curricular assignments, projects, competitions, and community service under the supervision of our teachers. Students often use the skills learned from our DS program to prepare for the rigors of high school.

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

## **2. Other Curriculum Areas:**

Carmenita provides opportunities to explore the arts, sports, clubs, and many other services, and students are encouraged to explore these opportunities.

Carmenita offers 23 periods of electives that support and connect with the core content areas and their curriculum, ranging from art and computers to broadcasting and robotics. While 7th graders have access to "combo" 7th and 8th-grade elective classes, most 7th graders generally enroll in the elective survey wheel; Intro to Spanish, Art, Intro to Computers, and Intro to Music. The elective wheel provides nine weeks of topical information to help students make decisions about their 8th-grade elective choices. In addition, our 8th-graders have access to various art classes: Project Lead the Way (Planning and Designing- semester I,

followed by Robotics- semester II), TV broadcasting, Yearbook, Beginning, Intermediate, or Advanced Band, AVID, and a foreign language Spanish I option. Although students cannot earn high school credit in the Spanish I class, they can enroll in the Spanish II course at the high school upon successful completion of our middle school course. CMS recently added a new STEAM elective class that is exclusive to our campus, and next year, we are pursuing a new Model United Nations (MUN) elective.

Our band and art programs give the students an opportunity for self-awareness, self-expression, and creativity in their craft. Similar to our sports programs, students learn how to succeed independently and work together as a team. The programs help the students build their self-worth and success. Students have presented their talents to the school, district, and the community through art shows, virtual art galleries, concerts, performances at school assemblies, and festivals. Through these programs, students have demonstrated cooperation, focus, good character, and respect while displaying the highest skills as artists and musicians.

Students with disabilities are included in the elective classes, and they all have equal access to the class of their choice. Our Leadership advisor has made a conscious effort to include special education students in the Leadership class (they are encouraged to apply and are regularly included in the class). Our special education students are also encouraged to apply for the Distinguished Scholars Program. All students have access to our campus-wide resources, including our school library, which is equipped with computers, and our computer lab, both of which are open during snack and lunch.

At Carmenita, we believe in bringing balanced programs for all our students, and our physical education program reflects that balance. The physical education department believes that "Healthy Bodies = Healthy Minds," and every student is challenged to be physically fit and agile. Over the past few years, our physical education program has created a one-of-a-kind fitness center with updated gym equipment designed to rotate entire classes through a series of cardio and strength training circuits. Our PE teachers provide a curriculum that includes dance, individual and dual sports, team sports, agility, and foundational skill-building. Most importantly, they believe in creating an inclusive environment that challenges students to be the best version of themselves. Our Mental Health Professional (MHP) provides Social-Emotional Lessons during PE classes on select days. Our 7th and 8th-graders also receive Tobacco Use Prevention Program (TUPE) lessons that our teachers have been trained to facilitate. Competitively, we are proud to say that Carmenita's students have represented the school well, as demonstrated by 11 consecutive track and field championships and various district "championships" in basketball, volleyball, and soccer over the years.

### **3. Academic Supports**

#### **3a. Students performing below grade level:**

Teachers meet both formally and informally to identify specific students at risk academically, socially, and behaviorally to create a consistent and effective support plan. Regular cross-curricular meeting times are established to allow the entire staff or grade level staff to discuss the needs of specific students. With struggling students, a team consisting of an administrator, teachers, counselor, parent/guardian, and student (when appropriate) develops a plan based on individual student needs. The plan is put into effect and monitored by the administrator and teachers. The grade level administrator refers to the final plan as the plan of action for students, which includes a component for the student, teachers, administrator, and parent/guardian. Each stakeholder is provided a copy of the plan, and the grade level counselor is responsible for following up with the team to check the student's progress. Components of the plan can include lunchtime tutorials with the teacher, after-school study hall sessions, targeted Guided Study, in-class accommodations or modifications, referral to the PASS program, and access to online tutoring.

Study halls are available before school, during lunch, and after school at both grade levels in multiple subject areas. During these structured tutorial times, teachers strategically place California Junior Scholarship Federation (CJSF) students and select Distinguished Scholar (DS) students to assist peers to receive additional support. As a result, these programs provide the structure and consistency that many struggling students require. Conversely, the CJSF and DS tutors benefit from having additional opportunities to lead, provide tutorials, learn communications skills, and in many cases, learn directly from the students

they assist.

Those students that require specific targeted support are referred to the Guided Study program for the areas of English and math. The Guided Study program provides small group instruction for one hour after school on specific days. We currently offer three after-school Guided Study programs, two in English language arts (7th) and one in math (7th), to help support our struggling students. We also offer several structured study halls, and the school library serves as a regular hub for students in need of a homework resource center.

### **3b. Students performing above grade level:**

While we are proud of the programs and services we have for students who need support, we are equally committed to students who desire and need more significant challenges. Our Master Schedule reflects that over 45% of our students are enrolled in classes with honors designation or higher-level math courses; these courses include Honors English language arts, Accelerated Math, and Spanish I. Each year we have also had over 25% of our student population apply for and join our one-of-a-kind Distinguished Scholars Program (DSP).

Our staff created DSP to accelerate learning for students who strive for excellence in a specific subject area such as English language arts, mathematics, history, science, band, and art. DSP allows students to participate in more extensive, hands-on projects and competitions in the subject area they are passionate about to go beyond the regular classroom instruction. Students are selected based on their submitted application, which includes a personal essay and two teacher recommendations. After being selected into a subject area, students accelerate their learning by participating in meetings, extra-curricular assignments, projects, and community service under the supervision of our teachers. The program continues to adapt and evolve each year as our staff brings aspects of the subject they are passionate about to DSP. Our projects have included Model United Nations (MUN) conferences, speeches, essay contests, aquaponics, District Math Field Day, District STEM Olympics, campus murals, and an art show over the past few years. The program is available to all students, including RSP, SDC, and EL students. While the student is not required to be identified as a GATE student or have excellent marks in all classes, they must have a passion for the subject matter they are applying for and must be willing to go above and beyond. For example, RSP and SDC students can apply for the DS program, and quite a few have been admitted to the Art program. These students become a part of a team that paints murals on our campus or submits artwork for local or national competitions. We are very proud of the evolution of the Distinguished Scholars Program, and the school was honored with the California School Boards Association's Golden Bell Award in 2011 and the California Gold Ribbon Award in 2017.

### **3c. Special education:**

At Carmenita Middle School, the Special Education Department uses different interventions to meet the needs of students. The Special Education team consists of one Special Day Class teacher and one Resource Teacher that serve our students every day of the week. We are also fortunate to have one speech teacher, one nurse, and one school psychologist on select days of the week. The team is committed to providing our students with updated IEP plans. At the beginning of the year, the team ensures that all teachers on our campus have access to the list of accommodations and modifications that each student in the program requires. As far as the in-class supports, the special education teachers follow the recommendations written by the team of specialists and professionals in the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) based on standardized and curriculum-based data. The students have accommodations that include but are not limited to extended time on assignments, text to speech, note-taking support, modified rubrics, one-on-one support, and much more. Carmenita Middle School students use the same curriculum as the general education students but at a different pace, and instruction is delivered in small groups. The special education teachers are included with the departments during professional development time, and they collaborate with the other departments. They can access the assignments through shared Google Classrooms as co-teachers. The special education teachers ensure that their lessons use instructional videos to help support students and that they are consistent in terms of utilizing programs and platforms that general education teachers utilize, such as Pear Deck, EdPuzzle, NoRedInk, and Google slides to assist students who may need to review the material additional times.

### **3d. English Language Learners, if a special program or intervention is offered:**

The idea of "Accelerating Excellence" remains a centering focus on our campus as administrators, teachers, and staff work with all students, including English Learners, students with disabilities, and gifted and honors students, in heterogeneous classes within most content areas. All students, with the exception of Special Day Class (SDC) students, continue to be enrolled in heterogeneous classrooms in history, science, PE, and elective classes. In order to give equal access to all students, the grade-level curriculum and instructional materials used in our general education classes remain the same, as much as possible, as those used in ELL and special education classrooms. For many years, our campus provided support through our ELL Coordinator, who had additional time to prepare students for ELPAC testing. As part of her duties, she would work to redesignate students at Carmenita. Through the team's efforts, we were able to redesignate students at the highest rates compared to other middle schools within our district: 2016- 35%, 2017- 32%, 2018-12%, 2019, 39%, and 2020- 31%.

This year, the district LCAP funding allowed Carmenita to add an EL counselor to help serve our students. The EL counselor is a shared position that travels between Carmenita and a neighboring middle school. This year, she successfully transitioned to Carmenita and immediately provided support in 3 after-school workshops entitled "ELPAC Boot Camp" to help boost student understanding of the ELPAC test. The EL coordinator began the process by holding a Zoom parent workshop to educate parents and students about the ELPAC test. As a result, we prepared students for the ELPAC testing during an after-school support program, and she was able to reclassify over 25 students this year alone! The EL counselor has been able to provide one on one support for EL students' academic and social-emotional needs. She has been able to connect LTELs (Long Term English Learners) to clubs and groups at school to improve school engagement. The EL counselor has collected parent data regarding EL parent knowledge of "a-g requirements" for high school, and she conducted a needs assessment survey for EL students. She has also provided extra support for EL students in different subjects and helped strengthen the communication between teachers and students.

### **3e. Other populations (e.g., migrant, homeless), if a special program or intervention is offered:**

Carmenita Middle School is also very fortunate to have resources to target specific groups that may require additional support. For the past seven years, Carmenita has been fortunate enough to have a Mental Health Professional (MHP) that works as a liaison with the families and school to provide social-emotional support, access to resources, and counseling for students who may need assistance. At the beginning of the year, the MHP will run Aeries system queries to identify the students that may fall under the specific criteria, such as foster youth, homeless, or migrant families. The MHP is then responsible for advising the teachers and counselors about her abilities to assist those specific students without encroaching on the students' or families' status. While we believe that it is essential to communicate and over-communicate the programs and resources available to the family, we also ensure that we focus on building trust with our families and students, and we do not share any confidential information with staff. Once the MHP has established lines of communication with the family, the MHP will offer counseling or resources when appropriate and conduct home visits if there is a need to address attendance or bridge the communication with the school. Over the years, we have found that the MHP's ability to bridge the family to school has been a great way to address attendance, learning, and parent engagement. In addition, the MHP's ability to provide one-on-one support and inform the family about their rights and access to McKinney-Vento assistance programs serves as a resource to the family and the student. The classroom teachers work in tandem with the administrative team to make accommodations, provide supplies, and additional support to help our students succeed. In one example, a classroom teacher took up a collection for a homeless family and assisted in the form of a gift card to purchase food, toiletries required for a younger sibling, and general goods.



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

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

Our staff creates a nurturing and positive environment to help support every student that walks onto campus. All staff members, including our secretaries and other classified staff, have an open-door policy that encourages our students to get involved and become contributing members of our school community. In addition, Carmenita offers a wide variety of clubs, sports, scholar groups, and visual and performing arts opportunities to further support students in their interests. CMS clubs and organizations include California Junior Scholastic Association with over 120 students, Science Clubs (In-person and online), Christian Club, which is open to all students on Fridays, and Where Everybody Belongs (WEB), which specifically focuses on connecting students throughout the year.

Carmenita's sports teams are seasonal and popular, offering three sports for boys and three sports for girls, and a track team. This year our teams have participated in intramural sports. This adjustment was made to increase the number of students participating in sports and avoid any "cuts" due to limited busing and COVID testing restrictions. In addition, we increased the number of students participating in after-school sports and increased connections through this adjustment.

We have created and continue to create multiple systems to celebrate students' success and get to know our students in meaningful ways. For example, our "PAW Print" award system gives teachers a way to acknowledge students for positive behaviors under our 3 Rs (Ready, Respectful, Responsible). The PAW Print can be redeemed for a fun prize like a pop-it fidget toy or exchanged for extra credit.

Students who demonstrate noticeable academic or social effort in a particular setting may be given the Unexpected Surprise award throughout the school year. The Unexpected Surprise awards are delivered to students during a class period by an ASB student with a written explanation for the award by a teacher or staff member, thereby providing positive peer and adult attention.

Our annual Pupil Recognition Inspired by Daily Excellence (PRIDE) Assembly occurs mid-year, and the Green and Gold Award Ceremony occurs toward the end of the school year (May). These award ceremonies celebrate excellence and improvement in citizenship, participation in sports and clubs, and academics. We have maintained these recognition ceremonies and made them available online despite school closures. Last year, we started a new Principal's Honor Roll at Carmenita to recognize our students' efforts, and we removed the perfect attendance award as this was no longer a focus. We believe that positive adult recognition and praise are the keys to reinforcing positive behavior and performance.

Although there have been COVID-related challenges this year, including student absences and many families dealing with loss and grief, Carmenita's staff remains flexible, supportive, and understanding. Thanks to our full implementation of Google Classroom and the rest of the G-Suite for Education, students can participate from home when absent and have access to all assignments. In many cases, teacher-created video tutorials to assist with missed instruction. In addition, teachers are available via email to assist or reassure students and parents during stressful periods of absence or uncertainty. In general, teachers understand how we must ensure that students have basic needs and feel safe before we can focus on academics.

Looking back to the 2020-2021 school year, Carmenita is proud of how our staff and students continued to engage with the school community. For example, under the supervision of staff members, our students created 18 unique clubs that existed online through Zoom and Google Meet. From Video Game Club to Fashion Club to Creative Club, student leaders created content to share with their classmates. Although we could not gather in person, the many students who participated in or led clubs felt a stronger connection to the school community.

In addition to regularly-offered club meetings during the year of online learning, our teachers set aside special "office hours" time each week to meet with students in a different setting. Students could log in for a

teacher's office hours to ask questions, check homework responses, or interact in a less-structured setting. Many teachers also had CJSF student tutors available during office hours, and tutors met in smaller breakout rooms with struggling students to offer assistance.

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

We value the partnership between students, parents, and our staff community. With this in mind, we provide students with clear expectations and share with parents how best to get involved in their students' education. Each year, a summer mailer is sent home via email and postal services to inform parents about all the policies and important dates to mark on their calendar. In addition, the community and students receive a "weekly message" from the principal even before the school year starts, and these messages are always available and updated on the school's website. The weekly message is a live document that all staff members get to modify or revise early in the week before the principal can make final adjustments and then shares with the community. The messages consistently go out every Friday afternoon. It contains information about upcoming events, cultural activities, deadlines, district events, parent opportunities on campus, and surveys for parents and guardians to help us make informed decisions.

As we begin the school year, we hold several parent meetings (7th Grade Parent Meeting, PTSA Meetings, Back to School Night Parent Meeting, and Content-Specific Parent nights) to share important school information and expectations. Parents and guardians can also stay informed with updated student grades by utilizing the district-provided Aeries Parent Portal and Google Classroom to access student grades, assignments, and teacher-provided feedback. In addition, our teachers make it a habit to update grades weekly or bi-weekly.

Parent input is valued, and each year, parent surveys on the California Healthy Parent Survey suggest that 89% of parents feel that "school is inviting" and that "school creates a safe place" for their child to learn. CMS strives to build a community that includes active family and parent participation. The participation of the teachers, administration, staff, and parents in the Parent-Teacher-Student Association and School Site Council Meetings allows for collaboration time and provides opportunities to build programs and policies for our school and students. For example, our stakeholders have been an integral part of creating a homework policy, dress code policy, and they approve the Comprehensive Safe School Plan each year. In addition, our partnership with the PTSA results in support for programs enriching our school's educational program. These include the Honor Roll Party, Student of the Month Recognition, Book Fairs, the PRIDE Assembly, Green and Gold Award Ceremony, and the 8th Grade Promotion Ceremony.

Every decision made at Carmenita Middle School serves to "Accelerating Excellence" for all students, community, and staff.

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

All professional development is rooted in our school's vision and mission statements. The CMS administration strongly values teachers' time and provides staff opportunities to complete the district-mandated training and encouragement to seek supplemental training such as the annual CUE Technology Conference and summer AVID workshops. The administration regularly shares professional learning and presentation opportunities with the staff. Teachers similarly feel supported in that if they ever need additional planning time, the administration has been supportive about procuring substitute teachers to provide that time, especially when teachers need time to collaborate. Teachers can design and implement their lessons based on district-adopted guidelines. They are provided with a district-adopted curriculum but are trusted as professionals to enhance the curriculum as they see fit. A culture of collaboration is encouraged, with the master schedule honoring shared planning periods for teaching partners and staff meeting time allocated for grade-level and department planning. For example, 7th-grade history students at Carmenita proceed through their units in the same order and at a similar pace, regardless of their specific teacher. In addition, the 7th grader history teachers meet regularly during their fifth-period planning time to analyze student performance, share commonly-asked questions, and develop shared assessments. Both teachers and students benefit from this embedded part of Carmenita's culture, with teachers feeling supported by each other and students benefiting from the stability of the organization and the "unified front"

of their teachers.

The Leadership Team creates a professional development calendar at the beginning of the year so all staff can provide input and review topics at a glance. However, the scheduled meetings are flexible, and this year there was much more change to meet evolving needs on campus. For example, with the Omicron COVID surge in early 2022, the CMS staff adjusted the topics to discuss posting virtual lessons for many absent students. In addition, the teaching faculty developed common expectations for absent students so that students and families received simple, unified information.

Adjustments were made in 2019 to support online learning, and the focus at staff meetings was rooted in communication with families and students.

Immediately after the school closure announcement, Carmenita's staff met to set up and execute standards of how to post interactive lessons, create Screencastify videos, schedule teacher appointments, and email parents and students for check-in. In addition, during the 2020-2021 school year, the CMS staff participated in district-provided Wednesday tech workshops. After attending the morning tech training, our staff would meet in the afternoon to exchange ideas and programs shared earlier that morning. Our staff believes in being collaborative and making adjustments based on the evolving needs of our students and community.

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

At Carmenita, we value everyone's voice and understand that ideas and creativity come from the ability to be open, honest, and collaborative to find programs, policies, and partnerships to make our school successful.

The School leadership team consists of the administrative team (Principal, Assistant Principal, and Secondary School Dean) and one representative from each department to ensure equal voice and opportunity. Our science department chair also serves as one of the site's union representatives.

The process of decision-making ensures a balanced and shared responsibility for all stakeholders. We do not believe in a "top-down" approach, and we value different points of view in our discussions as they relate to school programs. We realize that we can move forward with ideas and programs when there is input, solution-based approaches, and collaboration across the campus to focus on our students.

A few years ago, the campus had an opportunity to implement a new program to target support for struggling students via a "FLEX" schedule/program. A FLEX program carves out blocks of time twice a week during the school day. Students may be placed in intervention classes taught by content teachers, elect to join a quiet study hall, or choose an enrichment program led by a teacher or fellow students during FLEX time. The leadership team used several meetings to discuss the benefits and drawbacks of the new schedule and decided to gather more data to make an informed decision. A committee was formed, and they visited other schools with a "FLEX" program/schedule. The committee then gathered data about implementation at Carmenita Middle School and presented their findings to the Leadership Team and the school community. A plan was formulated and then shared with all of the stakeholders. The "FLEX" program was specific to the needs of our students and included enrichment, study hall, and intervention support. Through this collaborative process and solution-based mindset, the committee and Leadership Team were able to take ideas back to their departments, respond to questions from staff in a small group setting, and ultimately present a plan that we could execute successfully on our campus. The Leadership Team would meet to discuss the implementation progress and resources that the staff needed to make this successful. Through the ideas and suggestions of the team, surveys were created to find out what students enjoyed and what teachers needed to refine the program and make it more successful. The survey data was shared with the Leadership Team, and suggestions were made to ensure funding and an efficient class selection process and determine the next steps. Through this process, Carmenita successfully implemented the second year of the FLEX program in 2019-2020. Were it not for the disruptions of school closure, virtual learning, and health and safety protocols, "FLEX" would still be thriving on our campus.

There is a deep understanding that positive relationships among adults will positively impact our students,  
NBRS 2022

and this idea extends beyond our programs. Over the recent years, Carmenita's Leadership team has helped shape the Distinguished Scholar Program, homework policy, adjunct duties, hiring process, testing schedule, bell schedules, and overall school culture.

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

All teachers and staff had an opportunity to participate in a 12-hour equity training from Facing History and Ourselves called "Teaching for Equity and Justice." The training focused on the history of race, racism, and educational inequities in American society. It promoted justice, understanding, and how to build educational efficacy. During these sessions, teachers, and staff used time to journal and share thoughts, read scholarly articles about issues of race, and apply their findings to our specific content at Carmenita. Through deep, challenging discussions, participants built awareness of structural barriers that still exist for many populations and described ways to work against racists, classists, sexist, and ableist tendencies in public education.

Carmenita's teachers use a wide variety of strategies to keep students engaged with issues of equity and cultural awareness as well. The subscription for Newsela was made available as a resource for current events that cover a wide gamut of culturally sensitive and relevant topics. Furthermore, teachers can select articles from CommonLit and ReadWorks that both differentiate for the needs of our diverse readers and address important historical and current topics. Through Socratic seminars in history and English language arts, students are further challenged to prepare for and participate in academic discussions that tie what they are learning to modern life's present challenges and experiences.

We have extensive training and professional development days dedicated to responding to the needs of our diverse student body. For example, a meeting time is set aside at the end of the school year for our grade levels to collaboratively develop a "Getting to Know You" project for our incoming 7th and 8th graders. By working as a grade-level team, teachers avoid assigning repetitive or overwhelming work and develop a set of shared expectations for one assignment. The staff at Carmenita agrees that building relationships and truly knowing our students are the best ways to ensure successful progress for all.

Our Associated Student Body team further enriches the experience on campus. Our ASB team shines a light on various cultural groups and educates our staff and students on the rich history, culture, and traditions of those groups. For example, during Hispanic Heritage Month in September, ASB sponsors educational competitions between homeroom classes, produces video content about Hispanic culture, and decorates the campus with "Did You Know?" posters central to the theme of appreciating and understanding this significant part of our school population. This practice is reinforced with other cultures and groups throughout the year.

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

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The Distinguished Scholars Program (DS) was created because students need challenges at every level. The Carmenita Middle School staff went through a transformational phase and increased the amount of collaboration and discourse regarding teaching and learning. The staff focused on key questions set by Richard Dufour and the PLC models. The essentials questions were:

What do we expect our students to learn?; How will we know they are learning?; How will we respond when some of them do not learn?; and How will we respond when some of them already know it?

These four critical questions built the need to challenge our students and provide a program that fed their passion for learning and exploration. With this in mind, the Distinguished Scholars Program was created, and with it, the opportunity for any student to become a Distinguished Scholar. The Distinguished Scholars program at Carmenita has become a program that any student can become a part of to “accelerate learning” and strive for excellence in one or two particular subject areas.

Although the idea for DS originated from the concept that we needed to challenge high-achieving students, the program is made available to all. Students must apply for the program and obtain at least two letters of recommendation from their current teachers. The principal will hold student and parent workshops to review the application process and guides students through the paperwork. Our staff is also provided with time on select professional development days to review the applications and read student essays. Although this is a process, our students and teachers work together to gather interest and complete the application. Of course, one can find GATE-identified and high-achieving students in DS; however, our EL students and special education students thrive through this extra-curricular involvement with their favorite subjects.

Although the LCAP was not developed when the DS program was first created, Carmenita’s School Plan for Student Achievement included the Distinguished Scholar program goals and outcomes. Today, the program continues to be a part of the School Plan and aligns with the district’s LCAP goals. The LCAP Pupil Engagement piece is covered in part by the DS program. For example, students who are a part of the History DS program can gain access to the MUN program in high school if they complete our History DS program in good standing. Ultimately, the student’s passion and desire to explore more about a particular subject area brings about this program’s success.