

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

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

School Mailing Address 171 East Sycamore Avenue  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Arcadia State CA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 91006-2452

County Los Angeles County

Telephone (626) 821-8363 Fax (626) 303-7983

Web site/URL https://fh.ausd.net E-mail backer@ausd.net

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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

Name of Superintendent\* Dr. David Vannasdall E-mail dvannasdall@ausd.net  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Arcadia Unified School District Tel. (626) 821-8300

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. Leigh Chavez  
(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):
- 6 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 3 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 1 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 10 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	107	102	209
7	110	107	217
8	109	94	203
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	326	303	629

\*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):
- 0.1 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 60.4 % Asian
  - 1.5 % Black or African American
  - 14.9 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 2.7 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 18.5 % White
  - 1.9 % 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: 10%

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	49
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2020 until the end of the 2020-2021 school year	17
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	66
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2020	653
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.10
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	10

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

Armenian, Arabic, Burmese, Cantonese, Farsi, German, Hindi, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Telegu, Thai, Urdu, Vietnamese

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 7 %  
47 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 23 %

Total number students who qualify: 142

8. Students receiving special education services with an IEP or 504: 7 %  
44 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>3</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>1</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>7</u> Other Health Impaired                 |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>24</u> Specific Learning Disability         |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>3</u> Speech or Language Impairment         |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment      | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>0</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 8
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	2
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	27
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	5
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	15
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	2

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 20:1

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

<b>Required Information</b>	2020-2021	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017
Daily student attendance	99%	98%	98%	97%	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.

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

Foothills Middle School is dedicated to academic excellence and to the personal, physical, and social development of students. All students are challenged to reach their full individual potential in a positive, student-centered, teacher-guided environment.

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

<http://www.gamutonline.net/district/arcadia/displayPolicy/971150/6>

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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Foothills Middle School, located in Arcadia, CA, is a California Distinguished School currently serving 629 students. Nestled at the base of the San Gabriel mountains, the geographic location of the campus influenced the choice of the Scottish Highlander as the school's mascot. Whether playing bagpipes at the front of the school marching band, wearing our signature tartan on an athletic, academic, or student leadership team, or simply showing school spirit with a Highlander sweatshirt, the "Scotties" as Foothills students are known represent the most important element of our school community. It is fitting to introduce the students first, as their success, safety, and achievement are paramount.

Foothills students have access to a rigorous, standards-based curriculum. They are provided with engaging school work that challenges them to think critically and creatively. Students learn together utilizing stimulating projects such as debates, Socratic seminars, video productions, historical simulations, and hands-on science. Every student is provided with a Chromebook, a tool students use to access instruction, collaborate with peers, develop organizational skills, and connect with people and resources around the world. In addition to academic subjects, students may choose from a variety of elective courses such as band, orchestra, visual and performing arts, student publications, and science enrichment. During the last several years, the staff of Foothills has made great efforts to facilitate the vital work of helping students balance "the heart and the head;" that is, students are also afforded daily opportunities for social-emotional learning, character development, and various avenues to explore and facilitate their leadership and service to others. Students benefit from several peer-led initiatives including Leader in Me, Peer Tutoring, Restorative Practices, peer-led discipline diversion/student success panels, AVID, a robust Associated Student Body (ASB) program, and a peer mentor and orientation program called Where Everyone Belongs (WEB). Semiannual student wellness days, student guided self-care mini lessons, mindfulness practices, and community circles highlight Foothills efforts to educate the whole child.

The teaching staff at Foothills is professional, friendly, collegial, and collaborative. Foothills teachers engage students in the standards-based curriculum, drawing from a solid and ever-improving foundation in Universal Design, Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, collaborative teaching, and inclusive practices to tailor instruction to individual student needs. Outside of the classroom, teachers lead all extracurricular activities. The Foothills staff volunteers to coach sports, direct plays, facilitate student clubs, supervise student leadership organizations like ASB, student publications, and lead drill team. Whether teachers organize ping pong tournaments during lunch, attend overnight outdoor science school, or participate at school dances, Foothills' teachers are caring and involved. Close bonds and relationships are formed between the students and teachers, contributing to a safe and welcoming learning environment.

When not working directly with students, teachers are eager to support their school and colleagues in a variety of ways. Teachers variably serve as members of the School Site Council, the Site Leadership Team, or in grade and department leadership positions. Teachers are genuinely invested in student learning and welfare. Collaboration among the Foothills staff is a non-negotiable aspect of shared success, support, and accountability.

The site principal and assistant principal support the school community as leaders of leaders, ensuring that all students and staff have access to resources and materials, time for development of curriculum, instructional design, assessment support, student data and learning management systems, and opportunities for professional development and growth. The Foothills counselor supports staff, students, and families in academic, behavioral, and social-emotional areas, providing a listening ear and a helping hand whenever it is needed. The front office staff, the school psychologist, the school nurse, the cafeteria staff, the custodial team, and more than a dozen paraprofessionals and instructional aides meaningfully contribute to the synergy that ensures the needs of every child and adult on the Foothills campus are met daily.

The picture of Foothills Middle School would not be complete without highlighting its tremendous parent support. Foothills has a strong and vibrant PTSA that supports the school with activities, resources, and consistent parent volunteers. The PTSA donates funds to each teacher to spend in his or her classroom for needed supplies, hosts a full calendar of monthly student-targeted events like diversity assemblies, Red



Ribbon Week, and school dances, and provides essential support for back to school night, open house, and promotion events. The Foothills instrumental music program is supported by the Parent Music Club, that helps facilitate parades, concerts, uniform fitting, and other band and orchestra events. The Foothills Chinese Parents Club supports the school library, and organizes a cultural event that supports the seventh grade history curriculum. The school also receives tremendous support from the Arcadia Educational Foundation, Arcadia Rotary, and numerous community organizations and local businesses.

Foothills Middle School has a legacy of high achievement and the school is proud of the accomplishments of its students. However, this level of excellence is sustained only through the concentrated efforts of all stakeholders in the educational process. The quality and achievements of the school are not to be taken for granted. Through the collective energy of students, staff, and community, Foothills Highlanders are prepared to be the leaders, scholars, innovators, and nurturers who will make positive contributions to our future.

## **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:**

All students at Foothills Middle School participate in a broad-based, integrated, and academically-oriented core curriculum. Foothills’ approach to curriculum, instruction, and assessment is founded in the California Content Standards for each curricular area. Teachers use these standards as a starting point, then work collaboratively and innovatively to design teaching and learning opportunities that facilitate the knowledge, concepts, and skills students should know at each grade level. As a high performing middle school with a diverse population of different learners, Foothills teachers recognize the need to provide an appropriately diverse variety of instructional strategies that not only address the content standards and instructional frameworks, but also provide opportunities for students to access the curriculum at their own level, to provide voice and choice for every learner, to integrate literacy across the instructional day in all subjects, and to empower students to meaningfully apply learning to their own lives.

Instructional practices include a balance of teacher-directed learning, student-generated activities, co-teaching and inclusive practices, innovative use of technology, and other strategies that capture the eagerness and energy of young adolescents. Adapting instruction to match the diversity of students’ learning styles, interests and developmental readiness is conscientiously kept in focus. The use of instructional technology has continued to evolve at Foothills. The 1:1 Chromebooks assigned to students enable them, teachers, and parents with ways to connect, collaborate, and monitor student progress. All classroom teachers utilize Google Classroom and Apps, along with a suite of web-based instructional supports that enhance learning opportunities and provide students with a tool to play an active role in their own lifelong learning.

In the wake of school closures and reopening, the Foothills staff has reenergized a team approach to supporting students whose learning, social interactions, access to learning have been impacted. All staff have been building upon professional practices with Universal Design for Learning, inclusive and equitable teaching, differentiated instruction, and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support to address learning loss. Staff regularly work together and with district instructional coaches to design lessons with multiple entry points for different learners, and multiple data-driven assessments that better capture what students have learned. As a school community, Foothills believes it is our responsibility to set high standards for achievement, and to support our students in meeting and exceeding those standards.

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

The Foothills Middle School English Language Arts program is founded in the California Content Standards and Frameworks. With a focus on literacy across all curricular areas, all teachers in all subjects fully embrace the vital importance of reading in their disciplines. This central tenet of all instructional activities at Foothills serves as the foundation for a multitude of strategies, programs, and applications designed to improve comprehension, achievement, and communication for all students.

During school closures and with our return to in-person learning, the Arcadia Unified School District offered each school site the autonomy to focus on formative assessments as a means of supporting curriculum, instruction, and assessment in the classroom. With respect to English language arts, this translated to teachers having the agency to create instructional objectives, design engaging lessons, and guide student learning in the ELA domains of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. When standardized state testing was suspended during distance learning last year, Foothills relied more on using the Renaissance ELA assessment data as one of several multiple measures of assessment. Analysis of this data, often completed collaboratively across grade levels and disciplines, helped Foothills teachers to create engaging and innovative lessons and assessments for students of varying abilities.

The Foothills English language arts program is further augmented by access to a quite of web-based software and programs that support ELA objectives. Teachers and students access NewsELA, Imagine Reading, and Scope Magazine to add variety and choice to student learning.

The notion of “learning to read, then reading to learn” resonates with all Foothills teachers; a focus on nonfiction texts, reading for engagement, citing textual evidence in writing, and evaluating online sources have further enhanced students’ ability to read and write across disciplines and for different audiences.

One of Foothills Middle School’s signature practices is a sustained silent reading period after lunch, built into what is known as WIN Time (What I Need interventions and support.) Students who are not otherwise designated for intervention support spend 25 minutes after lunch reading a book of their choice. In the course of a school year, our analysis has revealed that this practice results in students reading nearly a million more words annually.

In addition to our English Language Development program for English learners, Foothills offers various supports for students who struggle. Several collaborative English classes feature a general education teacher who serves as a content specialist, and a resource teacher serving as an access specialist. This team approach effectively doubles the support for all students in the class, supports different groupings, activities, and universal supports to promote achievement.

The transition from traditional use of an adopted grade level anthology to a broader online bank of resources provides a limitless pool of material to teachers and students. This also has prompted all Foothills teachers to support lessons for students on communication in the digital age. Lessons in Netiquette, online safety, electronic publication, and social media awareness are continually evolving and influencing the manner in which we teach English language arts, and students facilitate their own learning.

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

As with all curricular content, scope, and sequence at Foothills Middle School, mathematics instruction is founded in the California Content Standards and Frameworks. Foothills offers grade level math courses in sixth, seventh, and eighth grade, along with Algebra, Geometry, and an accelerated one-year course for Math 7/8. Foothills students who excel in mathematics have access to multiple onramps to accelerate their learning, and students who struggle with mathematics are provided with additional support through math lab courses, peer tutoring, live online individual tutoring, and other interventions both inside and outside of their scheduled math course.

Instruction and assessment in mathematics at Foothills have always been highly driven by multiple data points, including formative and summative classroom assessment results, district math benchmarks, and state testing data. During school closures, California suspended state testing and allowed school districts to utilize local measures. Foothills and other Arcadia schools used Renaissance math benchmark test results along with other aforementioned available data as the foundation of the current math program, and for student placement within the different courses. From that starting point, Foothills math teachers regularly collaborate during department time and early-release instructional development time to design teaching and learning that matches the needs of all students.

Over the past few years, the structure and philosophy of math instruction has shifted dramatically, benefiting a broader group of students and leading to a wider experience of success across the school community. Traditional math instruction that historically utilized algorithmic methodology to identify a single “correct” answer has evolved in every aspect of lesson design. Foothills teachers have been utilizing authentic real life situations to bring new levels of engagement to math instruction. Computation is now embedded in open ended, problem-based tasks that encourage students to approach math with more than a singular path towards solution. Moreover, Foothills students are encouraged to bring their own math problems to their classrooms, giving students more ownership of their learning. On many days, classroom warm-ups consist of an image-based problem projected onto the board or screen, from which students are asked questions such as, “What do you notice? What do you wonder?” Foothills math teachers design such instructional opportunities with the “low floor, high ceiling” approach, which grants students to enter the problem at their

individual level; this is particularly important in collaborative math courses at Foothills, which feature both a general education teacher and a resource specialist co-teaching to a class group that contains some students with Individualized Educational Plans or Section 504 plans. Within a single class, different activities allow students choice, and combinations of homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping provide a diversity of teaching and learning experiences. These strategies effectively reframe the approach to mathematics; by removing the traditional notion that there is one correct answer to a problem, every member of the classroom community is valued for their contribution to a deeper and shared application of mathematics knowledge. This, in turn, contributes not only to broader success in a TK-12 articulated mathematics program across Arcadia, but also to a more relevant experience for every learner.

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

Science instruction at Foothills Middle School has been enriched by the implementation of Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) in classrooms. In years past, each middle school grade level at Foothills focused primarily on single science domains; namely, Earth Science, Life Science, and Physical Science. The NGSS approach adopted at Foothills inspires students to explore how these domains are interconnected, come to a richer understanding of their world to develop deeper scientific knowledge, and apply disciplinary core ideas that are key concepts across multiple scientific disciplines.

Foothills teachers have accomplished this by utilizing inquiry-based strategies in all grade level science programs. Teachers from the three district middle schools have been working together collaboratively since the pre-pandemic years to identify core concepts, design engaging hands-on lessons, labs, and demonstrations, and design performance assessments that prove to demonstrate student learning far better than traditional paper and pencil tests.

While Foothills benefits from specially designed science lab classrooms in which students perform a variety of learning tasks, it is not uncommon to see science classes working outdoors around the campus, collecting data, making observations and measurements, or applying new learning in science and engineering to building models. Students generate and test their hypotheses, record data, and share their findings with other classes on campus and at other schools using instructional technology. Each year, all 7th graders attend Outdoor Science School, an overnight camp experience that provides enriching science and engineering instruction, builds student relationships, and grows school community.

The science program at Foothills has been further refined and enhanced by providing science teachers with ongoing professional development and classroom supports. All Foothills teachers participated in a series of lesson study programs in concert with UCLA. District science instructional coaches regularly team-teach lessons and provide resources and guidance to help teachers differentiate instruction. English Language Development teachers, resource specialists, and trained instructional aides provide needed assistance to students who require science literacy support, accommodations to access their learning, or inclusive practices to engage all learners.

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

Foothills students enjoy a robust History-Social Science program. Most history courses are facilitated within a humanities core block, meaning groups of students stay with a teacher or co-teachers for both English Language Arts and History. This extended time together as a community of learners is marked by a focus on literacy across disciplines, and provides additional opportunities for students to gain a broader and deeper understanding of history.

The California History-Social Science Framework was adopted in 2016; and with the Content Standards, guides how history instruction is divided by grade level. Grades six and seven target world history and geography in ancient civilizations, and medieval and early modern times, respectively; grade eight focuses on United States history and geography, highlighting growth and conflict in the development of our nation. In all grade levels, teachers employ a highly engaging and interactive curriculum, hallmarked by project based learning. While the TCI History Alive is the adopted text, students access a variety of historical documents, maps, non-fiction resources, personal accounts, art, and photographs using instructional

technology in the classroom. Collaboration among students in the completion of group presentations, explorations, and projects is embedded in the learning design of every history classroom at Foothills.

In many instances, history classes at Foothills might be described as purposeful yet playful; sixth grade history students, for example, work together to build a sarcophagus and then mummify a chicken over the course of several weeks. Later in the year, these same students in different classrooms form “City-states” and compete in the annual Greek Olympic games on the athletic field. The formative assessment built-in to these activities provides teachers with valuable assessment data, and reinforces learning for students.

While engagement and fun are key to Foothills’ success in history class, teachers understand the importance of supporting access, equity, and multiple perspectives across the history curriculum. This year returning to in-person learning, Foothills held a series of assemblies to support this tenet, including a survivor of the Japanese Assembly Center at the Santa Anita Racetrack in Arcadia and the grandson of civil rights activist Cesar Chavez. These firsthand accounts of history, both rich and at times raw, provide unique context and invaluable humanity to history for students and teachers alike.

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

Foothills Middle School upholds the purpose of the Arcadia Unified School District, which is to challenge and inspire students to make a positive and profound difference on their world. The Foothills community holds to the ideal that ensuring every student is college and career ready will help students fulfill this purpose. To help meet this goal, Foothills participates in AVID, or the Advancement Via Individual Determination program. AVID has two components at Foothills. The first is the AVID elective classes for grade seven and grade eight, which serve academically average but hard-working students without a college-attendance tradition in their families; and the second is a school-wide focus on the AVID “WICOR” strategies in every classroom across all content areas. WICOR—which is an acronym for Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration, Organization, and Reading—includes a multitude of strategies that support the high academic achievement and executive functioning required for success in college and career. Both of these AVID components help level the playing field for minority, low-income, and other students in the academic middle who possess the desire to attend college. AVID students benefit from annual trips visiting several college campuses, as well as learning from Foothills alumni who visit AVID classes to share their experiences from college, careers, military and public service.

Additionally, the Foothills staff has forged strong relationships with other teachers at Arcadia High School, regularly collaborating with a focus on articulating middle and high school programs, and connecting them with college and career opportunities for students. Many courses, clubs, and student groups at Foothills serve as foundational learning for high school CTE programs and other opportunities. For example, the Foothills theater arts program works with the Arcadia High School drama and stagecraft programs, and the Foothills morning broadcast club collaborates with the digital communications and broadcast journalism studio programs. These relationships include regular field trips for students from both schools; high school students providing cross-age support on the middle school campus, and Foothills students visiting the world-class facilities at the high school.

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

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

In addition to the core curricular subjects, Foothills students have access to a variety of courses that enhance their learning, afford them new experiences, develop their leadership and talents, and contribute to them becoming productive citizens.

Foothills Middle School is well known in the community for its outstanding visual and performing arts programs. Students select from a variety of performing arts electives, including Technical Theater, Advanced Acting, and Musical Theater. Participants in these courses collaborate beyond the classroom to

produce two productions each school year. While the fall and spring productions are supervised by a highly-qualified teacher, the direction, stagecraft, playbill creation, publicity, and recording of these shows are entirely student-run.

In addition to theater production courses, Foothills offers several art classes. Students improve their ability to paint, sketch, sculpt, and sew. In the sixth grade, art and drama are incorporated into an enrichment elective that also includes public speaking, speech and debate, and dance. This 6th grade course provides foundational understanding and gives our youngest students exposure to a variety of learning units, so that as 7th and 8th grade students they may choose an elective that explores a specific art discipline in greater depth.

The Foothills Middle School music program is well-known and widely respected. Students choose from three different programs: Orchestra, Concert and Marching Band, and our newest instrumental music elective, Introduction to Ukulele. Students attend their courses daily, developing expertise on their instruments, learn to read music, perform in ensemble and large group settings, and develop music theory. Our Highlander musicians participate in a variety of parades, vertical concerts, music festivals, band reviews, and play for various community and charity events.

The physical education program at Foothills Middle School is designed to not only improve the physical health, strength, fitness, and athletic skills for all students, but also to provide them with the knowledge to make healthy choices and long-term fitness goals that will benefit them throughout their lives. All students in grades six, seven, and eight attend daily physical education classes. Once per week, physical education teachers present a health lesson to students. Topics in health range from understanding human biological systems and processes, digital citizenship and internet safety, healthy lifestyle choices, nutrition, and avoiding drugs and alcohol. Eighth grade students also receive instruction with the Red Cross Positive Prevention Plus program through their health instruction.

While a great deal of instructional technology is embedded in the core curriculum, Foothills offers digital photography, video production, and yearbook journalism courses to seventh and eighth grade students. These classes not only serve as foundational knowledge for students who may choose to take more specialized related courses in high school and college, but also contribute to the school community in powerful ways. Many students enrolled in these courses also participate in the morning news broadcasts, take photographs of school sports and events for the Foothills website and social media presence, and go on to serve during high school as Digital Communications Interns for the district public information office.

### **3. Academic Supports**

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

Foothills is home to many strong students who come to school prepared with a foundation of skills necessary for the increased rigor of middle school. However, this is not the case for all. Some students have disadvantages, which increase the challenge of learning with that same level of success. A simple unilateral approach to teaching does not reach all students. Over the years, instructional practice at Foothills has developed into a complex web of interconnecting parts although it was not always consistently applied. Effective instruction needed to be defined, codified, and communicated to ensure that all students were provided with the tools needed for academic achievement.

School improvement is measured by student outcomes. Student learning is the result of effective instruction. Yet while effective instruction raises the likelihood of positive outcomes for all students, specific subgroups of learners are targeted to receive the instruction that would deliver the best success. The students who have been relatively low performing include English learners, students with disabilities, and Hispanic students.

To improve outcomes for all students, Foothills teachers carefully analyze assessment data such as SBAC, ELPAC, District benchmarks, lexile reading scores, and historical grades. This regular practice is essential to monitoring the progress of students. Successful teaching strategies and practices are shared during grade level and/or subject-alike teacher meetings. Collaborative professional conversations give life to the

practice of communication around effective instruction.

Student Study Team meetings are held for any child found to be struggling academically, behaviorally, or social-emotionally. These meetings include administration, the counselor, the psychologist, and teachers. Programs available to all students such as after school peer tutoring, academic labs, and “WIN Time–What I Need” intervention held for 25 minutes after lunch allows students to work with instructional coaches or visit teachers across the campus for additional support. Consistent progress monitoring, home-school communication, and an individually-tailored support program throughout the instructional day is helping Foothills close the achievement gaps that exist at our high performing middle school.

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

Foothills teachers plan instruction that promotes high-level critical thinking. As a result, students communicate their comprehension, talents, and passions through a variety of tools including tests, assignments, presentations, group projects, and performances. Grades measure a variety of ways that students are asked to demonstrate proficiency. Consistent and clear feedback is valued for its power to communicate student progress.

For students whose excellence extends beyond grade level standards, Foothills is proud to provide myriad opportunities for them to explore their talents and interests. Many years ago, all Arcadia schools featured standalone gifted and talented education programs. Even prior to GATE funding transitioning in California to the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), Foothills joined other schools in Arcadia to embed acceleration and enrichment within the curriculum throughout the instructional day. Recognizing that many Foothills students perform at a superior academic level, all teachers are empowered to attend educational conferences that can help them extend learning opportunities. As part of the district’s TK-12 articulated vision, all levels share multiple points of performance data for students who ultimately access accelerated programs beyond their age-identified grade level. For example, fifth grade students at our feeder elementary schools are invited to optional summer boost and acceleration programs that support middle school math standards and content, allowing them to enroll in Math 7, or Math 7/8 as a sixth grader. Similar acceleration onramps exist for Foothills students through Geometry during their three years in middle school. Individual students who require higher math courses may attend those classes at Arcadia High School and return to campus for the balance of their schedule.

Additionally, students and teachers submit ideas for curricular-based clubs and enrichment activities to ASB. Clubs for students to extend their passion for writing, science, or chess enhance learning. Historically, Foothills teachers supervise academic teams that have competed in math and science olympiads, and college-sponsored contests. Providing these opportunities in partnership with a highly-involved and supportive parent community helps Foothills meet the goal of engaging every learner, and meeting their individual needs.

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

One of the long-standing tenets upheld by Foothills Middle School teachers is that “accommodations are tantamount to good teaching.” With respect to students in special education at Foothills, this belief holds true. Students with IEP goals are placed in the least restrictive environment, such that they are afforded the opportunity to be educated with non-disabled peers, to the greatest extent appropriate. Moreover, as valued members of the IEP teams, parents, teachers, resource specialists, the school psychologist, administration, and other service providers work together in partnership to ensure these students have access to the general education curriculum, to co-curricular and extracurricular activities, athletics, clubs, and any other program their non-disabled peers are able to access.

During distance learning, Foothills staff, IEP teams, and the Special Education department collaborated closely throughout the school year to ensure that continuity of services continued. Foothills students benefitted from the district’s investment in new technology platforms which allowed for a seamless transition to teletherapy for related services. Education specialists’ existing familiarity with Google Classroom also contributed to continuity in academic support for students with disabilities and allowed for

ensuring collaborative teaching and access to the least restrictive environment for students. Instructional materials were delivered and completed assignments were picked up by school staff and administrators on a weekly basis.

Foothills' in-person learning for special education students is highlighted by collaborative classes that include both special education and general education students in courses co-taught by a content specialist and a resource/access specialist. This general education setting, supported by Universal Design, differentiated instruction, and flexible settings benefits all students. Foothills also offers a zero period physical education class option for students with IEPs, so that they are able to select an elective course that might otherwise be preempted by a special education course like Study Skills or other Specialized Academic Instructional minutes required by the student's IEP.

Notably, a comprehensive Student Study Team process and continued professional growth with Multi-tiered Support Services (MTSS) at Foothills continues to help staff divert special education identification appropriately until other, lower-tiered interventions can be tried. This, too, maintains student participation in the general education setting, while providing support to struggling learners.

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

Foothills Middle School provides targeted services for all English Learners in small groups and individual instruction as needed. Students in ELD 1 and ELD 2 courses are enrolled in a cored block consisting of two periods. Due to their specific needs for language support, this effectively replaces their Humanities block. ELD 3 students are enrolled in a single period Reading and Writing Workshop course in place of an elective that provides support for literacy across all academic subjects. As with other unduplicated groups, ELD 3 students have the option to attend zero period physical education to open a period for an elective in their instructional day.

Students in all ELD courses receive targeted instruction in the four domains: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. At Foothills, the ELD 1 and ELD 2 courses are purposefully scheduled at the same time. This allows these classes the flexibility to work independently or collaboratively. Less experienced English speakers benefit from this exposure to peers with a greater command of English.

Foothills hosts several English Language Advisory Committee (ELAC) meetings annually, to educate and engage parents in their child's learning. Foothills ELD teachers, a dedicated ELD Instructional Coach, and site administration participate in the District ELAC (DELAC) meetings each year. District Interpreters play an active role in communicating with parents to provide instructions and answer parents questions. Students continued to use the Imagine Learning platform, Read 180, and System 44 are used as a classroom activities, after they were utilized during both synchronous and asynchronous distance learning instructional time.

Foothills ELD students take the summative ELPAC assessment each February, the results of which are utilized to reclassify students, and designate appropriate interventions and services.

English Learners are also supported throughout the instructional day in other core curricular classes. ELD teachers and the ELD Instructional Coach collaborate with subject area teachers at all grade levels to differentiate instructional materials, assessments, and class projects. Multiple opportunities for ELLs to participate in clubs, sports, as well as lunchtime and after school activities facilitates their feelings of belonging and provides multiple opportunities to practice communicating with peers.

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

In our ongoing work to implement Multi-Tiered Systems of Support at Foothills Middle School, one immutable truth in this process is that "all means all" with respect to students. Every child must be given the best possible access to instruction, resources, engagement, and community.

At Foothills and throughout the Arcadia Unified School District, less than 1% of students are identified as homeless, migrant, or in foster care. These few students are consistently monitored to ensure they are



making adequate academic progress. Foothills staff are cognizant of the fact that students in this small group have unique needs, the solutions for which often require creative and compassionate solutions. For example, while every student is issued a Chromebook for use at school and at home, there are some families who do not have reliable internet access off campus. To accommodate this need, students who require a connection to WiFi are provided with “hotspots,” supplied to Foothills by the district’s technology and information services department. Home visits are conducted by Foothills staff if students need support with technology set-up. During school closures, this proved particularly vital to maintain student connections to instruction, online school resources, and their classmates for socialization. Thanks to these efforts, our homeless and foster youth performed at or above grade level throughout distance learning.

This year with the school’s return to in-person learning, students in these special populations receive regular check-ins with the school counselor and site administration. Classroom performance and assignment completion are supported during these visits, and if required, students are connected to supports. Peer tutoring is available to all students several times per week after school. Students who need support accessing transportation, free or reduced meals are connected with the appropriate district department to fill those needs. Physical education uniforms, clothing, or school materials are available through generous donations from our parent community, booster groups, or private charitable organizations like the Assistance League of Arcadia. By providing each student with the services and supplies they need to be successful, Foothills is able to facilitate more equitable and dignified treatment of every learner.

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

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

Middle school students have developmental needs that are unique to these transitional years. Even as their minds and bodies are changing rapidly, students of this age are capable of independent thought and scholarly pursuits. Students grow, gain a better understanding of themselves, and navigate relationships with others. Building relationships to create a positive connection with school for every student is among Foothills Middle School's top priorities, and supports our shared goal of engaging every child. In the wake of COVID-19 school closures, the entire Foothills staff committed to an increased focus on the importance of re-engaging students in their school community.

Staff uses quantitative and qualitative data from survey data generated with Thought Exchange and other data points gained from AUSD culture and climate studies to reason that middle school students need to feel accepted, respected, and engaged in order to perform well in a school environment. The practice of building relationships to create a positive connection with school was identified as the key to all students' success. Those students who already feel connected to school participate in school activities and demonstrate commensurate academic achievement. Yet, the staff took action to ensure that no student goes unnoticed at Foothills. Upon returning to in-person instruction, they intentionally and purposely are rebuilding a culture where respecting students and colleagues is the norm and where every student has access to caring adults and engaging activities throughout the school day.

This relationship building begins during the transition from elementary school when all fifth grade students at the feeder elementary schools take a field trip to Foothills. Foothills student leaders conduct a peer-led orientation program, provide guided tours of the campus, and give presentations on the many co-curricular and extracurricular activities offered.

The master schedule at Foothills reflects the priority of building relationships with students. A six period day, with the teacher conference period outside the school day, optimizes time spent with students and results in relatively small class sizes. Character education programs like Leader in Me are embedded throughout the instructional day, not only guiding students to maximize their positive interactions with others and explore their full potential, but also providing student leadership group involvement and peer-service opportunities.

The Foothills students and staff believe in high achievement, but they also believe school should sometimes just be fun. The school calendar is full of engaging recreational activities that students enjoy. Regular lunch time activities like musical chairs, Friday music in the quad, ASB-sponsored ping pong and four square tournaments, daily noon sports, and quarterly school dances are just a few of the ways Foothills endeavors to engage students.

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

Foothills is very fortunate to have a highly engaged and supportive parent community. For the past several years, the school has celebrated 100% membership participation in PTSA. As practice, teachers involve parents in the planning, implementation, and progress-monitoring of academic and behavioral improvements for students. While Foothills is a closed campus, numerous parent volunteers visit Foothills to assist in classrooms, to staff annual events like Red Ribbon Week, PTA Reflections programs, preparing the band and orchestra for parade field trips, or chaperoning school dances. Registration days, Back to School Night, and Spring Festival/Open House are always well-attended. Yet the barriers created by the pandemic—vaccination status, community fear, and distance learning, to name a few—demonstrated the formidable threats to the positive relationships Foothills enjoys with parents and the larger community.

One of the most important strategies that helped Foothills sustain this high level of engagement through school closures and our reopening this year was meaningful home-school communication. The Foothills office staff update the marquee in front of the school and the school website each day with the daily student

bulletin, upcoming events, and important calendar items. The website also contains class links and contact information for every teacher and administrator. The “counselor’s corner” provides helpful information for students and families to access academic and social-emotional resources, and links for families to practice mindfulness, mental wellness, and self-care. The assistant principal publishes a weekly newsletter to families, sent via List Serve, to highlight events and updates. The Foothills learning management system offers functionality to send email and phone blasts to the entire school, specific grade level students and parents, or to staff. Most messages sent to families are provided in English, Spanish, and Chinese, to ensure more families receive important information. These multiple communication channels help connect families to our school community, by keeping them aware and involved in real time.

Foothills also benefits from incredible support in the greater Arcadia community. Two local grocery stores just down the street from Foothills have forged partnerships with the school, providing donations of bottled water and gift cards for school events, and reaching out to welcome English learners and special education students to participate in community outing experiences that support real world learning. A dedicated school resource officer from the Arcadia Police Department acts as a liaison between law enforcement and the school to promote safety, and connect students to the community. Foothills and other Arcadia schools also maintain strong relationships with philanthropic organizations like Arcadia Rotary, the Lions Club, and the Assistance League of Arcadia. Together, these groups provide grant funds for classroom projects, celebrate a Foothills Teacher of the Year annually, and provide resources for at-risk youth who may need appropriate school clothing, backpacks, or other materials.

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

The faculty and staff of Foothills Middle School openly refer to themselves as the Foothills Family. This moniker is more than a social media hashtag or a jovial salutation on a staff email; it is indicative of the positive professional culture of our school, the meaningful relationships marked by respect and accountability, and the investment every member of our faculty and staff make in the betterment of one another.

While distance learning and school closures challenged the staff’s ability to be together on campus, intentional efforts were made to remain connected to school and one another using Zoom and Google Meet for faculty meetings, grade and department conversations, or after school time to simply connect and talk. While challenging, this sustained relationships and the collegial, collaborative spirit of the Foothills staff. Upon returning to in-person learning, continued social distancing restrictions were mitigated using a combination of outdoor and virtual meetings to facilitate instructional planning, professional development, IEPs, and student support preparation. Throughout this school year, the office scheduled roving substitutes to cover class periods, allowing teachers to attend meetings with administrators to discuss goals and simply check-in to discuss successes and needed supports. Staff are frequently encouraged to practice self-care, but also to purposefully connect with colleagues to strengthen staff bonds and reinforce our primary goal of student success.

Two powerful changes took place over the past several years at Foothills that provided new opportunities for staff professional development. The first involves district-wide early release days, allowing staff from every level to collaborate. These Small Working Arcadia Groups (SWAGs) meet monthly, and teachers have the agency to choose the topics in which they wish to participate. The second is the Foothills staff shared decision to change the weekly bell schedule to incorporate an early release Wednesday for teachers to collaborate on campus. Embraced by the entire school community for its impact on instructional practices and student outcomes, the additional hour of time for staff to work together gives staff the time to work together as a whole faculty, as a grade level team, or as a department.

One additional strategy is allocating site funds to support staff attendance at conferences. While many conferences moved to a virtual format during school closures, the Foothills staff is eager to increase their effectiveness and capacity by returning to professional education conferences, at which they gain the innovations and insights that further refine Foothills practices that best serve students, families, and one another.

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

As a Leader in Me school, Foothills subscribes to the idea that everyone can be a leader. This growth mindset captures an important component of servant leadership, the philosophy that most accurately describes Foothills Middle School. The principal and assistant principal work as a team of servant leaders, empowering teachers to build their own capacity through collaboration and professional development. Site administration is officially responsible for the implementation of the school's instructional plan, safety, and overall achievement, but these tasks could not occur without the synergistic effects of all faculty and staff sharing these vital tasks to ensure success. Foothills and all Arcadia schools follow a shared decision making model contained in the teacher contract, that delineates certain aspects of school operations that benefit from multiple stakeholder input to decisions. Such work at Foothills is designed to avoid being positional, instead operating with shared interests and maximum benefits for students, families, and staff.

Because of these aspects of leadership at Foothills, administration endeavors to develop leadership qualities in others, including students. Since returning from school closures and distance learning, the principal and assistant principal have noted an increased need for listening, empathy, and attending to the social-emotional needs of stakeholders, including staff. This shifting role of administration—from “instructional leader” to “wellness facilitator”—has required a mindful approach to self-care and purposeful sharing of essential tasks for the administrative team themselves. Truly, no one can do it alone; thankfully, the school counselor, psychologist, office supervisor, school nurse, school librarian, and other support staff draw upon a culture of mutual respect and service to ensure needed tasks are accomplished.

The Site Leadership Team (SLT) is one example of this shared leadership role. Consisting of administrators, the counselor, and teachers representing all grades, SLT meets monthly to address student achievement goals, staff concerns, upcoming events, or student and family needs. Serving as liaisons for their grade levels, the teacher participants balance transparency and vulnerability to ensure that everyone's voice is heard. School Site Council is another Foothills group which values shared leadership and stakeholder engagement. Students and parents join teachers, administrators, and classified employees to improve student outcomes and ensure accountability in the allocation of resources.

This overarching philosophy creates the environment in which student leadership can be developed. Several student groups including ASB, Leader in Me Lighthouse team, student peer tutors, and Restorative panel participants lead and serve. During their three years at Foothills, the intention is for every student to grow as a leader, and continue that journey into high school and beyond.

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

Foothills Middle School is a vibrant community that values the diversity of its members. Foothills families speak at least eighteen different languages, proudly share their rich heritage alongside their school pride, celebrate our differences as opportunities to learn more about one another, and work to be mindful of the norms, beliefs, and behaviors passed down through families, cultures, and creeds.

Several years ago, after a high school event coincided with a religious holiday, the Arcadia Unified School District worked with multiple stakeholders across the community to create an inclusive holiday calendar. Each year, this calendar grows to include a more diverse and comprehensive list of important days in the lives of our students and families. While it assists with scheduling school events that maintain respect for our families, it also serves as a learning tool for teachers to learn more about their students. On several occasions, teachers have learned about these culturally significant holidays, and used them as “teachable moments” to build the cultural capacity of students, build classroom community, and promote mutual respect.

This year, returning from distance learning, the Foothills PTSA partnered with the Foothills Site Leadership team to create a series of diversity assemblies for all students. One of the visiting speakers was Mrs. June Aochi Berk, a Japanese American survivor of a World War II internment camp, who lived for several months at the Santa Anita Racetrack Assembly Center here in Arcadia, CA. Her first-hand account of those experiences inspired students to ask their teachers more, leading to powerful conversations. Another

visiting speaker was Cesar Luis Chavez, grandson of civil rights leader and United Farm Worker founder Cesar Chavez. He, too, delivered a powerful, first-hand account of life in the central valley of California, and the treatment of migrant workers throughout history.

Throughout the school year, teachers design lessons that align with monthly celebrations of cultural groups, including African American History Month in February, National National Women's History Month in March, and Asian Pacific American Heritage in May. By increasing awareness, the staff of Foothills hopes to inspire students to be more accepting of others, in the spirit of mutual respect.

A schoolwide goal at Foothills is to foster a sense of belonging for all students. All staff have received professional development promoting equitable practices, supporting LGBTQ youth, and designing instruction that acknowledges and mitigates bias in the educational system. This vital work continues at Foothills, as we grow honestly and vulnerably as a learning community.

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

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As a member of the prestigious League of Innovative Schools, Foothills has explored, trained staff, implemented, and refined a number of successful strategies to promote student achievement and success. However, the most instrumental program that has had a profound impact on the Foothills learning community is Restorative Practices.

While Restorative Practices training was implemented at Foothills several years before the pandemic, its application and impact has continued to evolve and grow across the entire school community. The process, which originally was explored at Foothills as an alternative to traditional, education-code based student discipline, was applied to reducing inappropriate student behaviors, restoring relationships in classroom communities, and repairing harm. Different from traditional means such as suspension or being sent to the office that remove an offender from the community, Restorative Practices seeks to keep students in the group so they can correct the wrong. Experience and research have shown that excluding students is more likely to have negative outcomes and fail to correct behaviors.

As time has progressed and more Foothills staff have been trained in Restorative Practices, teachers have found that there are outstanding academic applications for the program. Community circles, one of the foundational aspects of Restorative Practices, can be modified as alternative settings for instruction, standards review, student collaboration, engagement, and even formative assessment. Teachers were so frequently going outside their classrooms to find open space to hold a community circle, that site funds were allocated to build a Restorative Garden on campus. The permanent benches set in a circle, surrounded by plants and flowers, creates an ideal setting for students and staff to engage in the practice.

Restorative Practices has been used at Foothills as a faculty meeting format, for behavioral intervention, for professional development delivery, and for consensus-building activities. Students and families have become accustomed to site administrators and counselors using the Restorative Practice circle methodology to host meetings and resolve conflicts. In a circle, every voice is valued, and every participant is engaged.

Restorative Practices have also had a positive impact on counseling and supporting student social-emotional needs. One activity called “The Wind Blows” requires students to get up and change seats as a sponge activity if the facilitator shares something that describes them. While that might be “has shoes with laces” or “is left handed,” some teachers make statements like “I ate breakfast this morning” to gain insights into their student’s ability to engage and participate.

Most recently, Foothills students have been trained to serve on Restorative panels, a peer-leader program in which students help other students process disagreements with classmates, seek academic help, or resolve conflicts.

Restorative Practices have made a lasting impact on Foothills Middle School, and is positioned to continue improving the manner in which we serve students and ensure their success.