

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

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

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

Official School Name Ralston Intermediate School
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 2675 Ralston Avenue
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Belmont State CA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 94002-1216

County San Mateo County

Telephone (650) 637-4880 Fax (650) 637-4888

Web site/URL https://ralston.brssd.org/ E-mail sadler@brssd.org

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

Date _____

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent* Mr. Daniel Deguara E-mail ddegua@brssd.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Belmont-Redwood Shores Elementary School District Tel. (650) 637-4800

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 Sam Leinbach
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

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

Date _____

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

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

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

PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION

The 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

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)
 - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 0 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 7 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	190	198	388
7	202	178	380
8	163	155	318
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	555	531	1086

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

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 31.4 % Asian
 - 1.4 % Black or African American
 - 10.6 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0.5 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 37.9 % White
 - 18.2 % 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: 2%

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

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

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2020 until the end of the 2020-2021 school year	9
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2020 until the end of the 2020-2021 school year	14
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	23
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2020	1080
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.02
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	2

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

Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese- Cantonese, Korean, Filipino, Portuguese, Chinese- Mandarin, Japanese, Arabic, Armenian, Dutch (Flemish), Farsi (Persian), French, German, Hebrew, Hindi, Hungarian, Punjabi, Russian, Turkish, Polish, Gujarati, Rumanian, Serbo-Croatian, Telugu, Tamil, Marathi, Kannada, Swedish, Other non-English languages (10)

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

49 Total number ELL

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

Total number students who qualify: 73

8. Students receiving special education services with an IEP or 504: 22 %
236 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>16</u> Autism | <u>1</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>16</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay | <u>37</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>1</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>85</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>4</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: 1
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to the nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below. If your current staffing structure has shifted due to COVID-19 impacts and you are uncertain or unable to determine FTEs, provide an estimate.

	Number of Staff
Administrators	3
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	48
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	3
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.	8

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 23:1

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

Required Information	2020-2021	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017
Daily student attendance	100%	97%	98%	98%	97%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

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

Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2021.

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

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

Yes No

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

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

Ralston Middle School strives to provide a nurturing environment where all students, parents, and staff pursue academic excellence and participate fully in the life of the school. The Ralston School Mission Statement, developed by staff, parents and student representatives to our School Site Council, serves as a framework for our school's goals and priorities. This spirit of partnership pervades all that we do at Ralston. Ralston's basic mission is to provide a strong instructional program that focuses on the diverse needs of middle school students. We believe that academic excellence is our most important attribute and our highest priority. We also believe that a program of excellence provides students with enrichment experiences that extend the basic curriculum.

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

<https://simbli.eboardsolutions.com/Policy/ViewPolicy.aspx?S=36030523&revid=LiREjOJHHFMA1S9Rim0UyA==&PG=6&st=discrimination&mt=Exact>

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

Ralston students are generally well-rounded individuals. They value and place importance on academics and are involved in the community and in a myriad of extracurricular activities. Our students mostly come from very involved families (at home, in the community, and/or our school district) and most of the parents are college-educated. As such, parents are very enthusiastic and often anxious about academics, grades, math placement, and extracurricular activities. Administrators, office staff, and counselors spend a fair amount of time daily partnering with families to answer questions, listen to feedback, and address concerns.

As a result, this is reflected in our student population. Ralston students care strongly about their grades and academics. This does put a fair amount of pressure and stress on the students, and even more so coming back from the pandemic as the students are adjusting both to middle school and to being back on campus. We chose to not jump into normal curriculum for the first three weeks of school to allow students the space to acclimate and adjust to being on campus after 15 months at home. Instead, we focused on building community and teaching skills students needed to be successful in school: communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity.

We have many students with anxiety and are seeing increased incidences of eating disorders this year. The students want to do well and get anxious about assignments, assessments, and grades. Daily, we have a handful of students not wanting to get out of the car and needing counselor and/or admin support to get them to just be physically present at school, even if it is the office all day. We then work towards slowly adding classes in, having students assist as office aides with school tasks, incorporating counseling and mental health supports, helping to monitor student eating and providing snacks, and creating 504 plans as needed and making extra modifications and accommodations in the classroom. Because of all this, we are working even harder this year as a staff to be empathetic, supportive, and flexible to meet our students' needs.

Social Emotional Learning has been a huge focus this year and it has been important to include student screeners throughout the year like mySAEBRS (Social, Academic, and Emotional Behavior Risk Screening) and the YouthTruth survey to give students the opportunity share how they are doing and feeling, and to provide feedback to school staff. We are teaching students to be organized and communicative, by having a daily routine of using school planners and Google calendars, how to send proper emails to staff, and how to ask for help. At the same time, we really want middle school to feel fun and exciting and for students to expand their social skills.

Ralston students have so many different interests and talents and our elective classes reflect this. We have an elective program that consists of over twenty-five semester and year-long electives. In sixth grade, our students get one elective class, which consists of music, wheel (they get to sample four different electives over the course of the year), or an academic support class. In seventh and eighth grade, students get two elective classes. We also have clubs, groups, spirit days, competitions, a school musical, after school sports, and so many other things to engage students.

Physical Education is an important part of a Ralston student's day to help stay fit, relieve stress, and experience different new and fun units every six weeks. Students experience units like archery, badminton, dancing, spikeball, juggling, cornhole, and more traditional units such as football, volleyball, soccer, softball, track and field. Like all classes, student have PE four times per week. Students strive to earn "golden trunks," special PE shorts in our school color for strong performance and improvement in running the mile over the course of the year.

Students are very busy outside of school, too. Many participate in multiple sports, music, scouts, and outside math programs. Some even take classes at local community colleges.

Ralston is the district's only comprehensive middle school. With over 1100 middle school students, Ralston is like a mini-city. There is always so much going on and there are tons of opportunities and supports. Students switching classes each period, learning to problem solve and advocate for themselves, and

participating in rigorous academic and social programs across the school - these all strongly prepare our students for high school and beyond.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

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

Ralston believes that the purpose of middle school is to develop well-rounded citizens who are academically, socially, emotionally, and physically ready for high school and beyond. The analogy often used here is that middle school is like training wheels on a bicycle. We are preparing students for their next steps in education and life. We want this to be a safe and fun environment where students grow, can fall and make mistakes, and try new things. In the process our students learn how to get back up, do better going forward, and have the skills and knowledge they need to be successful in the situations they are presented with. Students also start to learn and understand that content and skills that they learn in classes and at school are not unique like individual siloes, but they are cross-curricularly connected and are important for real world situations outside of school. As such, it is not only important to teach core curriculum and content and to have dynamic and rigorous programs, but for staff to utilize school for teachable moments that address situations students encounter personally and that affect the world around them.

Given that middle school is a difficult time for students for so many reasons, engagement is key. This means in the classrooms, before and after school, and lunch. Students need to be motivated to attend school. They have to be excited about what they are learning and doing and our approach, programs, materials, and instruction need to provide that excitement.

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

At Ralston Middle School, our teachers work collaboratively to determine the scope and sequence of instruction. Our adopted core curriculum is StudySync by McGraw-Hill. This serves as the basis of our instructional program, but it is by no means the only curriculum our students are offered. The greatest strength of StudySync is the ability for teachers to assign text at multiple lexile levels within any given class. Student performance ranges widely, so our teachers need to strategically plan for engaging instruction that is differentiated, standards-aligned and articulated through our three grades. In addition to the core curriculum, our teachers use a variety of tools and instructional strategies to meet the needs of our students.

Starting in sixth grade, our school structure is designed to ensure success. Transitioning to middle school is difficult for our sixth graders. Not only does middle school mean increased rigor and academic expectations, it is also a transition from one teacher to multiple teachers over the course of the day. To support our students, our sixth graders receive two periods of English language arts, taught as “Literature and Composition” by one teacher. This provides them with more personalized instruction by lengthening the time with a teacher, and minimizes the number of transitions during the day. By seeing one teacher for two periods, the sixth graders are able to develop stronger relationships with peers as well as the teacher.

Across all grade levels, our teachers employ myriad tools and strategies. The curriculum is supplemented with tools such as Newsela and NoRedInk, core literary works and novels, and supplemental fiction and non-fiction texts. Teachers increase student voice and choice through the implementation of literature circles - while texts are thematically aligned, students choose the book to read and have ample time to analyze and discuss texts with peers. Reading and writing are intertwined, and students respond to literature, write expository essays, and engage in narrative writing. Through the organic process of writing, our students also learn about syntax, semantics and grammar so they are ready for the rigors of high school and beyond.

Central to strong instruction is assessment. In all grades, teachers use a combination of formative and summative assessments. Students take the Student Reading Inventory three times per year (fall, winter, and spring) to determine their lexile level. In May of each year, students participate in the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) for language arts. Throughout the year students demonstrate their reading,

writing, listening, and speaking abilities through formative structure such as classwork and participation, homework, quizzes and tests, projects, speeches, and more.

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

As mentioned, math (and math placement) are very important to families and students at Ralston and there are a variety of pathways that offer options as students progress their skills and thinking. However, our goal as a school is that students are appropriately placed, feel challenged, and that they can successfully apply and demonstrate the eight mathematical practices. We want students to really be able to work collaboratively, address higher order thinking skills, show their work, and explain their thinking. Additionally, we want students to be successful at algebra the first time they take the course, whether at Ralston or in high school. The most well-attended Principal's Coffee this year was on math placement and pathways where the principal spent a lot of time conveying all of these messages.

Ralston math instruction and curriculum in all grades/classes focuses on the Common Core State Standards. The textbook used is Connected Mathematics, by Pearson. Desmos, Delta Math, and Khan Academy are used to supplement the textbook curriculum. The April Principal's Coffee, Math - Part 2 will feature guest math teachers to demonstrate these different apps.

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

Our integrated curriculum spans Engineering Design, Earth/Space, Life, and Physical Science and is aligned with the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) for California, adopted in 2013. The disciplines of 6th, 7th and 8th grade science are woven together and there is an equal commitment to the three traditional scientific disciplines with the addition of engineering and environmental science. Instruction features a project-based performance approach rooted in inquiry and discovery, as well as aligned to the practices of scientists and engineers. There is an emphasis on hands-on, collaborative learning with real life application. Instructional emphasis is student centered learning that enables students to think critically, problem solve, communicate, and collaborate. With the integration of content and practice, science begins to make sense as a whole rather than discrete units which allows students to apply this material to the real world around them.

Our team of middle school science teachers engaged in a year-long adoption process during the 2018-2019 school year, and implemented STEMScopes in fall, 2019. As with all our content areas, the standards-aligned adopted curriculum serves as a basis for our instructional program, but teachers collaborate to determine where and when to supplement with additional labs and simulations, as well as when to access supplemental tools like Gizmos. Each year poses a different challenge as teachers assess student progress to determine pacing. Our students consistently out-perform county and state averages. Whereas 27% of California's 8th graders met or exceeded state science standards, 67% of our students met or exceeded the state science standards. This is a result of our strong collaboration and focus on student-centered instruction.

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

The California standards and framework for social studies focuses on critical thinking in four major areas: content, literacy, inquiry and citizenship. We have adopted a curriculum, History Alive published by Teachers' Curriculum Institute, that brings history alive through simulations, and our teachers have adapted the instruction further to ensure engagement and a depth of experiences to hone our students' ability to analyze and decipher the multiple perspectives involved in all of history.

Grade 6 social studies content covers prehistory through the fall of the Roman Empire. The literature and inquiry activities help students understand the relationships between ancient cultures and present society. Emphasis is placed on the knowledge, skills, and values needed to become active and reflective citizens. Teachers incorporate a variety of primary and secondary sources to facilitate the growth and development of historical thinking skills. A key project for this grade is the "Big Dig." Students participate in a simulated archaeological dig of a prehistoric site. In partnership with Stanford University's archaeology department, students participate in identification, evaluation, and mitigation/data recovery phases of the archaeological

process.

Grade 7 social studies explores the geography and history of world civilizations from the Fall of Rome to the Enlightenment. By narrowing the chronological focus, students are given the time to take an in-depth multi-cultural look at the world in which they live, further developing their perspective and necessary skills to be contributing citizens. A highlight of 7th Grade history curriculum is the Gupta Empire Shark Tank project. Students research an innovation of the Gupta Empire, brand it as a product and pitch it to a group of guest “sharks” made up of adults from the school community. This collaborative project combines research, writing, design, and presentation skills into an engaging examination of cultures of the past.

Grade 8 social studies investigates the history of the United States from our nation's earliest settlers to issues related to immigration today. Topics of study include: European explorers, settlers to America, immigration and its impact on our economy, origins of the U.S. government, the Civil War and how our country works together to promote principles of democracy and the promise of freedom and justice for all. In-depth study of the Constitution is an important course component. Emphasis is placed on essay writing, daily current event discussions, and source analysis. A highlight of the 8th Grade History program is a project that focuses on bill writing and US Congressional procedures. Each student writes a bill relating to school rules, each class debates each bill, and students vote on which bills to pass. These bills end up on the principal's desk for “signing”; through this experiential project, students simultaneously learn about the functions of Congress and take an active role in shaping school culture and community. This year a variety of proposed bills ended up becoming new school policies, including lengthening the student snack period to better meet student needs. Through experiential learning, students gain the skills to engage and affect change.

1f. For secondary schools:

In August, Ralston went 1:1 with Chromebooks. Every student now has their own Chromebook that stays with them from class-to-class and goes home with them at the end of the day. This has opened up a lot of doors in terms of teaching students technology and research skills in all classes that will be very useful in education and future careers. It has also provided the opportunity to enhance curriculum and provide more differentiation and student choice, with the ability to incorporate new and additional apps not only in core content classes, but electives. It also provides equitable access to education for all of our students.

Preparing students for the real world is important to Ralston. Our classes, programs, and partnerships don't just teach students the required content, but teach them the important soft skills and give them experience with real world professionals and situations. We are very excited to add some new opportunities next year related to CTE.

We will have two new electives classes, STEM & Career Awareness, and Robotics. We already have an unofficial pathway built with the high school for how Storytech/Coding leads to their classes. The goal is to build out a more robust CTE pathway starting next year with the addition of the STEM & Career Awareness and Robotics courses. We have been selected to receive a \$38,000 grant from the San Mateo County Office of Education to add these two new courses next year and participate in their green career awareness CTE pathway grant and professional development. The STEM & Career Awareness class will provide a fun introduction to relevant, project-based, real-world, and hands-on learning experiences that introduce students to STEM-based topics, and, ultimately, guide them toward a STEM-based career with a “solutionary”, equity-based, and environmentally- sustainable mindset. Topics covered in this course are Computer Applications, Energy/Environment and Utilities, Engineering and Architecture, Health Sciences and Medical Technologies, Manufacturing and Product Development and Agriculture and Natural Sciences.

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

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Ralston offers a strong variety of elective offerings that supports student choice and still incorporate skills and content knowledge useful to core curriculum classes and future life. In the areas of visual and performing arts, Ralston offers Art, Art/Ceramics, Ceramics, Drama, Guitar, and three different levels for Band, Choir, and Orchestra (beginning, intermediate, and advanced). For world languages, Ralston offers Spanish 1A & B and French 1A & B. Two years of foreign language classes in middle school are the equivalent of one year of high school world language. These classes have a strong academic focus on reading, writing, listening, and speaking, as well as teaching culture.

In the areas of STEM we offer Animation, Storytech/Coding, Fun with Physics, Media Productions, Project Based Learning, and will have two new electives next year, STEM & Career Awareness, and Robotics. Leadership related electives are: WEB (Where Everybody Belongs), Student Government, Journalism, Yearbook, and Speech & Debate. We also have an SEL and teambuilding elective called the Psychology of Happiness, our board game Strategy & Game Theory class, the opportunity to be a teacher's aide, and we will be bringing back culinary arts next year, but adding a textile arts piece to it and incorporating budgeting and life skills.

The final area of electives are support class electives. This includes Math support, ELD, Read 180/Reading Intervention, and classes to support work completion, executive functioning, and organization, which are Study Skills and Directed Studies.

Our electives allow students to explore new areas they are curious about and/or focus on areas they are passionate about or need support with. Students learn important problem solving and communication skills. Many of the courses incorporate concepts and skills from core subject areas language arts (listening, reading, writing, and speaking), math, science, and history.

Ralston's physical education department prides itself on giving students what they need and want to know about health, nutrition, and exercise. We partner with Stanford University to utilize and teach their Tobacco toolkit and incorporate other community partnerships to teach about health and wellness. Students in the 7th grade perform the Physical Fitness Test. PE teachers lead a rigorous program of fitness and endurance, spin biking, and fun sports units. One our staff's most memorable moments this year was right before winter break when our students put their newly acquired dance skills into action and organized a flash mob with hundreds of students dancing to the music "Thriller" all lunch throughout different sections of campus.

3. Academic Supports

3a. Students performing below grade level:

Student performance is monitored on an ongoing basis through our mutli-tiered system of supports. At Ralston, our "Students of Opportunity" are those performing below grade level across multiple metrics. Throughout the year, teachers document communications, interventions, modifications, and accommodations. Data are reviewed as a grade level team monthly, and teachers are constantly in communication about these students with colleagues, counselors, administrators, and parents. Counselors and administrators meet weekly and evaluate how these students are progressing; what is and is not working. When appropriate, we progress through our MTSS and hold a student study team meeting with school staff and parents/guardians. Through a strengths-based approach, the team formulates an action plan. Through a deep MTSS process focused on tiered interventions, we are able to provide supports that mitigate the necessity of special education assessment; we are also able to clearly document a student's strengths and areas of concern through th process, should evaluation be appropriate.

We have multiple supports for struggling students. Staff meet regularly with students to review use of school tools (student planners, Google Classroom) and teach executive functioning skills (chunking assignments and making a timeline, facilitating office hours with teachers). All students have access to Homework Club and staff who can help with assignments and some remediation. Struggling students are highly encouraged to attend, and counselors often meet students from their class to ensure they make it to Homework Club. Many teachers make themselves available before school, at breaks, or after school to help students.

During the instructional day, students can participate in Study Skills class (or Directed Studies for special education students) as an elective to learn executive functioning, organization, goal setting, and homework/classwork completion. We also offer math support and Read 180 as academic support classes to those who qualify.

This year we are doing a pilot of Sonday, a reading intervention program where students are working with trained staff. Students take an initial assessment and are grouped accordingly. Instruction includes basic phonics and sound blends, spelling, reading and comprehension. Students are assessed formatively and summatively throughout each level. This is an evidence-based intervention, and we plan to grow the program as we train more staff.

3b. Students performing above grade level:

Students performing above grade level are supported in a variety of different ways. Opportunities are both integrated into heterogeneous classes through differentiation and offered as homogeneously grouped classes with different pathways. For example, advanced math is offered in grades 6 and 7 (where students go faster and deeper into the content, but also start work on the next year's standards), algebra for grades 7 and 8, and geometry in grade 8, and students can move between pathways as appropriate.

All language arts classes are heterogeneously assigned, so teachers utilize literature circles as one strategy. Students select books and different projects by reading level. This allows students to select texts at an appropriately challenging level and work with peers of similar skill within a heterogeneous classroom. Opportunities are also provided through writing assignments and projects to go deeper.

Math courses are generally homogeneously grouped as we have multiple pathways, but there is still a range of ability and interest within each classroom. Teachers embed modifications on assignments and/or provide different choices on assignments so that all students feel challenged. Across grade 6, in both the common core and advanced standing classes, students are given options in their daily homework to choose the level of challenge on any given topic. The options all cover the same content, but allow students to show the knowledge in different ways or are designed to be more challenging. In all grades, regardless of the selected pathway, students solve multi-step performance tasks and explain their work and thinking, integrating skills across content areas.

Advanced learners can also access different electives. Band, orchestra, and choir all have advanced classes for which students can audition. Our Yearbook and Student Government classes are by application only, and students must submit teacher recommendations. Students in both classes have to demonstrate advanced skills in reading, writing, leadership, organization. We offer a second year Storytech/Coding class where students tackle more complex projects, coding languages, and additional challenges.

3c. Special education:

There are a variety of classes and supports for Ralston's special education students. In sixth grade students have the option of mainstream Literature and Composition classes or a small setting pullout equivalent taught by an education specialist (who is also the students' IEP case manager). For math, students can also participate in a mainstream class or a pullout equivalent. Paraeducators support in the pullout classes. There are two sections of a class called Directed Studies offered. This is an academic support class where students work on executive functioning and organization, social emotional skills, and get academic support on their homework and classwork. All students are mainstreamed for science and social studies, and as much as possible, paraeducators support in these classes. The courses students take depend on their needs and goals. So for example, one student might only have Directed Studies, another might have only pullout math, while another might have pullout Literature and Composition, pullout math, and Directed Studies.

In seventh and eighth grade there are three options for language arts. Students can be mainstreamed, students can be in a pullout class, or students can be in a co-taught class. The co-taught class is a mix of students with IEPs and mainstream students (randomly assigned by the student scheduling software), with a

general education teacher and the grade-level educational specialist teacher. For math students students have the same options and six grade, mainstream or pullout. There are also two sections of Directed Studies in each grade level. Like sixth grade, a student's classes will depend on their IEP.

All students in each grade level with an IEP have access to the RSP room as needed to come and take assessments and/or complete work. The case manager works closely with the general education teachers to make sure their students' IEPs are being followed, needs are being met, to help with curriculum modifications, and to keep abreast of students' progress.

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

Ralston has a handful of Newcomer English Language Learners. These students are in mainstream language arts classes where teachers provide integrated ELD, extra scaffolds, and modify instruction to meet students' needs. In addition, students have a sheltered ELD class just for Newcomers to receive differentiated instruction for reading, writing, listening, and speaking, as well as to learn "survival language" to help navigate a new school in a new country. Students also learn about U.S. culture like holidays, geography, food, places, and more. This class also utilizes the iLit curriculum from Savvas and other apps to support differentiated, targeted instruction.

For the long-term English Language Learners, students again receive integrated ELD instruction, scaffolds, and modifications in their language arts class. There is also a 6th grade Read 180 class and a 7th/8th grade Read 180 class. The foundation of the class uses the Read 180 curriculum, but iLit and other apps and appropriate high-interest leveled text supplements and novels are used as well to accelerate language acquisition and ensure academic growth and success.

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

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

Social engagement, fun, and community building are key to student engagement and a positive environment for our students, especially since so many of our students are so focused on academics and grades. Before the school year officially begins, we bring students together to socialize and feel more comfortable. Sixth graders come to WEB (Where Everybody Belongs) orientation for a half-day, where staff and leadership students lead icebreakers and team challenges. Students tour the campus with their leaders, get their schedules and practice them, and have time to eat pizza and socialize. We also offer a smaller scale version for seventh and eighth graders separately. Additionally, PTA hosts a sixth grade barbecue for families with free food and activities two nights before school and a seventh/eighth grade barbecue the night before school starts.

Throughout the year we host many fun and supportive ways to engage our students through various student and staff efforts. Our student leaders continue the WEB program with monthly events and run weekly clubs for sixth graders. Staff and parents run a number of clubs and extracurricular activities before school, at lunch and after school. This year we have the following opportunities: Art Club, Afterschool Sports (volleyball, cross country, basketball, tennis, track & field), Black Student Union, Dodgeball Club, Homework Club, lunchtime intramurals, Makerspace Club, Math Olympiads, Robotics Clubs - First Lego League & Vex, Sexuality & Gender Alliance Club, Soccer Club, The Lion King school musical, Trivia Club, and Upstanders Club.

There are also after school social events and carnivals for each grade and spirit days planned by the student government class. (Next year we hope to bring back dances). Our electives are showcased through musical performances and project displays during select school days where the other classes come out to watch and support. We also host evening music concerts.

Teachers and students recognize students' efforts through a Student of the Month program and awarding PBIS points to use at the student store. Each teacher may nominate one student from each of their periods per month for one of the following categories: Academic Excellence, Respect and Responsibility, or Outstanding Citzenships. For demonstrating our RAMS core values (Responsible, Accountable, Mindful, and Supportive), students have an app where they receive digital points and purchase items from the student store.

Administrators recognize and celebrate students' birthdays. Names are included in morning announcements, each student gets a birthday card on their birthday personally signed by each administrator with a small treat, and once a month we have a birthday celebration where if you have birthday in that month you get to pick up a cupcake.

During the pandemic we focused on providing fun environments in a virtual setting. For example, we did lunch trivia, grade-level open lunch Zooms facilitated by student government, and virtual contests on at-home crafts and activities. We also continued to offer academic competition opportunities such as the Spelling Bee in a virtual format!

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Frequent, clear, and proactive communication has been key in developing relationships and partnerships at Ralston. This includes general messages as needed during the week about COVID, needed volunteers, reminders about Ralston and District events and deadlines, as well as reaching out to families in a variety of ways to set up meetings, inform them if something has happened during the day with their student, when we have a concern, or something positive has happened. It is also important to make times for families when they reach out to talk or want to meet.

The Ralston Reporter, a digital newsletter written by the principal, is a more targeted engagement effort that

is sent on Sundays to families and students to keep everyone informed of what is happening at Ralston and in the community. The Principal's section includes announcements, information and data about school initiatives, project showcases, recognition of students and staff, and weekly pictures from classrooms. Upcoming events are noted in the calendar section, and we share "News From the Community" from various community partners. We have been able to advertise open houses and tours at local high schools, share about student-led clubs, and broadcast about free parent education events that are sponsored by local high schools, universities, and community organizations. Special guest speakers share their expertise on a variety of pertinent parenting topics like: Anxiety, drugs and alcohol, working with gifted students, preparing for college, how to talk to your kids about ethnicity, culture, and inclusion, and executive functioning.

Another key communication and engagement opportunity is the monthly Principal's Coffee. The principal presents on a curricular topic and showcases some of the related curriculum and apps. At the end there is always open forum time for dialog and feedback on any school-related topic. Due to the pandemic, this event is hosted on Zoom, which makes it more accessible for more parents to attend and provides the ability to easily record the session for those who can't attend. The slides and recordings are included in the principal newsletter. When we return to in-person events in the fall, time will also be included to visit classrooms and see the learning in action.

Partnering with PTA and Site Council is another way community is built and family/student needs are addressed. Together we plan school events, both educational and social, we collaborate on budgets and school needs, and share data.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

Akin to Robert Marzano's research that many short visits are more effective at evaluating classrooms and teachers than a singular, long visit, we believe the same for professional development. Providing ongoing, embedded support throughout the days and weeks is more effective than offering one-day, sit-and-get sessions in a traditional setting. Ralston staff are intimately engaged and involved in the workings of this school, and contribute to the culture and climate. As the principal, I play a critical role in providing clear, regular communication and genuine interactions with staff. These are foundational to creating a culture of value and support.

At Ralston, we are a collective team of administrators, counselors, teachers and classified staff, all here to provide students with a top-notch experience, and we cannot do any of it without strong relationships and a cohesive commitment to the students. Administrators are rarely in their offices, behind their desks. To begin and end the day, administrators are out and about on campus greeting staff and students, making themselves available to teachers who want to talk, and helping the assigned teachers with supervision. During the day administrators are in classrooms as much as possible to be informed about lessons and curriculum, observe and assist with students, and provide staff quick opportunities to chat or showcase their efforts. Staff also call, text, and email administrators throughout the school day (and sometimes during the evening and on weekends) when they need assistance with students or families and administrators are quick and consistent about responding and providing solutions. The visibility of administrators and willingness to help, listen, and collaborate are a crucial part of creating a strong community and climate.

Through weekly communications (memos, in-person conversations, staff meetings, grade level and department collaboration times), we are able to establish clear expectations, develop collaborative timelines, and facilitate student-centered conversations. We utilize technology as a tool to mitigate the challenges of multiple calendars - whether we use Zoom to hold meetings with working families, or capitalize on Google calendars and shared documents to schedule and collaborate from afar, we are able to support our staff and create systems that encourage voice. Even though we were working remotely in fall, 2020, our practices and systems ensured continuous communication. The Ralston staff played an integral role in designing the schedule for both distance and hybrid learning. Thanks to their active engagement, our students were able to continue with 6 courses (instead of 7) in 2020-2021, and students maintained their leveled math courses without being tracked with the same students through all courses. Teacher input and design were critical in creating a schedule that offered the most in-person time to students attending in hybrid, while maintaining

high levels of rigor for those who stayed in distance learning.

To say that teaching through a pandemic is hard is an understatement. We had to work especially hard to strategically support our staff. Staff engaged in open office hours with specialists from counseling, special education, and other specialized services at our school. We partnered with our PTA to provide delivery of food and thank-you's to staff who were carrying the load of continuing education despite ongoing challenges with adapting our youth to online learning. And through it all, we involved our staff in the decision making process.

4. School Leadership:

Shared leadership is the vision at Ralston. It takes a village to raise a child. As such, there are lots of leadership opportunities for staff (and students). Plus, staff don't always want to hear from the administrative team. This is why there is a staff leadership team composed of department chairs and grade level leads. There are also committees for SEL, PBIS, and safety, and staff leaders who are a part of PTA and Site Council. When administrators are thinking about larger initiatives and changes these are teams we often collaborate with first.

The instructional leadership focus for this year (determined by the administrative team), but in partnership with the leadership teams, has been classroom environment (CSTP 2) since this has been so important to welcoming students back to school. There are new expectations about consistency across classrooms to help the students since they have seven different teachers and classrooms. There is some flexibility and creativity allowed, but all classrooms must have agendas, homework, and objectives on the board, word and unit walls, and other scaffolds and supports on the walls. There were opportunities at staff meeting for staff to help come up with these requirements, professional development, and then generous time to implement since this is new. Administrators visit the classrooms regularly to make sure the requirements are met and provide any necessary feedback. The second half of the year was supposed to focus on differentiation, voice, and choice. However, this has been put on hold for next year since staff are overwhelmed with all of the additional student needs and supports due to being in distance learning and the pandemic.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

At Ralston, we have a diverse population of students and staff with varied needs and backgrounds. As a school community, we look for equity and cultural awareness at a micro and macro level. Equity and cultural awareness lenses are used for planning and making decisions across the system. Staff partner with families individually to address specific areas of need, and work hard to know each child.

In classrooms we see a multitude of strategies to bring in multiple perspectives and to understand our community and the current context: watching CNN10 news, discussing current events, using Flocabulary's Week in Rap. There are discussions about social movements like Black Lives Matter, and what is happening in Ukraine. Our Journalism class writes about current events in their monthly student newspaper. In Language Arts, teachers teach novels and lessons that address diversity and different perspectives. Our seventh grade Language Arts department has developed a whole unit called "Where I'm From." Over the course of a month, they read a variety of short stories, autobiographies, memoirs, and poetry. Each text helps students learn about different people's diverse and varied experiences immigrating to or living in the United States. Concurrently, students have the opportunity to learn about their own family history and make connections between their life and those they read about. At the end of the unit they have a cultural celebration of food.

Teachers give monthly lessons from our SEL curriculum and engage their homeroom students in lessons about respect, tolerance, diversity, awareness, and empathy. During this time there are also opportunities for community circles to dialogue about how students are feeling, address topics and concerns that are coming up for students, and current events.

At the beginning of each school year, the administrators do a kick-off assembly in each grade level related to school expectations and respect. There are messages through the year to reinforce these concepts. After

winter break, administrators lead reinforcement assemblies on rules and respect, and also spend time on bullying. This year we have also focused on teaching students the difference between “reporting” versus “tattling.” We share resources we have created and found with students and families through the weekly principal newsletter.

Students have also helped in the effort to prevent bullying and educating others about tolerance and racism. They have created announcement and poster campaigns to address bullying and racism. They have created kindness events and opportunities for students to share notes of appreciation. Our Black Student Union and Upstanders clubs are currently partnering on a project to address the use of the N-word that students casually use.

Overall, we believe we are just scratching the surface when it comes to culturally responsive teaching and learning. Next year this is one of the areas we will be focusing our professional development efforts on. We are also working on some motivational speakers and workshops for next year for students now that we are moving towards an endemic.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Socio-emotional practices have been imperative to Ralston students' successes, growth, and well-being. Our middle school students are returning from distance learning and living through a pandemic, experiencing puberty, facing new academic and social situations and pressures, testing boundaries, and quite simply, learning how to navigate middle school.

The District and families recognize how important mental health and social-emotional support and learning are. At Ralston we have one counselor per grade level. We have a full time psychologist at Ralston and there are also two licensed mental health therapists who support district-wide by providing therapy to individual students, as well as partnering with staff and providing consultative services. There are dedicated office hours monthly where teachers can drop-in to collaborate with the mental specialists and psychologist and even address their own mental health needs. Every other week there is a mental health meeting for the counselors, principals, and mental health therapists to come together to discuss needs, concerns, and plans for specific students. The counselors, psychologist, and the mental health specialists run different support groups during lunch throughout the week to meet students' needs. This year there are specific groups to address coping skills, open emotional processing, and grief (for those who have lost a parent due to death). The counselors (in partnership with teachers) also run some specific clubs that are open to everyone and have socio-emotional components as well. These are our Sexuality and Gender Alliance, Black Student Union, and Upstanders Club,

The counselors have been foundational in teaching staff how to implement our Character Strong SEL curriculum. They have broken down and organized the lessons so teachers have a monthly menu of different thematic lesson options. Teachers teach at least one lesson to their homeroom each month. The counselors also visit homerooms to model some of the lessons and dedicate a day each month to bring the students in RSP together during class time to do tailored SEL lessons and team building activities.

Additionally, each counselor partners closely with an administrator to support a specific grade level of students and follows the grade level through Ralston. This allows the administrators and counselors to build strong connections with the students, get to know them personally, and support their social-emotional and academic needs. The counselors and administrators work collaboratively, checking in with students daily, resolving conflicts, mitigating anxiety, supporting academics, meeting with parents, participating in student evaluation meetings, supporting staff, and helping students to advocate for themselves and get support. Then, the whole counselor and admin team debrief the day and monitor efficacy of supports.