

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

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

School Mailing Address 1500 Fair Oaks Avenue  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City South Pasadena State CA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 91030-3836

County Los Angeles

Telephone (626) 441-5830 Fax (626) 441-5835

Web site/URL https://spms.spusd.net/ E-mail cbusick@spusd.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. Geoff Yantz E-mail gyantz@spusd.net  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name South Pasadena Unified School District Tel. (626) 441-5810

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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

Name of School Board President/Chairperson Mr. Zahir Robb  
(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):
- 3 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 1 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 5 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	199	168	367
7	203	170	373
8	205	201	406
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	607	539	1146

\*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
  - 31.6 % Asian
  - 1.2 % Black or African American
  - 24.4 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0.1 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 26.3 % White
  - 16.3 % Two or more races
  - 100 % Total**

(Only these seven standard categories should be used to report the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.)

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 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.

<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	20
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2020 until the end of the 2020-2021 school year	0
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	20
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2020	1175
(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):

Swedish, Spanish, Mandarin, Korean, Cantonese, Russian, Japanese, Farshi, Hindi, Khmer, Taiwanese, Telugu, French, Thai, Bosnian/Serbian/Croatian, Armenian, Rumanian, German, Portuguese, Sign Language, Bengali, Greek, Arabic, Hungarian.

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 6 %  
68 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 16 %

Total number students who qualify: 182

8. Students receiving special education services with an IEP or 504: 13 %  
144 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>33</u> Autism                 | <u>10</u> Multiple Disabilities                |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>66</u> Other Health Impaired                |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>40</u> Specific Learning Disability         |
| <u>1</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>10</u> Speech or Language Impairment        |
| <u>2</u> Hearing Impairment      | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>1</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>1</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 2
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.	46
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.	12
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	6

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 24:1

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

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

<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.

The mission of South Pasadena Middle School is to promote life-long learning in a safe and nurturing space where all are able to think, learn, explore, discover, and grow. SPMS strives to be a positive and supportive community that encourages individuals to become capable, contributing, and confident life-long learners by being respectful, responsible, honest, demonstrating integrity and being fair to others. Vision: We will collaborate in order to nurture our students' creativity and to support them in becoming independent, contributing, and confident life-long learners. Working together with families and the community, we will create a safe, positive learning environment for all students.

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

<https://4.files.edl.io/9ef5/06/08/21/232727-004afc48-d31a-484c-9924-eba1ab279ad0.pdf>

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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South Pasadena Middle School (SPMS) is a dynamic school of 1146 sixth through eighth students in South Pasadena, California, a family-oriented small town located northeast of Los Angeles. South Pasadena was incorporated in 1880 and encompasses only 3.44 square miles. Our school was built in 1928 as one of the first Junior High Schools in the state.

At SPMS, our fundamental purpose, as stated in our Mission Statement, is “to inspire, challenge and empower all students to acquire the knowledge, skills, and values to become successful, responsible and caring citizens in a diverse society.” These ideals guide our day-to-day actions.

Our campus, like our city, maintains a small town family-feel. As the only middle school in the district, we are the Tiger Cubs to our high school’s Tigers. We are the place where many students discover who they are, who they would like to be, and what their passions are. We are fortunate to still have elective programs such as culinary science, STEAM, yearbook, art, foreign language, choir, and drama classes eliminated by many schools.

Our school vision states, “We will collaborate in order to nurture our students’ creativity and to support them in becoming independent, contributing, and confident life-long learners. Working together with families and the community, we will create a safe and positive learning environment for all students.” This vision is incorporated into our daily practice and is the reason our school is more dynamic than just bricks and mortar of the historic buildings. Our vision impacts the entire community, as we genuinely believe that we practice what is best for kids.

SPMS’s excellence over the years results from a unique blend of a professionally skilled and personally committed faculty, a talented and actively involved parent community, and a student body that is extraordinarily motivated to succeed. Part of our success is due to our school’s broad ethnic and cultural diversity and our community. As a school community that shares high expectations for all students. Our shared commitment results in children feeling happy, safe, and loved. The joy of learning abounds: teachers, classified employees, and administration work together as a close-knit team, continually striving to meet the overall growth of all students. Our staff works tirelessly to stay current with educational trends, seek out best practices, and be lifelong learners ourselves.

We pride ourselves on being a community where students can walk to school. Groups of middle schoolers make their way to school, carting their instruments and projects with them. At 7:00 am, you will find teachers on campus working with students. ASB students can be seen running a formal business meeting while members of the jazz band warm up their instruments in the quad. In the evenings, you will still find students on campus for hours decorating for dances, practicing sports, or rehearsing lines for our annual musical production. Middle school is a tough age for students and parents alike because students are eager to spread their wings, and parents strive to maintain a connection. At SPMS, we have record-breaking turnouts at school events, such as Back-to-School Night and parent conferences. Our students are about more than just school spirit; they also take pride in serving both the local and global community. SPMS is one of the primary donors to the St. James’ Food Bank, which supports local families in need. Thousands of canned items are carried to school each December as students work to reach our school-wide goal.

Finally, SPMS works to ensure that the social-emotional needs of students, parents, and staff are given the importance they deserve. We have three guidance counselors, a school psychologist, and a social worker with the hopes of providing students with the resources and opportunities to become the best version of themselves. They work together to develop strategies to help support our students and families. Along with college interns, this team is creating a campus Wellness Spot, a place where students can come for support and hang out.

SPMS was honored as a California Distinguished School in 2011 and was named a California Gold Ribbon School in 2016. These awards have served to enhance the reputation of our school within South Pasadena and surrounding communities. The past decade brought numerous changes in our state ELA/ELD, math,

science, and history-social science standards, causing shifts in curriculum and instructional strategies at SPMS. Fortunately, these shifts have been in line with our commitment to providing a comprehensive educational program that allows all students to meet the standards and develop a life-long love of learning. As a result, South Pasadena Middle School is special and uniquely qualified to become a National Blue Ribbon School in 2022!

## **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:**

SPMS has embedded the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) into our rigorous curriculum in all departments. Our staff utilizes a wide range of resources to foster student learning, such as textbooks from various publishers, community resources including guest speakers and experts in the field, and cutting-edge educational technology. Teachers employ consistent, research-based instructional practices that support the CCSS to help students develop 21st Century skills.

All students participate in a rigorous academic program that teaches problem-solving, critical thinking, and exceptional communication skills. We strongly believe in setting high expectations for teaching and learning and supporting teachers and students in meeting those expectations. All students have been assigned a Chromebook which allows teachers to incorporate technology into their lessons. Technology is a valuable tool in our school, and its use ranges from researched-based projects to online tools like Google Classroom, Kami, Khan Academy, Mosa Mack, and Newsela.

One of the most significant factors in our academic success is the collaboration that takes place. Teachers are encouraged to share, and time is dedicated monthly for departments to meet to plan and align pacing and best practices. Our staff has also found it valuable to meet by grade level to ensure vertical alignment and articulation.

The SPMS staff knows it is through frequent and meaningful assessment feedback that individual student achievement can be monitored and improvements can be made. Ongoing formative assessments allow us to analyze data, reflect upon the effectiveness of current instructional practices, and plan and implement corrective actions. In addition, state, district, and site-based assessment results are used throughout the school year as valuable tools to address student needs.

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

Our English Language Arts (ELA) approach reflects our commitment to developing students as enthusiastic readers, insightful writers, independent thinkers, thoughtful listeners, and effective communicators. All students are provided with a Chromebook to support academic instruction. Technology is embedded in the curriculum. Through Google Classroom and shareable documents, students are offered the opportunity to collaborate on classwork among each other and with their teachers.

SPMS focuses on providing rigorous literacy-based instruction that follows the California Common Core Reading, Writing, and Speaking/Listening Standards. English classes use Amplify curriculum, which focuses on a balanced approach to literacy using technology to provide students with a wide range of grade-appropriate readings utilized in class and independently. Amplify is a blended English language arts curriculum explicitly designed to support students in grades 6–8 and prepare them for high school and beyond. Teachers design text-dependent questions to help students analyze and understand complex texts. Students are engaged through dynamic texts, lively classroom discussions, and meaningful digital experiences. The program’s design allows for multiple entry points and differentiated supports to allow every student to engage deeply with the same complex texts and rigorous curriculum regardless of fluency or ability level.

We adopted Amplify as our English/Language Arts curriculum because it most closely aligns with our philosophy. Teachers frequently administer formative, summative, and SBAC-like assessments to check for understanding, adjust curriculum and diagnosis and respond to identified student needs. In addition, they review assessment data, including CAASPP results from the previous year and interim and unit assessments, to monitor student progress. Each unit of study allows students to interact with the text through annotation,

text-based answers incorporating higher-level questioning and analysis skills, and synthesizing the content learned through short writing responses, research projects, and extended writing projects.

Students are enrolled in either grade-level English or honors English. The curriculum for these classes is similar in scope and sequence. The honors level English courses include more rigorous reading and writing opportunities, move at a faster pace, and include more in-depth critical analysis of stories or novels. Students performing below grade level receive interventions and access additional support through tutoring after school.

To fill the gaps in the curriculum for English Learners and struggling readers, teachers provide additional scaffolding and support. The English Department collaborates with the ELD and Special Education Department (SPED) to provide specific feedback and support to each group. An array of formative assessments include text-dependent questions and exit tickets which inform the following lessons.

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

SPMS Math Department focuses on the goal of balancing basic skills, conceptual understanding, and problem-solving in rigorous math classes. Teachers utilize Big Ideas Math Course by Houghton Mifflin, Core Connections by CPM, Math Accelerated by Glencoe, and custom-made curriculum. All courses adhere to the California Common Core Standards (CCCS) and promote higher-order thinking through depth of knowledge questions. Standards are explored using different learning modalities with emphasis on critical thinking and oral/written justification of reasoning. In addition, our math teachers work together to align and pace the curriculum to prepare students for long-term success.

SPMS mathematics teachers see math as a necessary and vital skill that all students need to succeed in college and the workforce. Teachers create and implement activities that promote the CCSS mathematical practices. Students work both in groups and independently to persevere through challenging, multi-step problems. Word problems are incorporated into classes to promote writing and reading across curricula. Teachers are equally committed to challenging advanced students and supporting struggling students. Our Math team ranked fifth in the state in the California Mathematics League contest, with one of our eighth graders scoring the highest score in the state. We show our commitment to our students that may need extra support by providing after-school tutoring three days a week.

Our engaging curriculum and supplemental materials enhance daily instruction to develop problem-based, student-centered activities embedding the mathematical practices within lessons to focus on big ideas and mathematical connections. Across all math classes, there is a heavy emphasis on discussion, analyzing, and computing/problem-solving. In addition, teachers use real-life open-ended challenging tasks to help students understand the real-life application of the concepts they are learning.

We provide three pathways in math, grade level, honors, and accelerated, to best meet the needs of our students. In mathematics, not only will you see students discussing, explaining, and defending their process or answers, you will feel the true community of learners where students are helping one another understand. The focus in mathematics is on conceptual understanding first, followed by procedural accuracy. When students can explain why a problem is solved in a particular manner, they are more likely to understand the concepts and applications of the mathematics. Students practice and apply concepts using both hands-on activities as well as technology. With the need to develop a technology-centered curriculum starting in April 2020, the Math Department embraced technology programs such as GoFormative, Khan Academy, Quizizz, Desmos, EdPuzzle, Jamboard, Explain Everything, Kami, Flipgrid, and Nearpod. With the return of in-class instruction, the most effective aspects of these programs have been preserved.

All teachers administer formative, summative, and SBAC-like assessments to check for student understanding, adjust curriculum and instruction, and diagnose and respond to identified student needs. Unit quizzes, tests, and assessments at all grades determine intervention needs. End-of-year benchmarks allow us to collaboratively analyze class and school performance. IAB assessments are administered to help prepare students for the CAASPP and give us additional data regarding student progress.

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

Our inquiry approach to science education begins with the natural curiosity of children. Teachers guide students' wonder with phenomena and the framework provided by the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). Our educators advocated for the domain-specific middle school science option, which allows our students the challenge, rigor, and depth of knowledge of the core sciences. Each grade has a specific focus: sixth, Earth Science, seventh, Life Science, and eighth, Physical Science. Our science program is driven by inquiry-based instruction, where critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration are valued.

As a team, we were early adopters of NGSS and worked collaboratively to design our curriculum, using the best resources and varied educational approaches. Gizmos, Mosa Mack, Newsela, BrainPop, HHMI, PhET, and TCI, are some of the dynamic sources of the content we use to increase engagement and differentiate instruction as we are fully inclusive of special education and English language learning students within the mainstreamed class.

Students are given multiple opportunities to show their understanding of content in a variety of modalities. Learning goals are assessed through summative assessments, labs, class discussions, and claim, evidence, and reasoning paragraphs. Assessments are analyzed to determine areas needing reteaching. Common assessments allow us to compare data and instructional approaches. Science Notebooks assist with readiness for the California Science Test (CAST).

Each science lab classroom is designed for a hands-on approach to learning, and block scheduling provides time for experimentation, problem-based inquiry, and introspection during one class period. During virtual learning, we shifted to virtual labs and online assessments. We have returned to hands-on investigations: hot air balloon designs, microscopic analysis of pond water, and the aerodynamics of wooden cars. Some of the digital resources have remained, but Thinking Maps and Doodle Notes have been brought back to help students construct meaning from their learning experiences.

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

The social science curriculum aims to equip students to be involved and informed citizens who can critically evaluate, analyze, and make judgments about past and current political, social, and economic events. Teachers follow the California State History-Social Science Framework.

Sixth-graders explore Ancient Civilizations and each civilization's major geographical features and boundaries. Studying past kingdoms, empires, rulers, conquests, contributions, and influences from early man to the fall of Rome, students gain an appreciation for the history of the people of the world. Seventh-graders study Medieval and Early Modern Times. Students study the early civilizations of the world, starting with the Roman and Byzantine Empire and continuing with the influence of Islam throughout the Middle East and Africa. They examine East Asia, China and Japan, the Renaissance and Reformation, and the Exploration of the Americas. In eighth grade, students actively participate in a study of the origins of the United States from the issues surrounding the founding of the nation up through Reconstruction and the Progressive Era.

All students learn through lectures, discussions, reenactments, simulations, collaboration, and cooperative learning. They are encouraged to "think like a historian," focusing on cause and effect, change and continuity, and how the past helps us make sense of the present and how people in the past view their world. Our teachers utilize culturally relevant teaching strategies to ensure students explore culture and history through multiple perspectives. Students are taught to challenge, question, and make sense of history. The curriculum is enriched by literature, media, technology, and primary source documents. Teachers utilize Project-Based Learning to engage students and assess their understanding.

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

SPMS is proud that our students are college and career ready due to our rigorous academic program. The majority of our focus on college and career readiness lies in rigorous academic preparation and the 4- C's—

communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking. Our program teaches problem-solving, critical thinking, and communication skills.

College and career skills are embedded throughout all curricular areas. Students are not just asked to use technology, but they are expected to use it to create new thoughts and ideas and as a collaborative tool. Research and inquiry-based skills are emphasized through shared Google Apps for education.

Students have the opportunity to be a part of our school leadership through the Associated Student Body (ASB) and Upstanders. These student leaders need to maintain good grades and have teacher recommendations in order to participate in school leadership activities. The ASB students sponsor college sweatshirt spirit days and bring in guest speakers to share presentations with students. To promote greater organizational skills, every student is provided with a student binder reminder to keep track of homework and assignments. Teachers spend time in class helping students with their short and long-term planning.

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

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

At SPMS, we offer a broad range of curricula outside the core academics, all designed to articulate and enhance our core curriculum offerings. While seventh and eighth graders enroll in a semester or yearlong classes, our sixth-graders participate in the Exploratory Wheel.

1. Art/Drama/Chorus/Band/Orchestra: Students perform, design, collaborate, and learn through visual and performing arts. Art classes are designed to introduce all forms of visual communication, including drawing, painting, ceramics, printmaking, 3D sculpture, and digital art/technology. The drama classes are designed to provide advanced theory and practical application of stage and film acting techniques. Chorus is a performance-based class where music is studied and performed from various styles, cultures, and periods. Students learn proper vocal production and technique, music reading skills, sight-singing, and performance skills. Our Advanced Band class is available by audition only. This class performs several concerts, attends the District Band Festival in the Spring, marches in parades, learns advanced music theory, and works on higher musicianship skills. In Orchestra, students focus on more advanced music literature, instrument technique, and becoming more professional musicians. Students in this group have a chance to perform in our class string ensemble, symphony ensemble, and chamber groups.

2. Physical Education: Our PE department encourages students to become active and challenge themselves with various athletic endeavors. To ensure that students successfully acquire the skills and knowledge needed to lead healthy, active lives, the Physical Education instructors have collaborated to create lessons, which allow the students to practice core skills in a competitive, yet safe environment while remaining inclusive of all ability levels.

3. Foreign Language: Our 8th-grade Spanish course is a full year and is more intensive than the 7th-grade introductory course. This course mirrors the Spanish 1-2 course offered at the high school, and students who are successful in this class may have the option of advancing to the Spanish 3-4 course when they reach 9th grade. Students engage in conversations, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions. We also have a Dual Immersion Spanish class.

4. Technology/library/media: All students are assigned a Chromebook on the first day of school. They are responsible for bringing it charged and ready to go daily. Since we have one-to-one devices, we no longer have dedicated computer labs. Our library is a favorite spot of many on campus. We have an extensive collection of over 25,000 books for leisure reading and research. Daily, the library houses 50-60 students on average where they hang out, play games, read, or decompress in the quiet room during brunch and lunch.

5. Other Areas: We have a variety of interest-based electives for students to choose from. Our Engineering careers classes explore four cutting-edge STEM careers that focus on creative problem-solving projects. In

Broadcast Journalism, students learn about writing, reporting, producing, and anchoring news stories. Students also write and produce their own Public Service Announcements. The Tiger Cubs News team write, produce, edit, and broadcast weekly shows that feature newsworthy stories about SPMS. Shows are available on a secure YouTube channel for teachers to show students during Homeroom. Another popular elective is Culinary Science, where students have the opportunity to advance their cooking skills and knowledge of nutrition. Students will learn about carbohydrates, fats, proteins, and sugars as they cook a variety of recipes ranging from pretzels to mozzarella cheese to caramels. Finally, our school Yearbook elective produces an unforgettable memory every year.

### **3. Academic Supports**

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

We believe that no barrier should separate a child from quality education; therefore, differentiating instruction is critical to the success of SPMS students. Thus, teachers perform regular assessments in all subjects and grade levels to determine student needs and provide students with targeted instruction and differentiated instruction.

Our Student Success Team (SST) meets regularly to address attendance, academic, and behavioral concerns to develop appropriate action plans. SPMS utilizes a tiered response to instruction (RTI) approach that begins with solid classroom core instruction that is differentiated to meet all students' needs. However, if students are not successful or need more practice, they are provided Tier II and Tier III instruction. Struggling students participate in intervention support.

At each grading period, our counselors generate a list of students with D's and F's and coordinate available support. In addition, academic support classes are offered after school for students performing below grade level. These classes are designed to give individual and small-group attention to students struggling academically in primarily math and English. Still, teachers can provide support in other subject areas as needed. Intervention strategies focus on re-teaching of curricular content, repetition, and additional time and practice to grasp concepts.

We are committed to maximizing the learning potential of each student. To provide academic support to students who demonstrate learning or skill gaps, SPMS offers a course titled, Extended Learning. This class is composed of students who demonstrate poor performance either in their core academic coursework and/or through their state testing results. Our team of counselors works in concert with our staff to identify students who demonstrate this need and collaborate with families to support student's academic progress. Our Extended Learning elective classes aid in providing additional scaffolding, resources, and strategies needed to address the particular needs of the low-performing students. Students are evaluated each quarter and are able to transition out of the program if meeting standards.

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

The high academic achievement of our students is one facet that makes SPMS an outstanding middle school. Our students benefit from a high-quality, college-preparatory curriculum filled with rigor. We have a collective goal to provide an appropriate challenge for all students: those who need additional support and those performing at a high level.

Teachers work hard to ensure they support the needs of all scholars. As a result, our high-achieving students have multiple opportunities to extend and challenge themselves. To better support those above grade level, SPMS offers an opportunity for students to test into honors English classes and honors or accelerated math classes in sixth, seventh, or eighth grade. Honors courses are provided for highly advanced academic students who consistently demonstrate skills above grade level. In addition, we use multiple measures to assess readiness in English and math, beginning at the end of fifth grade. As a result, students prepared for advanced courses are afforded the opportunity to move more quickly through their content.

Our honors English class is designed for students who excel in English language arts and require a faster-

paced, more in-depth, and challenging course of study. Honors students have exceeded standards and value the challenges of complex, critical-thinking opportunities; they can achieve this with minimal assistance and often take ideas to a higher level. Honors English students enjoy the writing process and understand the need for multiple revisions. Teachers present lessons using a variety of modalities, including but not limited to video, interactive lectures, problem-solving, and project-based learning. Teachers use instructional strategies including discussions, debates, presentations, and group work, ensuring that students actively engage in their learning and develop the skill to substantiate their opinions and conclusions with documentation.

In honors math, Standards content is covered with less time spent on remediation and basic skills and more emphasis on content depth and rigor, requiring depth problem solving and critical thinking and additional homework. Accelerated math included the honors content plus the first half of the following grade-level standards, making it a compacted, rigorous curriculum. For example, 6th-grade students learn 1.5 years of math curriculum and standards in one school year. This includes participation in Math Team problem-solving competitions. The SPMS math team earned fifth place in the California Math League Contest this year.

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

Through our outstanding special education offerings, we are able to meet the needs of our special population in the least restrictive environment. Students receiving special education services spend a significant amount of their day in the least restrictive environment, along with the general education students. Our belief that every student can learn when given the proper tools and opportunities resonates with children who qualify for an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Students with an IEP are given access to general education courses as defined by their IEP. In addition, all students with an IEP are supported in their academic, transition, and personal goals by a case manager and other support staff (e.g., instructional assistants, speech pathologists, therapists, school psychologists, occupational therapists, and adaptive physical education teachers).

To facilitate instruction to meet the needs of all students, general education teachers are trained to differentiate lessons. All teachers have received professional development and collaboration opportunities with the Special Education Department (SPED). Our SPED team meets with different departments to collaborate on lesson plans, help adapt instruction to meet the needs of students with disabilities, and ensure appropriate accommodations are integrated into the lesson for students that require them. Teachers modify assignments and grading as needed to ensure success.

SPMS offers a learning lab class that focuses on helping students stay on track with their content classes in a smaller classroom setting. Other SPED team members also provide push-in services in core classes to support students one-on-one or small groups. In an effort to close the achievement gap, the Special Education teachers work closely with the school's testing coordinator to ensure students with disabilities receive accommodations on assessments. When developing IEPs, the needs of individual students are extensively evaluated to ensure that each student is provided the appropriate accommodations needed for them to access assessments successfully. It is essential that all children in our school community learn together along with their peers with respect to their individual needs in an equitable environment.

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

Another special population at SPMS is our English Language Learners (ELL), which comprise less than 6% of our student population. Our objective for our English Learner (EL) students is that they will develop proficiency in English as rapidly and effectively as possible, and they will keep up academically with their English only peers. Therefore, we provide English language development (Language Acquisition) instruction and access to the district's challenging core curriculum to all English Language Learners.

EL students are provided designated English language development instruction and integrated and embedded instruction within the core curriculums. All classroom teachers at SPMS are required to have special training and to practice Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE) teaching strategies with English Learners in their regular education classes. SDAIE is a specific method of teaching

grade-level content (i.e., social studies, science, math, etc.) that helps EL students to master the California Content Standards. This training includes research-based information about the needs of their students learning English as a second language, as well as strategies to assist students in understanding the content they are learning in academic coursework. Students are grouped according to their English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC) level in classrooms. We recognize that our EL students have unique learning needs and therefore receive a variety of support. Emerging and expanding ELs who have been in the country for less than one year are placed in an ELD support class where they receive language acquisition support for two periods.

Our ELD support classes are differentiated by proficiency levels to meet their wide range of needs and to provide intensive instruction so that they can be successful in the core curriculum. Emerging ELs are provided with multiple opportunities to practice survival English skills, beginning with reading very short texts or reading with the use of a translation dictionary, speaking and performing scripted conversations and skits, and writing one-to-two word free responses. As their language production improves, ELs are tasked with reading longer informational and narrative texts, performing their own dramatic skits and speeches, and writing with or without sentence frames, academic paragraphs, and short essays and speeches. ELD teachers are also English Language Arts teachers, so they incorporate several strategies used in the core ELA curriculum so that ELs are familiar with different collaborative structures, including literature circles, Socratic seminars, and reciprocal teaching. In addition, ELD teachers provide direct instruction on grammar, academic vocabulary and etymology, and the writing process.

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

SPMS is dedicated to supporting all student populations. We currently provide support for homeless and foster students and immigrant families. We have a district homeless and foster liaison, trained in best practices, who provide support for students and families who may be going through transitional or limited housing. A meeting with the family is held to determine how the school can best provide support to allow students to continue learning. Some examples of support include, but are not limited to, clothing, bus passes, gym clothes, food, and school supplies. This liaison also collaborates with all stakeholders, including the student, family, teacher, administration, and social workers, to help identify academic and emotional support areas for the student and their family.

In addition to our homeless and foster students, SPMS also serves immigrant students and their families. Most of our newcomer students have a limited understanding of the English language. Therefore, all newcomers are enrolled in English Language Development classes where different strategies and supports are implemented in collaboration with teachers and an instructional assistant to expand student knowledge and language skills.

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

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

At SPMS, we embrace a culture of high expectations for students that supports a positive environment and motivates our students to make strong academic, social and emotional connections to their education.

SPMS provides a positive environment that supports the academic, social, and emotional growth of each student through curricular and extracurricular opportunities in all academic and non-academic areas. There are a variety of teacher-advised academic and social clubs available, including robotics, Chess Club, Art, Theater, Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA), book clubs, and yoga. Providing a variety of choices provides all students with a group on campus in which they can feel supported. Thanks to our Associated Student Body(ASB), our school is rich with activities, including school dances, lunch, and break competition games, themed spirit days, and community service projects.

Students are fortunate to have ample opportunities in the visual and performing arts with art exhibits, multiple theater performances and a musical, an outstanding orchestra and band, and a highly sought-after choir. Our after-school athletics program offers a long history of competitive excellence in cross country, football, tennis, soccer, basketball, volleyball, track, and field. Additionally, we have intramural sports just for fun. Lunchtime whiffle ball and kickball team competitions are highly competitive and draw large crowds of spectators.

Each year, incoming sixth graders participate in a program WEB -Where Everyone Belongs. The program's goal is to help students acclimate to middle school by creating familiarity and relationships before the first day begins. Our WEB program is open to all incoming students. Groups of incoming students are matched up with an 8th-grade WEB mentor/leader and participate in various team-building activities while touring the campus. WEB mentors undergo a summer training mentor-ship day where they practice the activities that they will do with their incoming “buddies.” Over the course of the school year, there are various activities that involve check-ins with the WEB students and WEB leaders.

SPMS has created a community that promotes the celebration of our diverse population, not only in terms of demographics but also in the unique needs of individuals. Through solid relationships with families and partnerships with the community, we have established a caring and enriching environment that allows our students to be confident and secure in their emotional, social and physical well-being. All students receive a school handbook that includes the expectations for student behavior. Conflicts are viewed as opportunities for students to learn and grow in social responsibility. Conscientious behavior and character building are also reinforced through monthly Pawsitive awards that celebrate positive character traits. This award allows teachers to recognize students for demonstrating exemplary character traits.

The social and emotional well-being of our students is also a top priority. Our school counselors and our social worker provide lessons on coping strategies and stress reduction techniques to classes during homeroom. Due to the high level of need brought on by the stress of Covid, we have partnered with local agencies to provide additional support and therapy as needed. Participation in these activities allows students to connect to school in meaningful ways.

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

SPMS has a very engaged parent community. Our parents have a variety of ways to be meaningfully involved in school. The strong partnership we have with our families and community is based on our shared commitment to nurturing the intellectual, emotional, and social growth of all of our students and to celebrating the ethnic and cultural diversity that makes us so unique. The SPMS teachers encourage parents to take an active role in their child’s education because we recognize children do better academically and emotionally when the adults in their lives work in unison. We understand that parents are a valuable piece of the puzzle when it comes to student learning. Parents serve as the primary source of information to see if students are struggling with homework, seem confused, or maybe facing issues that the school is unaware

of. Due to COVID, our school has switched to reaching parents through zoom meetings and prerecord zoom webinars and performances for this school year with great success.

Communication is an essential piece of the school-to-home relationship. SPMS prides itself on open communication and collaborative efforts between all stakeholders. Our staff uses Parent Square school outreach, websites, auto-dialers, and teacher emails to disseminate information. Parents receive a Weekly PTA News Bulletin, which gives general information, events, and updates from the school and community. Additionally, the school maintains an up-to-date website with student and parent resources. Parents and the community can also find information and exciting news on the school's Instagram page.

Academic grades are available for viewing by staff, students, and parents through our AERIES, live grade book. In addition, each teacher on campus maintains a Google Classroom site with general information about the course, calendars for assignments and assessments, and tips for students to succeed in their class. Parents are encouraged to have their children reach out to teachers with questions or for support and are also encouraged to communicate with staff with any concerns via email or phone. Counselors collaborate with teachers and administrators to inform parents of concerns if students are struggling in multiple classes.

The School Site Council and Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) involve parents in school programs that support the development of the whole child. Our PTA organizes numerous fundraisers and schedules school-wide performances and assemblies each year. Our PTA also sponsors parent education nights focused on academic, social, and emotional ways to support our students. Parents also play a key role in involving the larger community in supporting our school. Specifically, they have been actively involved in the South Pasadena Schools Foundation, a community fundraising group that has tremendously impacted our school. Additionally, parents in our community have worked tirelessly to pass numerous school improvement bonds to renovate all our facilities.

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

We believe that having the best teachers creates the best student outcomes. As a result, we view teacher professional development (PD) as a critical component of the success of our school program. As a staff, we determine the most high-priority PD topics for the year. Regardless of the year or focus, we always emphasize that our teachers are experts, celebrating our strengths on campus and utilizing a trainer of trainer model.

Recognizing that professional growth is critical to the continuous improvement cycle at SPMS has been very valuable. Our approach to professional development aligns with the district and school goals and embraces the essential role PD plays in our capacity to continually improve student development. Our vision for PD is collaborative, continuous, embedded in daily practice, and builds on the successes already evident in our school. Specifically, we seek best practices that address goals identified by reviews of student performance data, annual needs assessments, program evaluations, and teacher self-assessments. In addition, district and site PD plans are aligned with our School Plan for Student Achievement.

The SPMS staff works together in various forums, including monthly site meetings, department meetings, staff development days, and release times. Our administrators have an open-door policy to encourage discussions and suggestions between admin and staff. This is an informal way for teachers to share positive updates and challenges they may be facing and has proven to help keep morale high. This helps ensure that teachers feel valued as staff members and people.

Teachers, support staff, and administration are all continuously developing professional skills and honing practices. We constantly analyze data and seek evidence-based solutions. We approach problems through collaboration and seek experts as we need them. Training and formal professional development are differentiated by educator needs and selected according to school goals.

Our new teachers are supported through the district's Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) induction program. Each new teacher is assigned a veteran coach to help them successfully acclimate into the SPMS family. Their success is celebrated at the end of the year colloquium.

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

The SPMS leadership philosophy is centered on collaboration and shared decision-making. Every staff member is a valued and critical member of our team, and their contribution to our collective goals is directly linked to our success. Our administrators have developed a deep understanding of each team member's strengths, harnessing them to build a team that embraces a shared vision and purpose. In addition, each grade level and department has curriculum experts who provide team support and mentor teachers.

Our administrators consistently communicate that SPMS students are capable of accomplishing great things if everyone works together. "Students come first" and "assume good" embody our principal's core message. To this end, our School Site Council (SSC) serves as the key advisory group for developing our Single Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA), analyzing data, setting school goals, monitoring program implementation, and deciding how to allocate resources.

SPMS's school leadership team meets monthly to make decisions on school-wide issues and disseminate information to and from colleagues. All staff members stay informed about our successes and challenges, review and analyze data, and share what they've learned about excellent teaching with their peers.

We celebrate the emergence of talented new teachers because it supports SPMS's history of excellence. The leadership structures we have created facilitate the collaboration of all stakeholders in student achievement and program improvement. In addition, our administrators nurture new leaders by helping staff, and community members recognize their strengths and grow stronger through being part of the SPMS family.

Our principal and assistant principal have two core daily tasks: Providing an atmosphere that promotes powerful learning opportunities for all students and enhancing the quality of every person's daily activities in our school. This has resulted in remarkable success and a greater sense of happiness and enthusiasm at our school. This strength-based focus builds positive relationships among staff, between staff and students, and within our community.

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

SPMS addresses students' diverse needs and backgrounds through student-led clubs and organizations that teachers facilitate. Clubs at SPMS range from Associated Student Body (ASB), Gay-Straight Alliance, Where Everyone Belongs (WEB), Drama, Builders, and more, emphasize connections through active participation and open dialogue with the goal to increase the sense of community and belonging for all of our diverse students. In addition to student clubs, our staff and students engage in Anti-Defamation training through the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) to address aspects like microaggressions and implicit biases to improve our school culture and community.

It is a common practice at SPMS for teachers to provide students opportunities to express their personal backgrounds and stories through About Me surveys and questionnaires. These surveys are collected and utilized to create culturally relevant discussion topics and activities throughout the year. In addition, the personal stories elicited from these surveys are being used during cross-curricular collaboration with various teachers, staff members, administrators, and counselors to provide insight on particular students and how to best support their individual needs. Finally, our school offers professional development for staff and administrators to analyze grading schemes and eligibility parameters into higher-level courses to ensure that the measurements used provide students equitable access and educational opportunities.

One of the critical methods that SPMS utilizes to address current events and/or social movements that may directly impact students, their families, and their communities is through our Broadcast Journalism course. This course is open to grades six through eight and is disseminated through a YouTube channel for all students to watch simultaneously in homeroom class. Because this class posts all of its stories on its own YouTube channel, the entire South Pasadena community can also watch. Each week, the Broadcast Journalism classes piece together video segments created, filmed, produced, and edited by students under the guidance of their primary teacher. News segments range from Public Service Announcements related to weekly events taking place at school, current worldwide events, Anti-Bullying campaigns, national holidays

and remembrances, and much more. In addition to providing a platform for students to be exposed to various events and news, this class gives students the opportunity to have a hands-on learning experience related to digital media. With Hollywood no more than a few miles away, this class will indeed have a direct impact on many students' futures in the film and television industry.

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

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A main strategy for academic success at SPMS is meeting our student's social-emotional needs. Our school counselors play a unique and vital role, and their work has a significant impact on the students they work with daily. We have three school counselors and a social worker that make up our outstanding school-counseling team.

Middle school is an important time for students. It offers so many experiences and possibilities, but it can be a challenging time for students, parents, and teachers. Children are going through so many changes, both physically and emotionally. They are typically moving toward independence while needing support and guidance from the adults around them. The need for trained, understanding and proactive professionals is essential for their success during a typical year.

Across the world, all educators see the toll that COVID has taken on students. Now that students are back in school full time, teachers and counselors report witnessing various problems, from depression and anxiety to a rise in students reporting self-harm and suicidal thoughts. Students are struggling with friendships, relationships, studying, and coping with the stress of school life. More kids are being referred for mental health treatment than ever before. Like many schools, SPMS is rising to the challenge of the pandemic's disruption, stress, and isolation, which has resulted in a spike in behavioral and mental health issues among our students.

The school's counseling team supports students in their diverse and challenging world. They understand and respond to their unique needs. They work to identify and support the academic achievement and social-emotional needs of all students as they prepare them for the ever-changing world of the 21st century. It is work that is not done in isolation but is integrated and supported by administration, counselors, teachers, staff, and parents.

A successful part of our counseling offering is the Train Your Brain (TYB) program. TYB is dedicated to providing social-emotional support services to our students to expand access to wellness services on our campus. Our program promotes healthy coping, resiliency, and wellness by providing a spectrum of comprehensive, integrated, culturally sensitive services that support the academic achievements of SPMS students. Due to the increased need for assistance this year, we have interns who are also working alongside our team.