

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

Official School Name Vinton-Shellsburg Middle School
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 212 W. 15th Street
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Vinton State IA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 52349-1562

County Benton

Telephone (319) 436-4728 Fax (319) 472-4014

Web site/URL https://www.vscsd.org E-mail shelly.petersen@vscsd.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. Kyle Koeppen E-mail kyle.koeppen@vscsd.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Vinton-Shellsburg School District Tel. (319) 436-4728

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. Thomas Burke
(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):
- 2 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 1 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 4 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	50	63	113
7	52	53	105
8	56	51	107
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	158	167	325

*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
 - 1 % Asian
 - 2 % Black or African American
 - 1 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 96 % White
 - 0 % 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: 6%

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	10
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2020 until the end of the 2020-2021 school year	8
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	18
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2020	314
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.06
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	6

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

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 0 %
0 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 39 %

Total number students who qualify: 128

8. Students receiving special education services with an IEP or 504: 15 %
50 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>5</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>0</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay | <u>33</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>1</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>0</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: 12
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	1
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	19
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	7
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	10
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	1

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 13:1

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	94%	95%	96%	95%	95%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

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

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

To be a positive difference-maker.

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

<https://www.vscsd.org/equal-opportunity-non-discrimination-policy/>

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

The Vinton-Shellsburg Community School District (VSCSD) is located in Benton County, Iowa, and Vinton is the county seat. We serve about 7,000 people living in and around the towns of Vinton, Garrison, and Shellsburg. The district is 30 miles northwest of Cedar Rapids and southeast of Waterloo, and its proximity to the two larger communities provides a wide variety of cultural and entertainment events plus a choice of colleges which include vocational, liberal arts, and graduate opportunities. Vinton-Shellsburg Middle School (VSMS) is located in the town of Vinton. Over the past decade, several natural disasters across our district have caused a steady decrease in student population. Examples of these natural disasters include a major flood in 2008 and a derecho that destroyed over 100 housing units, a tornado in 2016 that resulted in the loss of 50 families, a second derecho in August, 2020, and another tornado on March 5, 2022, which damaged the industrial park and several manufactured homes and whose impact on the district and the community is yet to be fully understood. Nevertheless, the community is resilient. The 2021-2022 school year enrollment has seen stabilization and an increase due to the redevelopment of the infrastructure in our community through new housing developments. The city itself does not have many jobs in the industry sector. Vinton and Shellsburg are known as bedroom communities where most people travel to a larger city for employment. The Vinton-Shellsburg Middle School (VSMS) serves a blue-collar community with a median household income of \$67,000 and 7.5% of our population lives in poverty. VSMS students who qualify for free or reduced meals are over 39%. Churches, outreach through the local communities, and the district's Backpack Program provide much-needed resources for the significant food insecurity in our community.

VSMS believes every child can learn, given ample opportunity. Staff have participated in professional learning opportunities over the past eight years to engage students in meaningful activities connected to our academic standards. The leadership team developed a roadmap for all students to be provided a guaranteed and viable curriculum. Our professional development plan focuses on pacing, feedback, questioning, assessment, and differentiation. Five years ago, VSMS changed its system from a "one-and-done" philosophy of testing to one of allowing students to engage in self-evaluating, relearning the material, and then demonstrating to teachers the mastery of the concept. A robust Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS) system is in place to support students not meeting grade level expectations. Students are provided a 30-minute intervention session every day. Students are assigned based on a skills deficit, needing time to complete missing work, or choosing an enrichment opportunity to extend their learning. This innovative design was developed by the leadership team at VSMS to ensure we have students getting what they need to understand and achieve the core standard while allowing the students to move to another activity once the skill has been met. Every staff member at VSMS is responsible for teaching a skill or an enrichment opportunity to ensure all students make growth.

While academics are at the forefront of everything we do, VSMS was a leader in the district when implementing Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) to support students' social and emotional growth in 2011. The goal of PBIS is to create a positive school climate in which students learn and grow. The philosophy at VSMS is to "catch" students doing the right behavior and acknowledge those behaviors. Tier two interventions are set up to address behavioral discrepancies and students receive guided support through our Success Center or within the Check-in/Check-out system which matches struggling students with mentor teachers to provide support and encouragement throughout the day.

Social Emotional Behavioral Health continues to be a priority for our students, especially coming from this unprecedented time. The VSMS model is a part of the larger district work of our Social Emotional Behavioral Health Committee (SEBH). A series of surveys have been sent to all students trying to gauge the level of their emotional well-being. During the past two years, information has been collected and specific concerns are addressed by our counselor and/or a therapist who is commissioned by the district to support a student's specific needs in the building.

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:

VSMS is proud of the academic accomplishments of our students over the past several years. When we started the process of addressing behavioral and academic concerns simultaneously, we saw dramatic gains on our state testing. VSMS is proud to offer a variety of opportunities. Our goal is to provide rigorous academics to all students. We have adopted the Iowa Core Standards in all subject areas and staff have used Wiggins’s “Understanding by Design” process to create assessments aligned to the essential learning experiences. After intentional communication with stakeholders regarding our standards-based reporting process, these standards were then utilized in our reporting system. Students have the entire school year to attain proficiency on each essential standard and teachers allow students to revisit standards as understanding grows.

At VSMS teachers have developed Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) within their core subject area to determine priority standards, develop learning intentions, success criteria, and assessments. Teachers in their PLCs decide, “What do we want students to learn?” and “How will we know when they have learned?” They decide as a team the next steps in the classroom and with individuals who are below standard and what to do with those students who are above standard.

In March of 2020 the world turned upside down and VSMS quickly moved from face-to-face learning to creating online classrooms and meetings with students daily via Zoom. At VSMS those first weeks were a trial and error to determine how to set up classes to best serve our students. Teachers found creating a reverse classroom of instruction where students worked through the assignment and then met with teachers virtually to address specific student concerns worked well for our students. Teachers met in PLCs weekly during the closure to determine what standards were missed and planned ways to add those to the following year’s curriculum. The 2020-2021 school year brought students back into school. Mitigation strategies were in full force to keep staff and students healthy and learning in person. Students whose parents wished to keep their student at home had a designated middle school teacher who supported them virtually through an online curriculum.

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

In English/Language Arts (ELA), students are engaged in the essential language arts components of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Grade-level curriculum is vertically aligned and teachers meet in PLCs regularly to discuss priority standards, determine pacing, learning intentions, and success criteria. The ELA team is a part of the larger District Alignment Team that meets yearly to discuss preschool through 12th-grade literacy alignment.

Student progress with standards is monitored through classroom assessments and state-level reading assessments. Data is analyzed regularly to determine further student needs in the area of reading. Analysis of data determines the amount of need for extra support. Students may get an extra reading class with intense reading support for 50 minutes a day or students may receive small group instruction on a specific skill for 15 minutes a day. The interventionist uses the Fusion Reading Program to close instructional gaps and help students acquire the necessary skills to succeed in all areas.

The students at VSMS have a unique opportunity to have student choice and voice in their learning during our 30-minute response to intervention time. Students have the ability to sign up for classes they need to refine a skill or take a class they are interested in exploring. Each day the students have a menu of classes to choose from at any grade level and to determine what best fits them. Within a six-day cycle, teachers have predetermined priority days where they can assign students if needed, based on classroom assessments that are aligned to the standards. Students who are not able to complete homework due to evening activities or do

not have support at home may choose an independent or structured study hall with specific adult support to complete the work. Students who do not need support or a quiet place to work may choose from a long list of learning opportunities: building something in the shop; learning a foreign language, exploring a science laboratory opportunity; working out in the weight room; or learning about the Holocaust or other historical events, photography, coding, and creative writing classes, just to name a few.

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

In Math, students are engaged in standards-based problem-solving daily. As with ELA, grade-level math curriculum is also vertically aligned and teachers meet in PLCs regularly to discuss priority standards, to determine pacing, learning intentions, and success criteria. The math team is a part of the larger District Alignment Team that meets yearly to discuss preschool through 12th-grade math alignment. In 2017, VSMS adopted the Big Ideas Math curriculum series to support instruction of the Iowa Core Math Standards. This comprehensive math curriculum supports rigorous learning through a problem-solving-based approach. Teachers have the ability to assign and score lessons online and teachers can reassign problems to students who are not quite there yet.

The math department has multiple pathways of instruction to meet the needs of all learners. Students are evaluated each year to determine if they will be supported through the grade-level curriculum, a basic math class, or an accelerated coursework load. Approximately, less than 2% of our students need a basic math class, while over 25% of the students at each grade level qualify for the accelerated math path. Students who qualify in 8th grade can take Algebra 1 for high school credit. All course work for all classes are available in Google classroom. Within Google Classroom students can watch videos, complete coursework, and submit assignments for evaluation whether they are at school or at home due to illness or quarantine.

At VSMS, we use a variety of assessments to determine student understanding. Students who are below benchmark in reading and/or math are provided intense, targeted small-group instruction for 15 minutes daily. Literacy and math teachers meet monthly to evaluate progress monitoring data from weekly probes in our monthly “data dives.” Students’ progress monitoring data helps us organize students into groups of Accelerated Growth, Following Aimline, Trendline Moving, Flat Trendline, or Negative Trendline. These groups help us determine what instructional changes might need to take place with students below benchmark receiving intervention. The principal, instructional coach, general education teacher, and AEA consultants meet monthly to determine the next steps for instruction by interventionists and/or classroom teachers.

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

The science department uses a curriculum aligned to the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS); each grade level focuses on all three branches of science: physical science, life science, and earth science as defined in the NGSS. The knowledge and learning from year to year supports the students' progress from sixth through eighth grade. We adjusted the curriculum to accommodate for instructional gaps from the spring of 2020. Those missing standards were determined to be implemented into the next two years of science lessons. While social distancing, we continued to teach hands-on, phenomena-based science to enhance student learning. There are additional extended learning opportunities where students are able to explore Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM). These include STEM days, Financial Literacy fairs, and an Open Minds Open Doors Conference at our local Coe College which is a day focused on middle school girls exploring STEM.

Assessments are completed at the end of each unit and include a combination of formative and summative assessments, lab experiments, and projects. Item analyses are conducted, and deficiencies are identified. Identified gaps in required knowledge are corrected in multiple ways, including altering future lessons to place greater emphasis on deficient standards, providing small group reteaching opportunities through our response to intervention class, and allowing students to retest after they have met with the instructor individually. Students learn at varying speeds, but we focus on the achievement once they master the learning goal, not the speed at which they master.

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

The social studies department at the middle school uses a teacher-developed curriculum aligned to the Iowa Core Standards. As a part of the Iowa Core Standards, each grade level includes a set of inquiry standards. These inquiry standards define key disciplinary skills within social studies and include: instructing compelling and supporting questions, gathering and evaluating sources, developing claims and using evidence, communicating and critiquing conclusions, and taking informed action. These standards are taught in conjunction with the content standards, which include a portion of Iowa state history, world geography, current events, and pre-industrial American history.

Though not a state tested subject, the social studies team has worked hard at aligning their priority standards to the Common Core. The Social Studies team have met and determined priority standards and aligned instruction and assessment to meet the needs of all students at VSMS. These assessments, as well as formative and common summative assessments, are used to identify students performing at, above, and below grade-level expectations and to tailor instruction to best support their needs. Teachers use assessments to guide instruction, monitor progress, and support academic achievement, while students use data to guide their learning. Results are analyzed to create flexible, differentiated groupings, and teachers request students for reteaching opportunities during out MTSS time.

1f. For secondary schools:

In each grade, all students are expected to comply with the state's Iowa Career and Academic Planning (ICAP) requirements for their grade levels, asking each student to take surveys to start learning about the types of careers that best fit their interests and skill. At this time, students start their career folders and start building their four-year plans. To help guide decision-making, several data pieces are considered. This includes an interest survey, career cluster survey, coding activities, Career Speaker Days, Financial Literacy Fair, STEM Institute, and an in-depth Freshman Orientation where intentional collaboration takes place between the middle school and high school to set up our students for success. Additionally, all students rotate through exploratory curriculum in the areas of; Health, Personal Wellness, Financial Literacy, Civic Literacy, Career Exploration, and Technology.

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

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

VSMS and the wider Vinton-Shellsburg Community School District is devoted to providing our students with a well-balanced education. Students at VSMS not only are provided a strong core content but are allowed to express themselves through the arts. Students are able to extend their academics through an array of course offerings we provide students but are not limited to music, choir, band, jazz band, art, Opus, Honor Band, Honor Choir, Solo and Ensembles, and art.

The art program at VSMS offers courses for students to create, respond, and connect their passion and thoughts through art. Students are encouraged to take risks in the creative process to develop skills in the art-making process. Students explore pastels, print-making, clay, pottery, and graphic design just to name a few. Students create an art portfolio of their work throughout their middle school career and they choose their best work to share at the Fine Arts Night with the community each spring.

Physical Education (PE) Class has the philosophy of fitness for all and fitness for life. Students are engaged in a 50-minute class every third day and engage in healthy activities, games, partner activities, and learning how to keep active and healthy for the rest of their life. Students have a set of standard curriculum they work through using the national PE standards and students are assessed in alignment with these standards.

Technology is an exploratory class with increasing expectations of program usage integrated within the core curriculum. Students learn about digital literacy, Cyber Security, Digital Citizenship, Internet Safety, music

production, and podcasting. Students culminate their technology experience by creating a production of a newscast about events currently going on in the middle school, which is viewed on our building events platform.

VSMS is a one-to-one school with students having access to Apple MacBooks. Two years ago during the start of the pandemic, we took the plunge and sent devices home with students to ensure their ability to access instruction was met. As a result of this, we moved forward as a middle school to allow students one-to-one capabilities as we pushed ahead to face-to-face instruction. Internet access in our rural community can sometimes be an issue, so in addition to laptop devices, hot-spots were also provided to families who would not otherwise have access to the internet for instructional purposes.

Industrial Technology (IT) is a sixth through eighth-grade curriculum for all students to experience at the middle school. Students are able to express themselves through woodworking, rocketry, bridge building, drafting, and engineering opportunities. IT class focuses on safety, knowledge of tools and machines, and hands-on activities to design and construct projects. The main purpose of the curriculum is to help all students have a solid foundation in trade careers and to help students determine if this is an elective area they would be interested in exploring.

Through our exploratory experiences students are able to communicate, collaborate, and create leadership opportunities. During Financial Literacy and Careers classes, students are engaged in activities giving them experience in 21st Century Skills. Students attend Career Fairs and engage with the community about their life passions.

3. Academic Supports

3a. Students performing below grade level:

Students performing below proficiency are placed in a tiered intervention system in the area of reading and/or math. All students are provided with 50 minutes of core literacy instruction daily. Students who are below proficiency are offered a core plus-plus program. Students can receive 50 minutes of direct reading instruction beyond the universal core provided to all students, and some students receive an additional 30 minutes of intense remediation on specific academic skills not yet attained. This instructional support offers the student the potential of receiving up to 130 minutes of literacy instruction per day. Students are offered similar opportunities in math using the core plus-plus system and can obtain 50 minutes of core math, 30 minutes remedial intervention, and 15 minutes of specific math intervention skills to support deficits or gaps in learning. An extensive placement process is used each year to identify students who will need additional support and progress is monitored monthly by a team of staff members. Students may qualify for additional support through our Success Center. This program is designed to support students who need positive adult support and guidance. Students' progress is evaluated on a monthly basis using attendance, nurses' visits, and missing assignments. Students who qualify for this program are placed in a guided study hall by a certified teacher who supports the students by teaching organizational skills, assignment tracking, goal setting, and weekly communication with parents about their student's success.

3b. Students performing above grade level:

The Expanded Learning Program (ELP) serves the top 10% of the general student population in grades six through eight and meets every other day for one class period. The specialized curriculum focuses on four essential 21st Century Skills: communication, collaboration, creative thinking, and critical thinking in addition to addressing individual needs and challenges gifted students face. ELP students have individualized education plans developed by the student and our certified ELP teacher. The ELP program stresses the importance of students' self-advocacy, team development and peer partnerships, and personal ownership of their education. Students are involved in special events throughout the year to challenge their thinking such as LEGO League, Battle of the Books, and Future City. Students can advance through the math curriculum by participating in our advanced math courses. At least 25 to 30 percent of each grade level participate in advanced math classes each year.

3c. Special education:

All teachers at VSMS are dedicated to the individual success of every student with a disability. The school has demonstrated superior academic results for this population, due to a commitment to student-centered interventions that help each child reach their full potential. VSMS consistently and significantly outperforms the state average for special education students in all academic areas. Students in special education are general education students first and they receive core instruction from the content experts in all content areas in addition to their individualized instruction. Special education teachers co-teach with the core content experts to support student learning in the classroom with their peers. Special education teachers work in tandem with the content teacher to provide modifications, accommodations, and general assistance to all students in the classroom. Special education teachers are a part of content teams in PLCs as well as having their own PLC.

Special Education supports also extend beyond the academic setting. VSMS is a trauma-responsive school. The Special Education teacher, who runs the Behavior Learning Center, is also a trainer for Crisis Prevention Intervention (CPI) and conducts training for all administrators and approximately 60 staff members across the district annually. Adults who have been trained in CPI in the building respond to students in crisis, help them become regulated, and then transition back into the academic setting. The Behavior Learning Center provides social skills lessons focused on meeting students' needs and personal goals based on their individual needs. The district curriculum focuses on teaching students about growth/fix mindset, emotions, relationships, communication skills, executive functioning skills, and self-regulation.

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

VSMS has a limited number of enrolled English Language Learners. A typical year would have a student population of three or fewer students. To integrate ELL students, we use the push-in model. Our ELL teacher pushes in to differentiate curriculum, so the students can acquire the skills needed to succeed in the general education environment. Then we pull students during the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) period to provide specific instruction and assessment. The ELL teacher works with grade-level content teachers to ensure they receive the accommodations and modifications they need to be successful.

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

At VSMS we serve a handful of homeless students each year; a district Homeless Liaison provides information of services to the staff. We provide free meals and exempt any school fees. School counselors provide a contact list to families containing information about agencies and organizations and where to obtain rent assistance, utility assistance, food, holiday assistance, and clothing. A summer meals program is set up in the district to provide free lunches to any K-12 grade student in the district. This program runs every day for meals served in our cafeteria or meals that are grab-and-go for anyone in need. During the pandemic, the meals were prepared daily by staff, loaded onto a school bus, and dropped at specific points throughout the surrounding communities to ensure students were safe and being fed. Parents needing academic materials/books could have items dropped off at these drop points. This was a great opportunity for our staff to check in with students and families to ensure a relationship was continuously present during Covid-closures.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

Our staff is committed to implementing professional development focused on student engagement. Throughout the last several years our professional development has focused on Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Understanding by Design, and most recently, Teacher Clarity. We work to incorporate the PBIS philosophy in everything we do. We have seen several parallels between the philosophy of PBIS and the philosophy of Teacher Clarity. These parallels have helped us bridge the gap between social-emotional learning and academic success. By defining expectations for both behaviors and learning in the classroom, we are able to build trust between teachers and students and further deepen those relationships.

In addition to the learning and application of professional development, we also reflect on the climate and culture of our building through the use of informative surveys and assessments. One assessment we recently reviewed was the Conditions for Learning. Using the information from this assessment, we were able to identify an area of growth, which was to improve the quality of student-teacher relationships. We analyzed four areas of connection for each and every student in our building. Teams then made plans to address student connections based on this data.

The school is the heart of the community in many rural areas and this is true of our community. School spirit and pride play a huge role in building a sense of belonging for both students and staff. Part of what we do to develop this sense of belonging and community is to recognize students for their efforts in both extracurriculars and academics. At least four times per school year we have a school-wide assembly where students are publicly recognized for their achievements. These assemblies are documented by local news outlets and posted on social media for the community to see.

The shutdown due to COVID-19 was difficult for all, but especially for students. In order to minimize the isolation and negative effects this had, we worked to connect with our students as much as possible. We created a schedule that ensured students had daily contact via Zoom with at least one of their teachers. Our staff also tracked communication with students to not only ensure engagement and completion of the lessons, but also to ensure their safety. In order to continue to provide basic necessities to our students the district provided hotspots to families without internet access, computers, and also provided lunches to-go at various locations throughout the communities we serve.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Vinton-Shellsburg Community School District prioritizes partnerships within our community. VSMS partners with many local businesses and organizations in order to support our students. We have a strong partnership with our local parks and recreation department. They use the school as a communication outlet for their programs and activities. We also share the use of several facilities in order to provide more options and opportunities for our students. In addition to this partnership, we also partner with other organizations including the Knights of Columbus who sponsor our school dances. This not only acts as a fundraiser for them, but also provides a night of safe entertainment for our students.

From the very start of the pandemic our building and district have recognized the fragility of social emotional health for our students, staff, and families. The district formed the Social Emotional Behavioral Health committee (SEBH) to support each other as we headed back into the classrooms. Our district is committed to the positive mental wellbeing of both staff and students and we have partnered with several local organizations. One of these is Therapeutic Innovations, which provides on-site counseling services to our students at all grade levels. In doing this, we are increasing access to mental health services and are continuing to explore how we can further support both our students and staff in this arena.

Many local businesses support the school through their donations of time, money, and materials. These efforts go towards the school's goal of providing positive recognition to students and creating a positive

school culture. Local businesses have supplied gift cards for drawings and items we can place in our Viking PBIS Acknowledgement Store for students to purchase using their Viking Vouchers.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

The Vinton-Shellsburg District's mission is "to be positive difference-makers" and this mission includes our staff. The staff at VSMS are expected to be on two teams, these teams are designed to support both each other and the students we serve. The first team is their grade-level team. This team is designed to focus on the whole student, analyzing behaviors, social-emotional needs, as well as academics. Much of the learning and data analysis related to PBIS is done on the grade-level teams. These teams share a lunch and a prep period. These times provide the teams with opportunities to develop relationships both personally and professionally. The grade-level teams share a bond that is unique in that, not only do they share the same students, but they also have the most time to collaborate.

The second team is the Professional Learning Community or PLC team. This team is composed of the content area teachers for sixth through eighth grades. These teams meet during our professional development time and focus their work on alignment of standards, instruction, and assessment. These teams also frequently meet before or after school to discuss and receive feedback from each other on lesson ideas and assessment results. These teams' bonds are formed around their mutual passion for content areas and their ability to share ideas and feedback with each other.

During the COVID-19 shut down and the school year that followed were difficult on morale for teachers across the country. In order to combat low morale amongst our staff during this time, we provided protected time for our teams to meet via Zoom while at home and allowed extra time for teams to meet and debrief throughout the following school year. The district also provided the entire staff with professional development focused on staff mental health and wellbeing. As we continue to reel from the pandemic, we are committed to continuing to improve the well-being of our teachers, staff, and students.

One of the best ways our building has found to improve and maintain a positive building culture and climate is by providing opportunities for staff to spend time together. Some of these opportunities include several themed potlucks throughout the year, a lunch cookout when the weather is warm, a holiday breakfast hosted by the leadership team, holiday and end-of-the-year parties, and team-building activities during professional development. We have also found that having fun with students by doing activities at assemblies and our end-of-the-year field trips also build teacher-student relationships and improve the morale of our building.

4. School Leadership:

In recent years with the development of the Teacher Leadership and Compensation (TLC) Program, there has been a change in the structure of the building leadership. In addition to the principal, the school also has an instructional coach, a building decision team (BDT), and PBIS teams, which are all supported through the TLC program. The principal and the instructional coach are present at all BDT and PBIS tier meetings. The BDT has representatives from every content and grade-level team. These people are the driving force behind the building-level decisions as well as the facilitators of the content and grade-level PLCs.

The changes in leadership structure also allowed for more opportunities to increase student achievement. Analyzing data in PLCs eventually led to increasing our intervention opportunities in both reading and math. The principal, instructional coach, math and reading interventionist, and general education teachers meet monthly to review screening and progress monitoring data and make recommendations and adjustments to interventions based on this information. This process has led to more targeted interventions and an increase in student achievement in these areas.

In addition, all teachers also receive instructional coaching support around their career goals and any other classroom needs. New teachers are assigned a building mentor and beginning teachers have a Grant Wood AEA Induction Coach to support their needs as an educator either new to the profession or new to the district. Along with this support also comes a freshly revised teacher evaluation system that has changed to a continuous improvement process for all certified staff. Through all of the changes in instruction, curriculum,

state laws and guidance, along with the knowledge of how students respond and learn due to influences in their lives, the staff at VSMS feels supported by a vast variety of leadership and support.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

The staff at VSMS strives every day to meet the needs of all students, but when it comes to our diverse population, the greatest concern in our community is supporting our low socioeconomic students and their families. VSMS's student population for free and reduced meals is around 39% and many students come to school without their basic needs being met. Our school recognizes that students cannot learn if they are worried about food or home insecurity, so our guidance office works with our district service coordinator to ensure basic needs of food, clothing, and personal hygiene items are readily available. Since the pandemic our district has provided lunch and breakfast to all students and that has broken down the negative stigma of families filling out paperwork for food assistance. Because all students have the opportunity to eat for free, the demographic group at breakfast has changed and students feel more comfortable coming in to eat before starting their learning each day. VSMS partners with local food pantries, churches, and our district Backpack for Kids Program to ensure student families have enough resources at night and on the weekends when not in school.

The guidance office collects names of families in need at VSMS and shares those names with churches and local families to provide and adopt a family for the holidays to ensure they have presents under the tree. Our school resource officer (SRO), in conjunction with the Vinton Police Department, have developed a Shop with a Cop program to support middle school families.

During the school closure in March of 2020 staff compiled lists of lists of vulnerable students in each grade level and staff members met weekly to ensure students had contact with someone in the building. Teachers made phone calls and sent emails to students who did not show up for our online learning. Any students who teachers were not able to make contact with for more than a two week period were supported by the SRO and the principal who went out and made home visits. These visits were made to ensure student safety and determine what barriers exist which were preventing them from attending class remotely. Barriers were taken back to the district level team and resource needs were addressed. Most students and parents had the ability to work remotely at home, but with multiple students and parents working online, the infrastructure of the systems was not able to support so many users in our rural community. The SRO and the principal took the information back to staff and we were able to adjust the lessons to be a more flipped model of teaching where students could access video lessons any time anywhere and teachers set office hours for questions.

VSMS began implementation of our Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) program eleven years ago. The first week of school focuses on teaching students to set building expectations along with developing classroom expectation matrices. Upon completion of the lessons, students contribute to the creation of a safe and respectful classroom and learning environment.

Inclusion, acceptance, empathy and kindness are all pillars of the PBIS framework and what VSMS believes. Students earn Viking Vouchers for following expectations and those vouchers can purchase items at our school store. Assemblies and activities are developed throughout the year to celebrate successes and create a fun learning environment. The belief at VSMS is that building relationships leads to building stronger academic successes. Adults at VSMS engage in activities with students, including hallway monitoring, greeting students, and creating relationships with students that last well beyond their middle school years

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Like many middle schools across the nation, VSMS faced many challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic and the closure of schools. The shut-down created distance between teachers, students, and families, but the one thing that never wavered was the belief that VSMS had a mission to ensure the best education they could in the circumstances in which they endured. We may have had to change how we brought learning to the students in new and unique ways, but we never wavered on what students needed to learn and the process we had started pre-pandemic that made our students so successful. Collaboration, innovative thinking, and building the basic structure of a strong academic programming is the backbone of VSMS success.

VSMS developed a roadmap to ensure a guaranteed and viable curriculum for all students at VSMS. Within the roadmap we determined there are essential components needed to ensure all students had their needs met. Teachers created core content teams to develop priority standards, learning intentions, and success criteria. A strong Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) system was developed to support students who are not meeting standards as well as students who need extension opportunities because they have met standards. These system supports have catapulted not only our general population, but have dramatically increased the number of students reaching proficiency. We have made significant academic gains in our low social economic and our special education subgroups, providing evidence of an effective system of supports.

In the fall of 2020 when VSMS opened for in-person instruction, teachers were met with a student population that came in and out of virtual learning as well as students who were placed on quarantine for a period of time. Our Google Classroom platform allowed students to maintain access to classroom materials and instruction while having connections with teachers and peers. Collaborative learning teams, a strong pathway to determine what students were missing, steps to ensure we place students in intervention supports as needed, along with a progress monitoring system were essential for this multiple delivery format.

Staff at VSMS are keenly aware of the students and families we serve. Our multi-tiered intervention process assures we are meeting students where they are, modifying instruction as needed, and moving them forward at a pace which ensures students are meeting standards. Despite the many challenges over the past two years, staff at VSMS have the mind-set that they will make VSMS an inviting and highly effective school for all learners. We are difference-makers and we are educating our students to be difference-makers as well.