

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

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

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

Official School Name Lowell Elementary School
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 704 Third Avenue Northeast
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Brainerd State MN Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 56401-2465

County Crow Wing County

Telephone (218) 454-6550 Fax (218) 454-6551

Web site/URL https://brainerdlowell.ss12.sharpschool.com E-mail kathryn.johnson@isd181.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* Dr. Heidi Hahn E-mail heidi.hahn@isd181.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Brainerd Public School District Tel. (218) 454-6900

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 Ms. Ruth Nelson
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

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

Date _____

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

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

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

PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION

The signatures on the first page of this application (cover page) certify that each of the statements below, concerning the school’s eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education and National Blue Ribbon Schools requirements, are true and correct.

1. All nominated public schools must meet the state’s performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
2. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2021 in order to meet all eligibility requirements. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
3. The school configuration must include one or more of grades K-12. Schools located on the same campus (physical location and mailing address) must apply as an entire school (i.e. K-8; 6-12; K-12 school). Two (or more) schools located on separate campuses, must apply individually even if they have the same principal. A single school located on multiple campuses with one principal must apply as an entire school.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2016 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 or 2021.
6. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. If irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state, the U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school’s application and/or rescind a school’s award.
7. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as “persistently dangerous” within the last two years.
8. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
9. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
10. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district, as a whole, has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution’s equal protection clause.
11. The nominated school has, or is subject to, a nondiscrimination policy (provide either a link to the policy or submit a text of the policy), is committed to equal opportunity for all students and all staff consistent with applicable law and does not have any outstanding findings of unlawful discrimination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school’s nomination and/or rescind a school’s award if unlawful discrimination is later discovered.

12. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

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

PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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

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

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 6 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 1 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 8 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	30	34	64
1	40	34	74
2	31	31	62
3	41	30	71
4	50	51	101
5	0	0	0
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	192	180	372

*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):
- 0.8 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 0.2 % Asian
 - 0.2 % Black or African American
 - 2.4 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 92 % White
 - 4.4 % 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: 5%

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	7
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2020 until the end of the 2020-2021 school year	11
(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	373
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.05
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	5

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: 32 %

Total number students who qualify: 118

8. Students receiving special education services with an IEP or 504: 21 %
79 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>3</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>4</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>19</u> Developmental Delay | <u>18</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>4</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>26</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>0</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 23
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.	17
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	14
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	8
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	2

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

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	96%	94%	96%	97%	98%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

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

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

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. 2014

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

A place where we are valued, we are critical thinkers, and we are always learning. Lowell School promotes a positive environment where acceptance, diversity, cooperation and high expectations are supported by students, parents, and staff enabling success and lifelong learning.

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

https://www.isd181.org/district/board_of_education/policies__procedures

This is the link to the Brainerd Public Schools Policies and Procedures.

Sections: 400 and 500 are the links to all our nondiscrimination policies.

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

Nestled among the lakes and trees in central Minnesota you will find approximately 375 students that attend Lowell Elementary School. Located in the city of Brainerd, it is one of six elementary schools that make up the Brainerd Public Schools. The school sits next to the Mississippi River, where the surrounding area is known for its hundreds of lakes and even more outdoor activities. People come from all around in the summer to rest and relax at this gorgeous get-a-way vacation spot. With all of these opportunities, the cities of Brainerd, Baxter and Nisswa create the Brainerd School District that covers over 250 square miles. Lowell School was built in 1939, but don't think for a minute it is a traditional old schoolhouse. We believe in a strong home-to-school connection with our families and our Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) plays an intricate part in our daily operations. Over the past 5 years, the staff has worked relentlessly at creating a new educational process. First and foremost, it allows students to work at their own level, while making positive connections with multiple staff members and their peers. Additionally, it offers new opportunities to learn Spanish as a second language and engaging activities to expand all children's background knowledge. Lowell has traditionally had over 40% of our students qualify for free and/or reduced lunches. However, for the past two years, our percentage has been below 40%. During the pandemic, our district received a grant to provide free breakfast and lunch to all our students. While this is a tremendous financial gift for our families, many have not completed the forms necessary to help us identify all students eligible for Title funding.

Regardless of a child's background, we have always challenged our students academically with a rigorous, positive learning environment. We have assigned some of our Title money to have a full time literacy coach. This individual is trained through Leslie University to ensure that our staff has the most current, researched based information to instruct our students. Also, through the generous support of the residents from our district, we passed a \$200 million bond referendum for our district. This allotted approximately \$13 million to create learning studios, specialist areas, and collaboration spaces to make all our educational goals a reality. During the 2020-2021 school year, our building was under construction as we added these additional spaces and modified existing spaces. With this and the challenges presented by the COVID pandemic, it required the Lowell staff to become a more cohesive unit than ever. We began by creating online learning opportunities for several months so the teachers never stopped meeting face-to-face with their students. Every certified staff member, no matter their previous job designation, became a classroom teacher that met, taught, and talked with every student. We did not "push out" videos, but instead we spent the day talking and instructing our children. Since we are now able to be back in-person, we are able to offer interactive reading instruction at each student's content level, guided by an instructor that focuses primarily on specific reading levels. Likewise in math, students are pre-assessed prior to every new unit. In both reading and math, students can receive remedial instruction with a specialized teacher, in conjunction with their core instruction. We have additional special education teachers assigned at each grade level. This allows for immediate help in dealing with academic and behavioral issues proactively so students are set up for success. This person also trains their grade level paraprofessionals, so that students remain safe and can be productive in the mainstream classroom. We have seen a dramatic decrease in seclusionary timeouts and students with behavioral needs feel like they have a person to go to when they are struggling to proactively address needs. For those students that already know the content, they can access enrichment instruction to expand instructional content of the unit. Finally, we screen all students around the school district for possible placement into the Area Gifted and Talented Education (AGATE) program at Lowell. This school-within-a-school program allows gifted students a modified curriculum that accelerates their math instruction one full year and expands their reading curriculum beyond their grade level peers. All of these opportunities take extensive training for the staff at Lowell. Our teachers have Professional Learning Communities (PLC's) that meet 45 minutes per week, and also have specified collaborative work time to meet everyday for 30 minutes. With our new programming, teachers are able to discuss student progress, adjust various learning groups, and create continuity between their practices to get the highest quality instruction throughout each grade level. Through all these efforts we have been selected for two National Blue Ribbon designations in 2005 and 2014, and we are very excited to be nominated again!

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:

Lowell Elementary’s philosophy of instruction indicates that in every lesson and intervention, students are at the center of what we do. We are guided by our mission: “Lowell School promotes a positive environment where acceptance, diversity, cooperation and high expectations are supported by students, parents, and staff enabling success and lifelong learning.” Through this lens, all core content areas are approached with high expectations that students will succeed, along with support in place to ensure students have the opportunities they need to achieve success. We utilize daily collaboration time with grade level and special education teachers to discuss individual student needs in core content areas. We focus on moving all students forward in learning. Whether in need of additional support to meet state standards or ahead of their peers, we believe each student should have the opportunity to feel appropriately challenged on a daily basis. In addition, we have created high-interest offerings for students including physical education, Spanish, science, music, arts, and engineering, etc., that are so motivating that students can’t wait to get to school and experience them. We stress the importance of cultivating curious children who love the process of learning something new, ask hard questions, and are inspired to be lifelong learners.

Many parents, substitute teachers and community members have remarked how Lowell feels “different” than other schools they’ve been to. When asked what is meant by that statement, they respond, “Everyone is so warm and welcoming. They seem genuinely happy to be here!” We know this is a result of the positive environment we work to create for students and staff, where individuals can be nurtured and cared for. While this environment “feels good,” the true result of it is that students feel safe and supported to do their best work in and out of the classroom.

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

Within the Brainerd Public Schools, we use Benchmark Literacy curriculum to support instruction in reading and writing. We have also created robust units of study that integrate the learning from Benchmark Literacy with the use of high quality read alouds that specifically address the Minnesota English Language Arts Standards, providing an authentic approach to literacy instruction. Through daily word study, students focus on a comprehensive understanding of words and how they work, so that students are able to apply what they learn in both reading and writing.

We approach literacy instruction with a multitext model. The instructional components within reading are interactive read alouds, reading mini lessons, shared reading, guided reading, book clubs, reading conferences, independent reading and a group share. The instructional components for writing within a multitext approach also include interactive read alouds, writing mini lessons, shared writing or interactive writing, guided writing, independent writing, writing conferences and a group share. The different contexts in both reading and writing allow teachers to vary the level of teacher support based upon student understanding of each specific concept. This highly effective comprehensive literacy design provides whole-group, small group and individual teaching for students. To be effective, teachers must have a strong understanding of the process itself to support the learners in each classroom. Teachers must possess a strong understanding of the strategic actions that readers employ, in order to process and comprehend what they are reading. The teacher’s role is to observe and support the development of each child’s system of strategic actions as they engage in the reading process and adjust instruction based upon their needs.

Ongoing student data is gathered through a variety of formative assessments including daily running records, conferring notes, anecdotal notes, and writing samples. From there, teachers analyze the data as a team to determine each child’s next area of instructional focus. Upon completion of literacy units, summative assessments are used to evaluate the effectiveness of our teaching strategies and the next action steps staff takes. Teachers create flexible groups throughout the literacy block to meet the individual needs

of students as well as provide necessary interventions or enrichment opportunities.

In reflecting upon the multitext approach to literacy instruction that we use, the most important and essential component is that it is student-centered. This model coaches each teacher to be highly responsive in their instructional practices based upon how the students are responding to the instruction. Each child is provided with exposure to numerous high quality texts and a strong understanding of the various purposes for reading on a daily basis. Through the multiple contexts of reading, students engage in high quality comprehension conversations that activate their ability to develop an inquiry stance and think critically and deeply about what they read. In particular, AGATE teachers focus on deepening critical thinking skills through various contexts such as Jacob's Ladder, Socratic seminars and project-based learning. Students are provided with the ongoing opportunities to develop their own identities as readers, which will cultivate a lifelong love of reading.

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

Our district's core mathematics curriculum, Math Expressions, has been aligned to meet our state standards. The state standards include the following strands: numbers and operations, algebra, geometry and measurement, and data analysis. In order to address each strand, we use instructional approaches that focus on several major tenets. These tenets enable children from all backgrounds to learn mathematics with understanding, fluency, and confidence. One tenet is building mathematical concepts through the use of manipulatives, drawings, and conceptual language. Manipulatives, especially in the primary grades, are paramount in understanding mathematical concepts and developing number sense. Students are encouraged to use manipulatives for as long as needed and teachers ensure understanding before moving to more abstract thinking. Another tenet is the use of real-world situations within lessons. By teaching math within the context of real-world examples, students see the importance of mathematical ideas and how it may apply to them. A third tenet encourages the use of "math talk" during daily lessons. When students talk about their mathematical reasoning, an understanding that there are multiple ways to solve a problem is demonstrated and exemplified. "Math talk" also requires students to have a deeper understanding of mathematical concepts and vocabulary. Teachers encourage students to lead routines and verbalize mathematical thinking to cement learning. To foster student engagement, our core components contain technology and utilize children's literature to support mathematical concepts. For skills that require repetition such as math facts, teachers employ a variety of games and activities. Beyond simple memorization of math facts, we teach students strategies for solving math facts so that all students reach proficiency. This proficiency is critical as students move to more complex mathematical concepts and has been the focus on interventions in math.

Formative assessments are embedded in students' daily instructional lessons. These provide teachers with student understanding and misconceptions to inform their instructional decisions. We help teachers anticipate common student errors and work together to build constructive responses. Our grade level common unit assessments are both formative and summative. Throughout the year our teachers meet in PLCs to look at math data to help determine their next steps. Oftentimes, this has our teachers differentiating instruction in the classroom by supporting those that need additional practice while accelerating students who have already mastered the content. In our AGATE program, the math curriculum is accelerated by one year with additional support for individual students requiring further enrichment.

Due to COVID-19 we have had to adapt our curriculum to online learning at different times. We have been able to continue to provide mathematics for all students with both of these core components due to the rich digital resources that were available within our district provided curriculums as well as what our teachers were able to design. We also had monthly math supply pickups for students to provide the hands-on manipulatives that were essential to their conceptual understanding of new ideas. Throughout periods of distance learning last year, teachers continued to hold "live" math lessons, just as they would have done if students were in the classroom.

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

Our district's core science curriculum utilizes several different materials to meet the Minnesota science standards. We use modules and lessons that align to our standards, including strands of Earth & space, life

science, and physical science for each grade level. Each component features instructional guidance, hands-on materials, student reading materials, and digital resources.

Our instructional approaches focus on using the methods of inquiry. The inquiry process encourages our students to ask questions, as they make observations and discoveries about the scientific phenomena around them. The overarching goal of the inquiry based science lessons are for children to continue to ask additional questions about the world around them, especially outside of the science classroom. These core components contain engaging technology as well as they support language arts standards through the use of science notebooks, student texts, and rich children's literature.

Formative assessments are embedded in students' science notebooks and/or through informal check-ins by their instructor. Student notebooks are used for recording observations, scientific inquiry, and reflections on the processes utilized during experimentation. Student-led thinking can then translate into collaboration and discussion, as children make connections with their learning. This data helps teachers anticipate challenges, adjust instruction, review content, and plan for future units.

Due to COVID-19 we have had to adapt our curriculum to online learning at different times. We have been able to continue to provide science for all students with both of these core components due to the rich digital resources that were available within our district provided curriculums. Additionally, teachers were able to design engaging add on science lessons that could be completed at home, so students saw how science applied to their everyday lives. We also had monthly science supply pickups for students to provide the hands-on materials that are so essential.

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

Our social studies instruction is fully integrated within our literacy block through units of study. These robust units provide students with high quality interactive read alouds, discussion questions that support higher level thinking, and historical context to build awareness and civic responsibilities. The units are an integral part of the multitext approach to literacy instruction that we use while also addressing the Minnesota Social Studies Standards. We utilize the state's social studies framework of inquiry, critical thinking, problem solving and communication to instruct around the following strands: citizenship and government, economics, geography, and history. Lessons are built to help students understand how they individually and collectively share responsibility in their communities. These lessons help students understand their roles as citizens within the context of our history and an ever-changing world.

Daily formative assessment for social studies includes rich student discussion and written responses to essential questions. Summative assessments for units of study include informational and persuasive writing, as well as interactive projects that allow students to show what they've learned.

Over the past few years, we have partnered with our Native American Education coordinator and American Indian Parent Advisory Committee to add meaningful Native American content and resources to our classrooms to meet the needs not only of our Native American learners, but to benefit all students. The creation of the units have provided us with the opportunity to make an intentional effort to help students of all backgrounds to be represented through our curriculum, while also affording the opportunity to build empathy, practice perspective taking, and ask critical questions about who is present and who is missing from historical narratives. This process is intentional and ongoing, as we continue to learn and grow in partnership with the equity work we are doing as a district.

1f. For secondary schools:

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

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Lowell school provides physical education and music instruction for all elementary level students in kindergarten through fourth grade. We have extended learning opportunities for students by offering programs beyond these two curricular areas in both the classroom and during specialist's instruction. Children now experience a foreign language (Spanish) and have science instruction during their specialist time. We also provide every learner at all levels with a "power hour" where they experience classes in culinary arts, coding, yoga experiences, chess games, and many other structured activities for students to learn beyond the classroom. Furthermore, classroom teachers provide weekly instruction in the visual arts as well as character building and social emotional learning.

Music curriculum is aligned to the state and national standards and is delivered to all students three times per week for a total of 75 minutes. Students experience music instruction that is multicultural based and includes many hands-on experiences. Each grade level has the opportunity to participate in a musical performance yearly. Physical education is delivered five times a week for every student for a total of 125 minutes. Instruction is performance based and aligned with the state and national physical education standards. We are one of a few districts in the state that has continued to provide physical education daily at the elementary level. Our school remains committed to the benefits students receive from everyday physical education that connects directly to their overall health and wellness. The overall goal is to develop a passion for activities they enjoy and choose to continue well beyond the walls of our school.

Classroom teachers continue the learning for all students by delivering instruction in the areas of social emotional learning. They experience character building and social emotional curriculum with the use of 2nd Step and Zones of Regulation. Teachers focus on creating an environment for learners to understand their emotions and how to handle them with one another. Since COVID, social emotional learning has come to the forefront. Teachers worked with students during distance learning in a variety of social and emotional areas. As we went into the 2021 school year, additional needs in the realm of social emotional learning appeared and teachers are working to address these skills with their students.

In the area of technology, students are continually interacting with technology in every learning space they are in. Distance learning has sparked much growth for both staff and students as we delivered instruction through Google meets and Google classrooms in order to reach every child.

Lowell has been in the planning stages for the last five years to create more opportunities for our students. Starting the fall of 2021, we provide Spanish for all students three times a week. Lowell continues to provide opportunities, innovation, and success in the area of science education with the use of the Full Option Science System (FOSS). Students use observation skills and hands-on learner approaches to explore, discover, and discuss science experiments with one another.

3. Academic Supports

3a. Students performing below grade level:

Our educational philosophy at Lowell School is to tailor instruction to each individual student. We know that one curriculum does not meet the needs of all, thus the need for flexibility, problem-solving and instructional strategies that accelerate each student's learning. Specifically, we focus on closing the achievement gap of two subgroups: special education and students of low socio-economic status. We do this through culturally competent instruction and targeted Title I interventions, utilizing a learning studio model to deliver core instruction. This model allows for flexible, fluid grouping that is highly adaptable, based upon each child's needs. Ultimately, student success and closure of gaps is due to the collaborative planning time that occurs in each grade level between both general education teachers and special education teachers on a regular basis.

Within this model, teachers engage in a cycle of analyzing data, identifying strengths and areas of need, and pinpointing instructional strategies or contexts for learning. Through our full-time literacy coach, classroom teachers, special education and interventionists meet for grade level team meetings three times a year to do

this work. Between team meetings, teachers meet at weekly PLCs to further assess and design instruction. This cycle ensures high quality instruction is happening first in the core curriculum. From there, intervention services are provided to students within small groups or on an individual basis, with a focus on early intervention in the primary grades. We align interventions with the core curriculum through a push-in model and ensure communication between classroom teachers and interventionists. With COVID, we had to make changes to our interventions but we continued to provide them weekly in all grades by three certified teachers. Even during a two month distance learning model, intervention and support happened for our students performing below grade level.

3b. Students performing above grade level:

The philosophy of educators at Lowell Elementary is that every child is on a continuum for some form of acceleration. Our weekly planning time at each grade level includes time to discuss how to best provide appropriate challenges to all students. The question guiding our planning is: what is our response when students already understand content before we teach it or pick up on material very quickly? Teachers use data on student performance against our state standards to regularly see where students are on the path toward mastery. Based on student data, teachers create opportunities for students to join children with similar academic needs for deeper learning throughout the day. One example includes the math block: once a lesson is taught, students have the opportunity to meet with small groups for independent practice: students needing additional help can work with one adult, while those ready for a challenge with the content meet with another teacher. Staff spend a significant amount of professional learning and planning time studying critical thinking, and how to create deeper conversations for all students according to their individual needs in various content areas.

Additionally, Lowell Elementary houses one section for each grade level of the district's AGATE program. This Gifted and Talented program is for students identified through a full-district screener as requiring additional enrichment and rigor. Students in AGATE participate in accelerated math programming and are served according to individualized needs in other content areas. Enrichment models including passion projects, Socratic seminars and engineering. Those activities, while grown through the AGATE program, are also introduced to all students throughout Lowell Elementary. Finally, recognizing that some gifted and high performing students have unique social-emotional needs, the AGATE program also infuses learning around perfectionism, self doubt, executive functioning skills, and interpersonal relationship building skills throughout the day.

3c. Special education:

Lowell Elementary strives to provide equal opportunities and inclusion for special education students. Lowell staff sees the value of immersing our special education students amongst their non-disabled peers and including them in all components of education. The goal is to keep special education students in the least restrictive environment. Lowell's Special Education teachers are divided by grade level. Each teacher specializes in various disability categories and is able to bring a variety of knowledge to their designated grade level. This model results in special education teachers becoming well-versed in grade level standards and curriculum, as well as creates opportunities for co-teaching with general education teachers. Being embedded within a grade level provides an additional lens into the spectrum of disabled and non-disabled students within the general education setting. It reveals specific steps to put in place in order to close the existing achievement gap for our special education students. This has also resulted in an increased knowledge of students' strengths, areas of need, and accommodations that support success. Our special education teachers spend the majority of their day in the classroom which creates a proactive approach in addressing behaviors through teachable moments and in-class coaching. Special education teachers collaborate with paraprofessionals on a daily basis and help provide knowledge in programming, interventions, consistency in delivering services, strategies, and modeling. Child Study at Lowell is a key component in allowing special education students to meet their maximum potential in a school setting. Lowell staff, in collaboration with the school psychologist, meet to discuss student progress and to determine potential interventions to improve student achievement. Through collaboration during child study and the Special Education Professional Learning Community, teachers gain knowledge of students across all grades and smoothly transition students from one grade level to another.

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

Brainerd Public schools has a small population of English Language Learners (ELL), thus offers ELL services to those students who qualify for it when they enter our district. All students are screened and then assessed if English is not their primary language or the primary language that is spoken in the home. Upon completion of this assessment, the general education teacher works with the English Language (EL) teacher to incorporate language goals into the general education content with the goal of making the general content accessible to the learner. Using sheltered content instruction, many strategies are employed to help students be successful. The classroom teacher is responsible for most of the content, with the EL teacher pushing-in or working in a small group to assist with the learning. ELL instruction focuses on social and academic English skills and is delivered solely by the EL teacher. This instruction is supplementary and will not take the place of content instruction. It primarily focuses on the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing.

At Lowell School, we typically have only a couple of students who qualify for ELL instruction. Although we have a limited number of students in this program, EL teachers throughout the district provide every classroom teacher with effective practices to help all students succeed in the classroom. We have focused on practices such as the use of sentence frames to provide students with prompts for how to respond and help them understand what a response might sound like. Another focus has been how to create an inclusive environment that is appropriate for all students during holidays and celebrations. From all these approaches, students acquiring English language skills are acclimated into a full inclusion classroom to not only practice and experience the language, but to learn its usage in a real world environment.

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

Lowell Elementary School does not have a sizable migrant population. However, homelessness and the resulting mobility challenges are addressed districtwide by, first ensuring a guaranteed and viable curriculum is consistently offered across all district elementary schools. Second, the district coordinates emergency homeless support via its district transportation plan in coordination with the Title I coordinator. Lowell directly addresses its students in poverty through its schoolwide Title I plan and its data based continuous improvement plan. This plan is reviewed and updated annually and includes community outreach as well as family engagement and education.

Within our Title I plan and in collaboration with a community support agency, we help students and their families who may be homeless or living in poverty. Lowell School has a family collaborative worker who connects with families to help them meet their basic needs. She is a direct link between community services and these families. This may include access to medical services, food and clothing, as well as mental health services. During the day, this same worker has set up social skills groups to role play social scenarios with small groups of children to help them be successful outside of school. She also has set up groups during lunch time to create a relaxed environment for students to build their skills in communication and casual conversation. This same person also coordinates clothing for children that come to school inadequately clothed as well as ensures students have proper hygiene supplies. Attendance is a concern at times and our collaborative worker works to identify the cause and develop solutions that work for each family. Furthermore, for students who need additional homework support, paraprofessionals and volunteers work with and read alongside our students so they have the same opportunities as other students who do have support at home.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

Lowell Elementary is defined by its focus on making every child a life-long learner. To do this, we continually set high expectations for our students and assist them to move toward reaching their educational goals. This mentality promotes learning and growth at each student's individual level while taking into account student interests. When students are learning at their cutting edge with authentic and interesting topics and activities, students are more engaged and thus achieve more. Furthermore, we engage students in a leadership role through a schoolwide student council committee. This committee, which is made up of students in grades second through fourth, fosters leadership skills in students as they make decisions on behalf of their peers that support schoolwide activities.

Lowell promotes a positive learning environment for everyone to grow and share in each other's successes through a variety of programs. Throughout the school, students earn "Gotchas" for making good choices. Each month, the school assembles to learn about a positive character trait and teachers identify students that exemplify that trait. This "Student of the Month" assembly engages our students as well as their families. Within the classroom, student choice is at the forefront. Lowell has worked extensively to support students' passion for reading by increasing their access to a variety of texts that they have the opportunity to choose from during independent reading time. When students are given choice in their education, they are more apt to be engaged and extend that learning beyond the four walls of the school building. Furthermore, students have had the opportunity to be actively engaged in a "power hour" each day in order to expand their opportunities to unique experiences. During this time, children are given life experiences in a subject area that their classroom teachers are passionate about. Some of these activities include culinary, strategy games, painting, time/stop animation, and phenology to spark the interests and possibly ignite passions for our students.

During COVID, we provided every student with a personal device at home so they could individually connect with their teacher before, during, and after-school hours. Students were involved in online lessons with the use of google classroom assignments for work completion. Our success during distance learning times was linked to the face-to-face instruction through Google meets during the majority of the school day. We had extremely high attendance rates during this time and instruction continued as seamlessly as possible.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Creating strong family and community partnerships is a priority at Lowell. We believe the support that surrounds our students is instrumental to their success. We work to engage and educate our families about their child's education through a variety of avenues. Monthly school and classroom newsletters as well as an app-based communication tool called Class DoJo inform parents of school happenings and educational experiences occurring in the classroom. Our Parent Teacher Association coordinates numerous school and family events throughout the year including a fall open house, Christmas extravaganza, bingo night, and spring carnival. We host a "Breakfast and Books" morning that provides parents with resources to support their child's at-home reading. Alongside our PTA and throughout all grade levels, we have numerous volunteer opportunities that support our students as well as bring unique experiences from outside experts. With circumstances surrounding COVID the past 2 years, our families and community have stepped up to support our schools by filling substitute teaching positions and driving buses. We could not have been successful these past two years without our community pulling together and supporting our school.

In addition to our families, the community surrounding Lowell School is essential to our students' overall success in life. We partner with various entities in the community to provide services and foster positive communication. Some of our families struggle to fulfill basic needs for food, clothing and housing. To help these families access necessary items and services, Lowell has a full-time Family Collaborative worker to connect families to a variety of organizations throughout our community. Furthermore, our school district works closely with our indigenous families to provide a positive educational experience. To do this, we have a district American Indian Coordinator who is advised by a community-based American Indian Advisory

Committee. Time and effort is dedicated to helping indigenous students feel valued and represented in our school community. Many service organizations support us through donations of time, money and resources. Community members eat lunch weekly with students needing a positive adult mentor. A local church donates hundreds of gently-used books each year to help build home libraries for students. Volunteers from a variety of professions including medical, rescue workers, and business owners share their talents and expertise with our students. Comments such as “Lowell is a special place” are often heard about our school. We attribute this to the belief that we are a family at Lowell School, where we help one another so that all can succeed.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

Brainerd Schools has established a foundation for professional development in order to strengthen the skills of our educators and ultimately impact the learning of every student. New and veteran teachers are provided opportunities to improve their knowledge and teaching skills in a multitude of areas. These opportunities include but are not limited to the areas of curriculum, technology, mental health and cultural diversity. Lowell School has initiated a team approach that allows staff to lean on each other for support while utilizing each other’s individual strengths. Through a collaboration period each day, general education teachers, interventionists, paraprofessionals and special education teachers analyze data, student behaviors, schedules, and areas for improvement. This additional time allows staff to share the workload to better meet student needs.

At Lowell we have the unique opportunity of having a full time literacy coach who provides group and individual coaching to all of our general education teachers, special education teachers, and interventionists. She attends ongoing professional development each year at the university level, learns new practices and brings her knowledge and expertise back to our staff. Educators implement these approaches, determine individual needs and work toward increasing literacy achievement for all students. Lowell’s Professional Learning Communities (PLC) are focused on working to reach team goals as well as individual goals that are directly related to improving student achievement. PLC groups analyze and reflect upon assessments based on Minnesota Standards, go over student data, and have healthy dialog regarding effective teaching practices with the intent to increase student learning in their respective areas of education. Brainerd Schools’ peer coaching program is a powerful tool that allows educators to observe one another during instruction while receiving honest feedback and reflection on practices and areas for refinement. It allows for both a time of networking and connection across disciplines, as well as creates a culture of peer-led coaching and collaboration. When taking into consideration a multitude of generations in the workplace as well as vast teaching experiences, it promotes a great learning environment amongst one another.

Lowell staff possess a growth mindset and an eagerness to continue learning to become better equipped to meet student needs. Collaboration also builds personal relationships among staff to support each other through high stress times in our profession. Lowell educators are a special group of teachers that refuse to remain stagnant and strive for continued innovation, growth and success together.

4. School Leadership:

The goal of every school in America should be to create leaders. From staff to students, we want everyone to take the responsibility of being a leader to make the world a better place. This is the belief of every employee at Lowell School, especially our principal. He has gone to great lengths to hire employees that are always challenging the status quo and are constantly looking for ways to improve learning for children. Every facet of our building allows for leaders to emerge and help shape the lives of everyone in our school. For example, over the past six years there were multiple leadership teams at each grade level as we designed our new educational vision. From academic content to designing spaces, staff guided the future direction of every aspect of our school. Lowell also has a full time Literacy Coach to help lead teachers with literacy instruction design and delivery, plus how to reach students with learning difficulties. She also guides our Building Literacy Team that is made up of teacher leaders from each grade level. They meet bi-monthly to address the advancement of our literacy initiatives in our building. Our Area Gifted And Talented Education (AGATE) teachers lead at every grade level to help support enrichment instruction for all students. Not only at our building level, but throughout the district, this group of educators see instruction through the lens of

gifted education. Next, we have our Special Education staff that lead our Child Study/Response to Intervention team. This group analyzes Tier II and III data and ensures that due process expectations are being met for every child. Staff members from every grade level at Lowell participate in the district's curriculum coordinating council to navigate the direction of district instruction. Peer coaches support and lead staff members through a coaching model to support, teach, and guide fellow teachers to improve their craft of teaching. Finally, we have a teacher from Lowell that is leading a district/community committee to address equity issues in our area. Having a staff full of leaders provides a model for students, who are also given the opportunity to lead in their classrooms and the school community as student council representatives, school patrol, and library helpers. To be a leader, one needs to take or be given an opportunity to lead. At Lowell, it is not only encouraged but expected that everyone will take responsibility in leading and shaping the direction of our school.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

Lowell Elementary is an active partner in our district's work to increase culturally responsive practices in our classrooms and school. We have staff engaged in the district process of creating frameworks to guide our building-level decision making through an equity lens. These areas include: curriculum and assessment, policies and procedures, community engagement, student support services, behavior and interventions, students experiences and activities, and students safety and engagement. Over time, we will address each of these areas throughout our school district. We recognize and acknowledge that not all students come to our school with the same backgrounds and experiences. We seek to honor diversity in our students' identities, cultures and socioeconomic status through our lessons and practices.

To best meet the needs of all our learners, we spend time regularly training staff around issues like implicit bias and deficit thinking, mindful of the inequities that can arise from unfair assumptions. We have a lens for equity when we choose diverse resources, so all children feel represented within our classrooms and within our curriculum. We work to raise cultural awareness of Native American experiences, so that we can better represent their culture and beliefs within our lessons around Native American cultural experiences, history and sovereignty.

While our community is largely ethnically homogenous, we are mindful that diversity and inclusion are important for all students in our school, as they grow in perspective-taking and understanding those who are both alike and different from themselves. Culturally responsive practices in our school are reflected in several ways. First and foremost, we focus our time on building positive relationships with our students. Connecting staff with students and students with students. In each grade level, all of the staff know each and every student. For example, in first grade, each child has five adults that know their name, and care about them as a unique individual. Within our curriculum, we look for places where a group's story is missing and look to include it. Within our assessments, we ask who will succeed in context, and who is not being considered in its creation and implementation. We look for ways to allow students' backgrounds and experiences to play an active role in making personal connections to their learning. Finally, we work alongside families and the community so that we can best understand each individual student. Together with parents, friends and neighbors, we are an active part of each student's educational and personal lives.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

The overall success at Lowell Elementary is achieved using a student-centered approach. Daily collaboration among staff with academic planning and support, a focus on social emotional learning for all students, and community building. While we know that students who have the support of one caring adult are more likely to succeed, at Lowell we strive to have multiple adults connect with every child so they know they are safe and loved.

We consider the needs of every student and do not settle until those needs are met. At times, this requires staff to ask hard questions about why we engage in practices that may need changing to better address both academic and social-emotional needs. Through daily collaboration time, we are able to pinpoint strengths and areas of need in order to address them immediately. This time also allows all grade level staff to know every child, adding to the family feel of our school.

Our student-centered focus does not just extend to academics, but to seeing and valuing the whole child that we teach. Because we know our students well, we are able to see when they come to school with needs beyond those that are academic. As a school family, we discuss social-emotional needs including the stress we collectively felt through the pandemic. We recognize that our students come to school wearing the stress of their communities, and we know that first addressing what is on their minds and hearts is critical to their academic success. Our social-emotional programming covers a wide range of topics from handling big emotions, to being an empathetic friend, to specialized lessons in conflict management, mindfulness, and self-worth.

Teaching social-emotional lessons in the context of the classroom allows students to own their roles as respectful members of their community. While staff work hard to make sure all students feel safe and supported, they also encourage students to support each other. Recognizing and celebrating our differences fosters understanding among students, and sets the stage for meaningful conversations during the day. Our community-centered focus on students creates the welcome students need to be the best version of themselves.

Our student-centered focus drives everything we do, because that is what we would want for our own children. Our school song ends with these words: We are Warriors, we dream big, we can do anything! We believe that for each of our students, our daily work helps that become a reality.