

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

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

School Mailing Address 12 S Burns Avenue
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Springfield State MN Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 56087-1299

County Brown County

Telephone (507) 723-4286 Fax (507) 723-4289

Web site/URL https://www.springfield.mntm.org E-mail jeff.kuehn@springfield.mntm.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. Keith Kottke E-mail keith.kottke@springfield.mntm.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Springfield School District Tel. (507) 723-4286

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. Jeff Kretsch
(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):
- 1 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 0 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 1 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 2 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	24	23	47
K	17	18	35
1	27	18	45
2	18	23	41
3	25	24	49
4	20	20	40
5	30	15	45
6	13	32	45
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	174	173	347

*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
 - 0 % Asian
 - 0 % Black or African American
 - 11 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 89 % 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: 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	9
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2020 until the end of the 2020-2021 school year	7
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	16
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2020	340
(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):

Spanish

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 44 %

Total number students who qualify: 152

8. Students receiving special education services with an IEP or 504: 14 %
49 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>9</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>2</u> Developmental Delay | <u>13</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>7</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>12</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.	17
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.	15
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 20:1

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%	96%	96%	96%	96%
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.

Springfield Public School District: Learning for All! Vision: Schools embrace an UNCOMMON mindset and seeks excellence in everything that we do.

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

<https://www.springfield.mntm.org/Page/16>

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

Springfield Elementary school sits in the southwest corner of the state of Minnesota. The community of Springfield (pop. 2,200) is home to the school but the communities of Clements, Cobden, Comfrey, Sanborn, Lamberton, Wanda, Sleepy Eye, Morgan, and New Ulm are all represented with students that are either within our district boundaries or open-enrolled. The greater Springfield area has an economy dependent upon agriculture (corn, soybeans, wheat, sugar beets, and livestock) and many of our students live on small family farms. Springfield and its schools have long been recognized as a place that values education and puts a premium on student achievement. Extracurricular programs are successful and tremendous pride is taken in having students participate in a wide range of academic, artistic, and athletic events. Our schools, communities, and families expect our students to be respectful, responsible, and safe (The Tiger Way). We have a culture that embraces hard work, honors integrity, and challenges each generation to pay it forward. Tiger pride is tangible and real at Springfield Elementary School and we're proud of the success we've had over time. Our aim is to continue to build upon that success and make Springfield the school of choice in our region for generations to come.

There are a number of things that have helped to drive our success. First and foremost, we've embraced the belief that the primary role of the school is to ensure learning happens (a process guided by our PLC model of studying data and acting upon the evidence of learning produced by our students). Student achievement is the driving force of our work as we recognize its essential nature in impacting the lives of our students. We believe that all students can learn and that our role as educators is to guarantee that growth happens on our watch. Another key belief that we hold is that the quality of our relationships determine the degree to which we can achieve our goals. Our aim is to create a school environment in which students want to run to our classroom doors each day. We believe in the power of smiles, laughter, and authentic joy. We know that when kids respect and admire our teachers, that they'll be inspired to honor their efforts and give them their very best. This dynamic is enhanced by regular celebrations and the recognition of "UNCOMMON" contributions. Our school operates within a PBIS (positive behavior intervention system) model and we are intentional about pointing out the good that we see in our students, staff, and families. The positive energy that's unleashed through these efforts is motivating to all and it fosters an environment that is encouraging, uplifting, and supportive to people at all levels. Finally, our school has held firmly to the belief that early intervention makes a tremendous difference. We have built early childhood, preschool, and primary grade programs that instill a strong emphasis on literacy and character development. The skills and behaviors that we promote at these levels are foundational to the work that follows in the years thereafter. There is an alignment of standards, curriculum, and behavioral expectations that are core to students' long-term success and we have found that communicating them with our youngest learners and families has borne out tremendous results.

While details of specific programs and strategies will be noted throughout this application, we're proud to note that much of our success stems from our ability to simplify and focus on the elements of greatest significance. We emphasize high academic achievement, we prioritize honest and respectful relationships, and we regularly reflect on the impact of our choices. By constantly reviewing our own effectiveness in these key areas, we're able to have honest discussions about our work and enact change where it's needed most. This was especially evident throughout the COVID-19 pandemic of the past few years. Throughout this turbulent time we maintained the beliefs that learning needed to move forward, relationships must remain paramount, and that critical self-evaluation was necessary to make progress. We made a commitment to put students first throughout the pandemic and to approach the work at hand with a "no fear" mindset. We used each day as a learning opportunity and expanded our capacities as educators and people in the process. Our resiliency was tested but our resolve was firm, and as a result, we are stronger today than we were when it started. We now look forward to taking the next steps in healing and growing our entire school community through this unique time.

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:

Our philosophy regarding the implementation of standards is based upon a belief that we need to ensure a clear and viable curriculum (Marzano). The state of Minnesota has adopted standards that are both rigorous and comprehensive. We have found that while these standards are all worthy of instruction, there are some that are more crucial than others. In recognizing this, we have annually worked through a process of determining "essential" or "power" standards. These are the standards that we've identified as the most crucial for long-term success and achievement at the next level of learning. After identifying these essential standards for each content area, we then build our instruction, assessment, and intervention efforts around ensuring mastery of these skills for our students. Furthermore, we have built reporting systems (standards-based report cards) that communicate with students, families, and future educators the specific strengths and weaknesses of each student in relation to these standards. By narrowing our focus to what is most essential, we have found that our students are able to develop a more confident and commanding mastery of the knowledge and skills within each subject area.

The other core element of our approach is building capacity in our staff to become content experts in their subject matter. As a 2-section school at each grade level we have assigned staff to specific content areas (reading and social studies or math and science in the homeroom settings). These teachers are thereby able to focus on a pair of content areas and plan more deeply than if they were expected to cover all subject areas. The expertise and depth of knowledge that's gained as a result of this process is significant and it's further developed through the regular sharing of best practices within their departments. The internal staff development that's achieved through our PLC process is something that impacts our students and staff in significant ways and leads to truly outstanding outcomes.

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

Our reading and language arts programming is based upon a "Balanced Literacy" model. We use a model that emphasizes a specific learning target daily that is taught across multiple settings (whole group, small group, and independent). We commit between 90-120 minutes of instructional time to this content area on a daily basis. Students are tasked with an abundance of practice and application of each skill while interacting with both their teachers and peers. Students are assessed regularly to determine their independent reading levels and this information is used to fill their desks and book bins with texts of various genres at their skill level. Guided reading instruction in small groups provides students with feedback and practice of skills, while independent reading periods allow students the opportunity to grow through application. Our teachers and paraprofessionals also use this model to pull students to confer and assess individually. The feedback that's provided helps students to know specific areas of strength and weakness. This feedback loop is motivating to students as it gives direction and purpose to their work. In addition to the core curriculum ("Treasures" series through McMillan McGraw Hill) and expansive classroom libraries, our students have access to thousands of books through our school's media center and the MyOn reading program. As a 1:1 iPad school, our students are also able to utilize programs such as Lexia, IXL, Study Island, Moby Max, Accelerated Reader, and STAR. This broad base of tools and resources helps to ensure that we have the variety of levels and genres that students need to become fully literate readers, writers, and speakers.

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

Our math department has consistently been one of the highest performing teams in the state. On an annual basis 90% or more of our students meet or exceed grade-level standards in mathematics. This is due to a number of factors. First, we commit 70-75 minutes of instruction to math instruction each day. We have narrowed our focus to the standards and skills that are most essential. By honing our attention to the concepts that are most critical, our students are able to develop a confidence and depth of knowledge that

allows them to apply their understanding in multiple settings. Second, our staff have embraced a "spiral review" method that allows for constant use of old skills. Math facts are practiced daily at all levels and students are asked to continuously demonstrate skill in areas that have already been instructed. By seeing problems on a regular basis that require recall and integration with other concepts, our students never lose their ability to manipulate information mathematically. Finally, our program is dependent upon rigor and volume of repetition. We demand a lot of our students in mathematics and our kids routinely complete hundreds of problems (of various skills/concepts) on a daily basis. With that said, homework is limited. After teaching, modeling, and guiding practice of skills in the homeroom setting, students are then given direct support (from teachers, paras, and peers) in small group and independent work sessions. In doing so, our students are able to work with confidence and efficiency and have questions answered in real time before frustration sets in. Ultimately, our math programming is the result of great people doing great work, but these are some of the core fundamentals of how we approach this effort.

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

Over the past couple years, our approach to science has evolved. We have become more driven by a STEAM-based model that encourages application of science skills across the content areas of technology, engineering, art, and mathematics. In doing so, we've converted an old computer lab into a STEAM room where experiments can be done, students can get messy, and exploration is encouraged. While we utilize the Pearson "Interactive Science" curriculum series for the bulk of our core instruction (25 minutes daily), we also take advantage of the online programs Mystery Science, IXL, and Moby Max. In our efforts to build a culture of inquiry in the area of STEAM we have established a pair of enrichment experiences that help to perpetuate the idea. The first is a STEAM day each spring. On this day, our staff identify a series of standards-based, STEAM related experiments and activities that they will host in their rooms throughout the day. A course list is then created and an adjusted schedule is shared with students and families. On the STEAM day itself, students then rotate throughout the building to connect with staff and hands-on activities tied to their standard of choice. Students rotate through grade-level bands (PreK-2 and 3-6) and at the end of the day, provide feedback to our staff on the activities they experienced. We use this information to drive our planning and preparation for the following year's event. Finally, each summer we host a one-month STEAM Academy where students entering grades 3-6 embark on a core challenge (building roller coasters, bridges, towers, etc.) in addition to daily activities designed to enhance scientific understanding. These programs have each had a positive impact on the culture in our school and we anticipate that they will also enhance student achievement in this area in the years ahead.

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

The elementary social studies experience is driven by our state standards at the homeroom level but has also been augmented through a specialist course that's been created (Global Explorations). Students receive 25 minutes of core instruction daily in this subject area and an additional 25 minutes of world cultures (3 days each week on M/W/F) in Global Explorations. Most of our curriculum within this subject area has become web-based (IXL, Moby Max, Brain Pop and Brain Pop Jr., etc.) to ensure that it is current, relevant, and engaging to students. While textbooks are still utilized as a base reference, we have also tried to build a bridge between our reading/language arts and social studies experience by embedding the use of novels, essays, and other primary documents (maps, historical documents, etc.) At the 6th grade level the focus is Minnesota history and the curriculum is driven by the use of a text titled "Northern Lights." This tool was developed by the Minnesota Historical Society and it helps our students to develop a broader awareness and deeper appreciation for path their ancestors have traveled in building this special place. Supplemental social studies experiences in our school include "I Love to Read" month themes focused on history and culture (U.S. Presidents, National Parks, etc.), field trips to local and regional sites of significance (the state capitol, state parks, history museums, battlefields, etc.). We also work with our local community experts to bring in guest speakers to share their cultural heritage (Dakota tribe representatives, Hispanic family traditions, etc.). We're proud of the broad experience that students get in social studies in our school and we are always looking for new ways to bring history and culture to life.

1f. For secondary schools:

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

Our Tiger Cubs Preschool program has a Minnesota 4-star "Parent Aware" rating (highest rating possible) and regularly serves between 40-60 students ages 3-5. It uses the "Creative Curriculum for Preschool," the "Zaner-Bloser ABC 123 Just For Me!" handwriting curriculum, and the "Austim & PPD Picture Stories & Language Activities." Through these various resources, the educators provide lessons in the areas of language, literacy, math, arts, social emotional, and movement; all of which nurture literate, lifelong learners. The lessons provided foster the interests of the students in the classroom through creative, hands-on, and active teaching strategies to promote positive energy and drive success in our youngest learners. The Tiger Cubs Preschool program offered to three and four year-old students follows the Minnesota Early Childhood Indicators of Progress for the given age of students in each class. By following these standards, our educators are ensuring their students have been provided the education to prepare them for kindergarten and beyond. Through weekly PLC meetings, our preschool educators meet with kindergarten and first grade teams to share, discuss, and align standards between grade levels. This opportunity allows the educators to make adjustments and revisions to lessons and curriculum as needed to meet the needs of the students and allow success to happen as they progress in the grades beyond preschool. As our Tiger Cubs Preschool program has been expanding over the last few years, it is evident to us that early childhood preschool classes are better preparing our students to be successful learners in the primary grades. The students who enter into kindergarten following attendance in Tiger Cubs Preschool have proven to be more school ready than those who have not attended Tiger Cubs Preschool or other outside preschool experiences. In the year ahead, we will be expanding programming to full-day services and will make both tuition and transportation free so as to remove all barriers to early learning opportunities in our community. This is a significant commitment from the district and we're eager to see the impact that these expanded learning opportunities will have on student achievement.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Our elementary has a number of "specialty" courses that students participate in throughout a given week. First, we believe strongly in the importance of every child having ample opportunities each day to move and play. All students in grade PreK-6 have multiple daily recess (45-60 minutes including before school, mid-day, and afternoon periods) and PE (25 minutes daily) opportunities. A healthy body leads to a healthy mind and when our students are physically strong, we believe they can best engage in the rigorous learning that we expect in our other content areas. Our PE courses are taught by licensed PE teachers and both indoor and outdoor facilities are utilized to teach skills, strategy, and sportsmanship.

The second area of focus that our students experience outside the homeroom is music. Currently our students get two 25-minute classes of music each week (T/Th) where they sing, dance, and explore this medium. Again, our staff are licensed music professionals and in addition to teaching our elementary students, they also conduct our junior high and high school bands and choirs. Their deep knowledge of their content leads to the development of outstanding outcomes for our students in the areas of music and the performing arts. Our elementary students perform at multiple concerts and events throughout the year (Veteran's Day, graduations, awards ceremony, etc.) and they regularly opt to participate in extracurricular events with a music or theater-based theme (Prairie Fire Theater, community musical, classroom plays, etc.)

In addition, as noted above, our students participate in a course called "Global Explorations." The class is a 25-minute experience three days each week (M/W/F opposite of music) and is taught by a licensed teacher. This is a class that is designed to accomplish a number of goals. First, it's our intent to provide students with a deeper cultural understanding of the world around them. Second, we desire for our students to have well-established knowledge of the geographic locations and features of the earth. Third, we use the study of varying global traditions as a way to embed visual art in our curriculum. Finally, we view world cultures as the optimal lens through which to develop literacy skills (reading, writing, speaking/language, etc.). This comprehensive set of targets allows us to provide students with a diverse experience and we've found that it is one of our students' most enjoyable classes.

The other course that our students engage in on a weekly basis (once for 25 minutes) is media literacy. This course is taught in a computer lab and its focus is building capacity in our students in the area of technology. As a 1:1 device school (iPads), our students need to know and be able to apply skills in a variety of applications that demonstrate their learning (Google Classroom, Microsoft Office, Infinite Campus, etc.). Another core focus of this course is to develop a deeper understanding of digital literacy and online citizenship. We emphasize internet safety, selection of good/credible sources of media, and the importance of using tools of technology in a way that builds ones' reputation vs. compromising it. In addition to attending media literacy each week, our students also visit our school's media center on a weekly basis where they check out books, take Accelerated Reader tests, and explore games/activities in our maker space. Students enjoy having access to these spaces and opportunities and they provide for a truly balanced education in our school.

The final, and perhaps most important other curricular experience that students get in our school is learning "The Tiger Way." The Tiger Way is our PBIS model that teaches students the importance of being RESPECTFUL, RESPONSIBLE, and SAFE. After our "training camp" (first two weeks of school) where we literally move throughout the district and practice the specific skills and habits needed to demonstrate The Tiger Way, we build upon our character model by teaching life lessons through weekly "Tiger Terms." We have a series of 30+ character terms that identify the behaviors and qualities that high character people exemplify. We post and define the terms in various places throughout the school and we as staff tell personal stories that give our students glimpses into the defining moments of our lives and how we've learned through both our successes and failures. Students that demonstrate The Tiger Way in our school are recognized with "Tiger Tickets" and if their impact is significant, are awarded the "Heart of the Tiger" award (certificate and t-shirt with all of the Tiger Terms on it). The Tiger Way allows us to teach and live out a culture that encourages character, community, and achievement in everything we do.

3. Academic Supports

3a. Students performing below grade level:

Students in need of additional time and support are able to participate in a variety of interventions in our school. The first layer of support is our Title I program. It consists of a team of paraprofessionals providing daily supplementary assistance to students that are performing below grade-level in reading and math. These support staff assist during core instruction but then pull small groups and individuals to intervention spaces throughout each school day to give additional guidance on essential skills. Another intervention that we have in place is our Hover Room. The Hover Room is a program designed to meet the needs of "intentional non-learners." This term/phrase refers to students that have talent and ability, but because of a variety of factors (lack of organization, support at home, effort, etc.) are not performing up to standard. Students that qualify for this program stay after school for an additional hour four days per week (M-Th) where a staff member guides them through homework completion, retakes, materials organization, desk cleaning, locker cleaning, turning work in, etc. The Pro-Kinship Tutoring Program is another intervention that we use to support students in need. Paras, high school students (National Honor Society members and other student leaders), and other community leaders are used to work with students in need for up to three hours per week. These students are typically those that lack support and structure at home. The focus of this time is homework completion, practice of facts, and reading with support. In the spring of each year we also offer an experience to students that have performed below grade-level standards on core assessments (MCA, NWEA, AIMS, and STAR). This program is called the MCA Academy and it provides these students with practice and review experiences on essential standards for an extra hour after school on Tuesdays and Thursdays. It also offers simulated testing experiences where students can apply test-taking strategies and develop added confidence in that environment. Finally, we offer a 4-week summer school each year called Jumpstart. It runs for two hours a day (two weeks in June and two weeks in August) and it helps lower performing students maintain and solidify skills over the summer months. Again, the focus is on the fundamentals of reading and math, and we tailor our instruction to the needs of each student group. We have seen tremendous growth and achievement for students that have participated in these programs and we're proud of the work that's been done to build this safety net of support.

3b. Students performing above grade level:

Within our PLC framework, we ask 4 critical questions. 1--What do our students need to know/be able to do (standards/curriculum)? 2--How will we know that they've learned it (common formative assessments)? 3--What will we do if they haven't learned it (intervention programs)? 4--What will we do if they've already learned it (differentiation and enrichment)? That fourth and final question is what drives our efforts to ensure that we push each student at his/her level. The first element of our response is differentiation. There's an expectation in our school that staff will level their instruction and assessment to meet the needs of all learners. We use our assessment data to identify strengths and weaknesses of each child. We then use that information to group students and build lessons that challenge them in these areas. Our staff has participated in a variety of staff development experiences designed to support their growth in differentiation and they are currently reading the book "Doable Differentiation--12 Strategies to Meet the Needs of All Learners." The second prong of our approach to students achieving above grade-level is enrichment. Students that qualify are able to participate in regional workshops through our service cooperative (SW/WC) for young writers, artists, and scientists. We also offer competitions such as the Scripps National Spelling Bee, the National Geographic Bee, and Math Masters. Our "I Love to Read" month entails a variety of challenges designed to push students in reading and writing and our MCA Academy invites top students to serve as peer tutors for their classmates. We have seen tremendous support for these programs and students demonstrate high levels of engagement when given the opportunity to participate.

3c. Special education:

Our school's special education program is composed of a truly outstanding group of educators. We have five different staff members that make up our elementary team. One teacher serves birth-kindergarten, while another serves grades 1st-3rd, and still another serves grades 4th-6th. The other two members of that team are our speech-language pathologist and our occupational therapist. The early childhood teacher also serves as the coordinator of our SEAT team and she helps to coordinate evaluations and meetings with families. Each of the other staff members serve as case managers and work collaboratively with homeroom and specialist staff to build IEP's that work for each child. Our school's model is primarily pull-out and student schedules in grades preK-6 are designed to ensure that they have services at times that either match or supplement the content areas of need. We've also worked hard to establish an RtI model that identifies students with needs in a proactive manner. Our efforts to intervene early have produced strong results and because of this we've been able to ensure that students qualifying for special education have received a thorough and comprehensive evaluation process. From a needs standpoint, we serve students with all forms of disabilities. While most are able to function independently within our setting, there are some students that require additional support through a paraprofessional. Likewise, when student needs surpass the services that we're able to provide, we utilize our relationship with our local service cooperative to connect students with educational learning centers that provide a more focused, individualized, or therapeutic approach. Over time our data has shown that students with special needs in our district far outperform students with similar needs throughout the state. While the instruction that they've received is exceptional, we believe the deeper function of their success is the environment that they've experienced in our school. They have been loved, accepted, engaged, and challenged to integrate in all aspects of their school life. The connections that they've developed with peers, staff, administration, and the community as a whole have helped them to develop the confidence and competency needed to succeed both in school and in life.

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

Over time, our district has worked with very few students that have English language learning needs. Typically, any students that we have had with these needs get an additional hour of daily language support with a teacher in our high school. She is fully licensed in English as a Second Language and also serves as our high school Spanish teacher. As students progress with their language skills, the child's family, teachers, and administration are engaged to help determine when they are ready to graduate from the program and be fully mainstreamed in the general education setting. We have found success with this model as it allows students to develop relationships with peers/staff and gain access to the curriculum all while getting supplemental support in grasping the language. Likewise, our ELL teacher has worked closely with homeroom and specialist teachers to help familiarize them with each student's unique needs. She is able to guide them in developing modifications and accommodations that support a student's transition to learning English. Our general education staff also work to maintain their professional knowledge and skills by

participating in ELL trainings. These activities help to ensure a workforce that is aware, informed, and capable of intervening for students that demonstrate needs in the area of language. Finally, students that participate in ELL services are also tested on an annual basis through the WIDA Access for ELL's assessment. This tool identifies for all stakeholders the language skills of the child in the areas of speaking, listening, writing, and reading. Results are reported and shared and the data that's gathered helps to identify next steps in supporting these students and families.

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

Again, our experiences with these other populations is rather limited. We have a number of migrant families that work in local agriculture and come to our school in the fall and spring but depart during the winter months. We work closely with their families and previous school systems to ensure that accurate records transfer and appropriate placements are made. These families typically return on an annual basis and most become well-connected within the fabric of our school and community. Likewise, we provide support services for any student that is experiencing homelessness. Our school counselor is our Homeless Liaison and works with our social worker, teachers, and administration to mobilize services and resources for any student in need. We are thankful that we are able to work with and support families of all backgrounds, and the response that we've gotten from these groups has been very positive.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

Student engagement is perhaps the single greatest precursor to learning that exists. When students have an interest in the task at hand and/or the individual teaching it, they are far more likely to build the knowledge and skills that are essential to their success. When interviewing prospective staff members, the number one question that we ask is "what is it about you and your class that will literally make students run to your door each day?" Therein lies the secret--it's the people that are teaching our students! There's perhaps no greater duty of administration and school boards than the responsibility to hire outstanding teachers. These teachers need to be people of substance, depth, passion, curiosity, and effective interpersonal skills. They need to be people of high character and high expectations that view their work as that which leaves a legacy. From an application standpoint, we expect our staff to use every opportunity to build relationships. That starts with meeting and greeting students at the door. Whether it's handshakes, hugs, or high-5's, the importance of connecting with each student by name to start the day cannot be overlooked. This dynamic extends into the first few minutes of class as our teachers facilitate a breakfast (and sit/eat with classes at lunch) and sharing time in their homerooms. Each student is given opportunity to share what's new, different, or interesting in their lives. In most grade-levels, this also correlates with a morning journaling period. Students are often allowed to share their entries and comment on the various topics that are presented. Throughout the academic day, teachers are creative in building content around topics of interest to students while also sharing their own enthusiasm for the subject matter at hand. Each teacher is free to use their own gifts to craft and deliver lessons on essential content, but there is an expectation that they convey personal connections to content in all matters. By sharing stories and providing perspectives on things, students gain greater insight into the lives of trusted adults and they begin to see the future relevance of the things that they're learning. While our teachers are not required to supervise or play with their students at recess, they are often witnessed engaging in games of football, kickball, and other activities on the playground. This has been shown to be highly impactful on the culture of the classroom and throughout our building. It was especially impressive to see our school community interact throughout the pandemic. Whether in distance learning or in-person, we attempted to move forward with routines as usual. Through the use of our iPads and Google Meet and Classroom, we were able to connect, communicate, and maintain routines that brought safety, reduced fear, and made mental health a priority. Beyond the routines of the school day, our staff are regularly seen at student events (concerts, games, etc.). Being that we're a relatively small, rural community, our teachers and students also find themselves interacting in the broader community. They often cross paths at the grocery store, the gas stations, at church and at other destinations in town. This bond that exists is fostered over time and is something that we take care to nurture every chance we get.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

The relationships that we have with our families is critical to our success. Partnerships have been forged over time through both intentional programming and casual connections. Some of the specific activities that we engage with our families through are as follows: kindergarten camp picnic, Tiger Trek (fall fundraising campaign with bike/run event), music concerts, classroom plays, community musicals, parent-teacher conferences (including an annual parent survey), gingerbread houses, winter sledding event, grandparent's day, track and field day, early childhood carnival, awards ceremony, spring picnic, and graduation ceremonies (preschool, kindergarten and 6th grade). Each of these events are opportunities for us to connect with families, showcase student learning, and build a broader awareness of what's happening in the elementary school. An abundance of planning and communication takes place in advance and we have had fantastic turnout. One of the most beautiful things that happens in our school is the efforts that are made to ensure that every child has a caring adult at these events. In situations where a parent is either unable or unwilling to attend an event, we have staff fill that void and make personal connections with those students. One other program that has been a particular success has been our "Real World Wednesday" initiative. The emphasis of this program has been two-fold. First, it's been to connect our students with leaders in our community and familiarize them with the careers that they've chosen. Second, it's been to help students gain a deeper understanding of the value of character and integrity in life beyond school. The elementary principal recruits leaders from the community to join him for a meal and then share their stories with 6th

grade students in our auditorium. These events have helped to build strong relationships between our school and local business, agricultural, medical, manufacturing, etc. leaders. A few other key connections that our school maintains within the community are its partnerships with local foundations. Thousands of dollars are gifted to the elementary school on an annual basis through PAWS (Parents Aligned With Schools), The Pieschel Family Foundation, and the Springfield Area Foundation. Their generosity in supporting infrastructure needs in the school as well as intervention/enrichment programs cannot be overstated. We're thankful to have their support and believe that it's a reflection of the trust that exists between the school and community. A final (and new in 2021) initiative that we've built in our school is our Springfield Elementary "Hall of Fame." Annually, our staff compile a list of candidates in three separate eligibility categories--former staff, former student, and community partner. After nominating candidates, votes are taken and narratives are written highlighting the various contributions of these individuals in our community. The inductees are recognized and allowed to speak at our end-of-year awards ceremony and their plaques are placed in the hallway of our school as a means of communicating the high standards of excellence that we seek to honor. This tradition has communicated positive values to our students, staff, and families, and it's been very well-received by the entire school community. Apart from these formal events, we also attempt to maintain regular communication with families through emails, newsletters, websites (Google Classroom, Class Dojo, Remind, Band, etc.), and school social media posts (primarily Facebook and Twitter). Administration and teaching staff are in constant dialogue with families to ensure that they're aware of what's happening in the school. We try to maintain an "open door" policy and be available whenever a question or discussion is necessary.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

Our school's professional culture is defined by the fact that we have a collective commitment to ensuring that all children learn. We've adopted a mindset that we're all responsible for all kids and that as a team we can meet their various needs. These commitments to our students are based in the framework of a professional learning community (DuFour and Eaker). We have a defined mission ("Learning for All"), vision (consistently achieve the highest standards across settings), values (people not programs, high character, BE UNCOMMON, The Tiger Way), and goals (annual SMART goals measured by assessments, behaviors, and other performance measures). There's mutual accountability within our teams and building-wide to the goals that we set and standards we hope to achieve. We believe in and consistently use various forms of data to guide our decision-making. We analyze our work through a continuous process of reflection and our teams document their work (essential standards, assessments, rubrics, grading practices, interventions, and communication) to provide a reference for future educators. The results that we get dictate our staff development planning (recent emphasis on literacy, data analysis/goal-setting, and technology integration) and daily preparation. A system has been built that not only ensures accountability, but also provides direction and affirmation of the efforts staff have given to students. Success is a tremendous motivator and over time we've had our share. Success within our system has helped to build belief and confidence in our processes and it's empowered our teachers to continue trying new things. This freedom of inquiry has encouraged continuous collaboration and has allowed us to be flexible as new circumstances arise. It's been especially impactful as we've navigated the challenges associated with COVID-19 over the course of the past three school years. The professional dialogue and cooperation that's evolved throughout the pandemic has given us the ability to adapt while still making progress towards our goals. Finally, this PLC structure gives us a foundation upon which to celebrate. We are continually looking for wins and we take advantage of the opportunities we get to lift up the students, staff, and teams to do good work. This brings life and energy to our work and ensures that we never lose sight of our mission to ensure learning for all.

4. School Leadership:

As a small, rural, school district, we have the luxury of seeing and interacting with leadership on a continuous basis. We have also enjoyed the continuity of strong leadership over the course of the last 10-15 years (all administrators have been in their current roles during this time). The superintendent is in the elementary building daily and conversation with the principal, teachers, and other staff is free-flowing. Our superintendent does an excellent job of working with the school board, community, and local business partners in providing the tools, resources, and conditions necessary to have success with our students. He

delegates effectively and has entrusted the elementary principal with the task of leading and managing our building. The elementary principal defines, teaches, and reinforces expectations to create a safe, caring, and rigorous learning environment. He has worked hard to shape a positive and engaging school culture that celebrates success and student achievement. He works hard to prioritize impactful professional development and programming that meets the needs of staff and ultimately impacts student learning. Our principal works closely with staff in leadership teams to ensure alignment of programs and goals and is active in creating a reflective process that challenges staff to consider the impact of their work. He empowers individuals and teams to always seek out best practices, try new ideas, and use data to inform their decision-making. He collaborates, builds leadership, and ensures accountability through reciprocal and mutually responsible relationships. He sets the bar high and expects growth to occur regardless of circumstances. The respect and rapport that the administration has with students, staff, and families alike is a key part of our success and it's a dynamic that's been built through many years of hard work, honest dialogue, and timely action. The consistency that this leadership provides our school cannot be overlooked and we're thankful for the continuity that exists within our system.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

Our school culture is built upon the belief that everyone has purpose and value. The Tiger Way identifies the importance of treating everyone with respect and dignity regardless of their race, gender, religion, disability, etc. We view each member of our school community as a unique individual with special gifts and talents. We believe that when individuals give their gifts away for free, the entire community benefits. We celebrate the contributions and creativity of our students, staff, and families whenever their impact is felt. On a daily basis, we use our PBIS framework to identify the good things that people are doing through little notes of thanks called "Tiger Tickets." At assemblies, we encourage a time of sharing where students and staff alike can recognize one-another for the difference that they're making. The highest honor that one can achieve in our school is the "Heart of the Tiger" award as it's reserved for individuals that embody the character traits that show an awareness and responsiveness to the needs of others. In addition, we've attempted to build a culture of service learning in our school. Twice a year (spring and fall), our students and staff go out into the community to complete service projects that teach respect, generosity, pride, and empathy. Through these experiences we've seen connections made between the givers and receivers of these good deeds. Another practice that's been especially impactful has been our efforts to reach out to local ethnic communities (Mexican, Dakota, Hmong, etc.) and invite them into our space to share the core aspects of their culture. Their willingness to engage our school in this learning has been impactful as they share their food, dress, music, dance, language, and other traditions. Students are drawn to their stories and have shown an appreciation for the challenges that they've faced in adapting to life in the both the United States and Minnesota specifically. From a staff development standpoint, we have worked closely with our regional service cooperative (SW/WC) to ensure that staff are trained in their cultural competencies and we've shown respect to the diverse opinions that people may have regarding the various social issues facing our communities. We embrace tolerance of honest and open dialogue and believe that true understanding is only gained when individuals are afforded their right to speak freely about their positions on topics of significance. We recognize that each individual comes to our school with a different experience and story and that those backgrounds make them who they are. Our hope is to continue to learn from one another and present content to students in a way that elicits honest thought and debate about content that is developmentally appropriate. We're proud of the culture and environment that exists in our school. We wholeheartedly believe that it is positive, engaging, and respectful to all. And if it's not, we believe that we are strong enough to invite discussion about how we can reflect, grow, and improve going forward.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

The most instrumental practice that impacts our school's success is the culture of high character and high expectations that's been built over time. We have a saying in our school--"BE UNCOMMON!" The phrase is built upon the belief that we're called to pursue excellence in everything that we do. As educators, we have a sacred responsibility to transform lives and equip students with the skills they need to have success and find joy as future citizens. When we put quality adults with high expectations in positions of leadership, we're able to create programs and experiences that change lives. Hiring people of high character is essential to our success. We use the phrase "high character" to reflect a belief in the importance of collaborating with people of integrity, wisdom, humility, loyalty, and commitment to the goals that we establish. We aim to employ people that are joyful, trustworthy, compassionate, courageous, and patient. We've been successful in bringing these kinds of people into our school system and it's a formula that's allowed us to develop an extremely positive culture. The other prong of our success is high expectations. We've attempted to build teams that embrace the most challenging and difficult tasks. We've set goals that most would consider out of reach and we've stuck to a process that forces us to reflect on our progress towards these goals. We don't blame, shame, or make excuses for our shortcomings, we simply analyze our current reality and work to improve. When success is achieved, it's celebrated. People want to know that their lives and their work have value and purpose. Without knowing the meaning of what they're attempting to accomplish, the motivation to continue battling is greatly diminished. Before each year we start our work by revisiting our "compelling reasons why" and considering the legacies that we hope to establish. In other words, we ask our staff to reflect on the impact of their work and to recognize the greater purpose of transforming the lives of students. Our work as educators goes well beyond the X's and O's of education, but we also realize that without an elite education, our students will lack the tools they need to have success. A great education is comprehensive in nature and ultimately, it's all about creating great future citizens. It's about building better future employees and employers, husbands and wives, moms and dads, and grandparents that can also pay it forward and build up the next generation of leaders. Our school's success is tied directly to this vision and the consistent application of practices that put great people in positions of influence. We are truly blessed to have the opportunities that we do to serve the students and families of our district and we take that responsibility very seriously. We're a team of UNCOMMON people doing UNCOMMON things and it's an honor and a privilege to fight that fight each day at Springfield Elementary School. Thank you!