

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

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

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

Official School Name W. A. Bess Elementary School
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 4340 Beaty Road
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Gastonia State NC Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 28056-8335

County Gaston County

Telephone (704) 866-6075 Fax (704) 866-6102

Web site/URL https://www.gaston.k12.nc.us/bess E-mail lbclark@gaston.k12.nc.us

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. W. Jeffrey Booker E-mail superintendent@gaston.k12.nc.us
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Gaston County School District Tel. (704) 866-6100

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 K. Ramsey
(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):
- 31 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 11 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 12 High schools
 - 3 K-12 schools
- 57 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	50	43	93
1	48	44	92
2	44	42	86
3	41	48	89
4	44	57	101
5	51	66	117
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	278	300	578

*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):
- 0.3 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 3.9 % Asian
 - 11.3 % Black or African American
 - 12.3 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0.2 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 68 % White
 - 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: 11%

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	24
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2020 until the end of the 2020-2021 school year	44
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	68
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2020	595
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.11
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	11

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

Igbo, Chinese, Urdu, Jarai, Punjabi, Russian, Spanish

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 9 %

53 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 26 %

Total number students who qualify: 152

8. Students receiving special education services with an IEP or 504: 15 %
88 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>11</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>1</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>9</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>7</u> Developmental Delay | <u>21</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>1</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>28</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>1</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>2</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 1
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to the nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below. If your current staffing structure has shifted due to COVID-19 impacts and you are uncertain or unable to determine FTEs, provide an estimate.

	Number of Staff
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	29
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	13
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	7
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	5

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 21:1

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

Required Information	2020-2021	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017
Daily student attendance	94%	97%	95%	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. 2006

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

The mission of W.A. Bess Elementary School is to create a nurturing learning environment. The vision of W.A. Bess Elementary School affirms the belief that academic success is the foundation for lifelong learners who contribute to their community. Our school embodies Gaston County Schools' vision to inspire success and a lifetime of learning.

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

Gaston County Schools acknowledges the dignity and worth of all students and employees and strives to create a safe, orderly, caring, and inviting school environment to facilitate student learning and achievement. Discrimination is prohibited on the basis of race, sex, color, national origin, religion, disability, or age (over 40). The school district will provide equal access to the Boy Scouts and other designated youth groups as required by law.

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

W.A. Bess Elementary School serves students in grades kindergarten through fifth grade, reflecting the more than 225,000 residents of Gaston County, North Carolina. The school opened in 1982 to relieve overcrowding and originally served grades K-6 until the district's introduction of middle schools in 1997. Once a relatively rural area of Gastonia and Gaston County, this community school located just 15 miles from the Charlotte-Douglas International Airport has experienced tremendous growth, which resulted in classroom additions to the school in 1995 and 2003. Within the last three years, nearby residential developments within the school's attendance zone have continued to increase enrollment and diversity.

W.A. Bess' parents are instrumental to the school's success. Our school enjoys a proactive and strong Parent Teacher Organization, which consistently partners with local business sponsors that understand the value of investing in our students. W.A. Bess teachers are committed to their profession and work closely with parents for the well-being of children. In addition to Parent Teacher Conferences and Parent Nights, ongoing parent engagement uses the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) process to support personalized student learning plans through goal-setting and increased academic achievement.

Our rigorous curriculum includes research-based best teaching practices and strategies. Flex time dedicates a period of time each day when students receive personalized instruction based on what is needed to master the current standard being taught and extend the standard for students who have mastered the standard. Our Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) system encompasses a proactive management framework to ensure a safe and positive learning environment for all students. This school-wide approach to teaching and supporting positive behaviors while meeting the needs of all students inevitably focuses on building a safe and positive environment in which all students can learn and be successful at W.A. Bess Elementary School. Our school focuses on four main school-wide PAWS expectations: Practice Self-Control, Accept Responsibility, Work Safely, and Show Respect.

In addition to school enrichment opportunities through the art club, chess club, Math Masters, Battle of the Books, and robotics competitions, teachers implement the "Morning Meeting" concept to provide opportunities for students to practice social skills and model social and emotional skills such as attention, listening, expression, and cooperative interaction while providing valuable feedback to students.

W.A. Bess participates in weekly designated themes throughout the year. The school observes Red Ribbon Week, Kindness Week, and World Mental Health Day through a series of instructional lessons designed to promote student awareness. Students enthusiastically participate in National Reading Month through our "March Into Spring Reading" challenges to read 300-500 minutes. Community leaders such as the police chief, county librarian, YMCA director, high school teachers, physicians, and our superintendent of schools read to our students to instill a love of reading. Our physical education program expands beyond the traditional classroom walls and curriculum to offer such opportunities as DanceFit, Bess Olympics, Fun Day, Girls on the Run, and Let Me Run.

W.A. Bess conducted a ceremony on Wednesday, August 14, 2019, to officially announce that it had been chosen by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and the North Carolina Arts Council to participate in the A+ Schools of North Carolina initiative. W.A. Bess was the first school in Gaston County to receive the A+ School distinction from the state, and it is among only a dozen schools in the western part of North Carolina that have earned this elite honor of which there are only about 60 A+ Schools in the entire state.

The state's A+ School program has been called the nation's most successful whole-school transformation model using the arts. The school's A+ application process began during fall 2018 and required whole-school commitment to the transformation process including ongoing professional development. Research indicates that arts education is linked to positive academic and social outcomes, increased civic engagement, and higher academic achievement.

The program has a proven record of increasing student proficiency, closing the achievement gap, decreasing

disciplinary and student attendance issues, and increasing parental and community involvement. As a result of their involvement in the A+ School program, teachers say they are more effective in their work. Through collaborative efforts and infusing the arts curriculum across all grades, the culture of W.A. Bess has been transformed by engaged learning that is collaborative, standards-based, and art-filled. Students' talents, abilities, and creativity are nurtured and validated as they gain a greater understanding and appreciation for lifelong learning.

W.A. Bess Elementary School students are engaged in the arts, and our teachers strive to instill higher degrees of empathy, acceptance, and stronger critical thinking skills among students. For several years, W.A. Bess Elementary School has consistently earned the School of Distinction, School of Excellence, and Honor School of Excellence recognitions under the ABCs of Public Education accountability model. Teachers, students, parents, and stakeholders take great pride in being a member of the W.A. Bess community.

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 overarching philosophy embodies a blended approach where students are engaged in modern learning experiences. Students have increased choice in time, place, and pace of their learning. Working as a facilitator, the teacher guides and provides opportunities for students in both digital and face-to-face learning environments to accomplish outcomes and achieve goals.

The W.A. Bess instructional model components consist of a learner-centered environment, rigorous curriculum, balanced assessment, and responsive instruction. Learning space, instructional strategies, resources, and the mode of delivery are designed to meet the needs of all learners. Students collaborate through physical and virtual environments. Students respect learners of diverse backgrounds and experiences, value the contributions of their peers, and appreciate different perspectives and responses.

The English/language arts (ELA), mathematics, science, and social studies curricula align with the rigor of the North Carolina Standard Course of Study (NCSCOS). Pedagogical approaches include direct instruction, constructivist, and inquiry. Student voice and choice are incorporated into face-to-face and digital lessons, procedures, assessment design, and reflection. As a member of the A+ Schools of North Carolina initiative, W.A. Bess Elementary integrates arts education across the curriculum. Teachers infuse the North Carolina Arts Standards with the core subjects to create hands-on, practical, connected, and meaningful learning experiences for students.

A variety of assessment methods are used to provide timely, specific, and relevant feedback that is aligned to the standards. Students use the unpacked standard to explain what they are learning and why they need to learn it. Proficiency scales track student learning progression either by showing inconsistent understanding or achieving grade-level expectations by meeting the standard with consistent understanding. Personalized learning plans meet students where they are and how they best learn. The learning plans follow the school district's lesson template Learn It, Practice It, Evidence of Learning, and Extensions model. Students are able to make connections and apply their learning to the real world.

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

At W.A. Bess Elementary School, we teach the North Carolina ELA Standard Course of Study and ELA instruction incorporates the science of reading research, which is focused on systematic, direct whole-group instruction, small-group instruction, independent reading, and writing practice time. In addition to a 90-minute literacy block, a 30-minute daily ELA flex time includes teacher-led differentiated small groups and personalized learning plans that are provided to students in our learning management system, Schoology. All ELA instruction thoughtfully integrates social studies and science standards.

Numerous curriculum resources are used to support standards-based instruction including Learning A-Z, iReady ELA, reading/writing units of study, Discovery Education, and Sound Sensible/SPIRE. A variety of assessment methods are used to provide timely, specific, and relevant feedback aligned to the standards. State and district assessments include Dibels 8, iReady Diagnostic Reading, NC Early Learning Inventory, and end-of-grade tests (3-5).

The ELA priority standards for reading foundations and language include print concepts, handwriting, phonics, fluency, and language. Reading standards include literature and information, writing includes a focus on narrative, opinion, and informational standards. The arts standards are often infused with the ELA standards at W.A. Bess Elementary School. One A+ lesson example that integrates language arts and theater arts to build text comprehension and understanding includes students listening to an author's text and then creating movements or postures based on certain words in order to express their comprehension of the text.

Fifth grade students listen to the details provided by the writer to infer theme and meaning in order to create body movements that exemplify the author's purpose.

All grades (K-5) have Tier II supplemental and Tier III intensive Intervention Curriculum ELA programs that are evidence-based and proven to produce academic and behavior outcomes. These programs use Sounds Sensible/SPIRE, Dibels (mCLASS), and EasyCBM Letters or Sounds to provide additional layers of support that include additional time each week and smaller group sizes.

Our formative assessment strategies allow teachers to determine the pace at which students are learning in order to measure students' current knowledge of the topic, concept, or skill, uncover what students still need to learn, determine if learning opportunities are effective, and identify when instruction must be adapted. Both pre- and post-formative assessments are given to students to evaluate their academic progress from the beginning to the end of each unit of study. Proficiency scales are used to collect data points for tracking student performance with ELA standards. Proficiency scales are tiered to inform instruction and help students increase their skills and abilities with a particular standard. Once teachers determine students' progress toward standards mastery, teachers can use this data to identify necessary strategies, scaffolds, supports, and/or extensions to meet students' needs.

Assessments highlight the needs of each student, support goal-setting in the classroom curriculum, and allow for monitoring of student progress on an ongoing basis. The data informs and targets next steps in instruction and guides teachers to provide descriptive feedback to students as to where they are in the learning process. The assessments enable students to assume greater responsibility for monitoring and supporting their own learning.

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

Our math instruction incorporates the Standards for Mathematical Practice that are in alignment with the NCSCOS. Whole-group instruction includes math discourse, collaborative groups, explorations, inquiry, peer discussions, problem-solving, and strategy modeling. In addition to a 60-minute math block, a 30-minute math flex time includes teacher-led differentiated small groups and personalized learning plans that are provided to students in our learning management system, Schoology. Curriculum resources used to support standards-based instruction are Curriculum Associates Ready Math Classroom, i-Ready Mathematics, and Assessing Math Concepts (AMC). A variety of assessment methods are used to provide timely, specific, and relevant feedback aligned to the standards. District and state assessments to determine student proficiency levels include AMC, iReady Diagnostic Math, and third, fourth, and fifth-grade end-of-grade tests.

The mathematics priority standards focus on counting and cardinality, geometry, operations and algebraic thinking, number and operations in base ten, measurement and data, and number and operations - fractions. Whole-class direct instruction focuses on prior knowledge and makes connections to new concepts through discourse. Teachers and students cycle through the steps of "explore, try it, and think" in each unit of study to set up the students for success with solving problems on their own. Teachers facilitate math instruction and ask questions to probe student thinking while engaging students by having them take ownership of the problem through reading the problem and building understanding around what they are trying to do. The strategy of "turn and talk" is used in math lessons to help build the capacity of all students and make sense of the math problem. Independent time is then given to process the information, formulate ideas, and productively struggle with the math concept. Taking risks is celebrated as students explore various solving strategies to determine which method or approach represents their specific learning style the best. As an A+ School, W.A. Bess Elementary teachers integrate arts standards with the curriculum to catapult student mastery of math. For example, in a first-grade classroom, observers will see students learning to count along with a musical rhythm. A teacher will play a woodblock to demonstrate the idea of hammering on an instrument. The teacher will ask the students to count various sequences of hammers they hear to assess their understanding of the mathematical skill.

Differentiated math small-group instruction is implemented to support each core math lesson. Assessment data from i-Ready diagnostics, pre- and post assessments, and anecdotal notes are used to form small

groups. Math manipulatives are often used during instruction to reinforce mathematical concepts. Reinforcement or extension activities are assigned to students based on the results of formative and summative assessments as well as the progress noted on each math standards proficiency scale. Progress monitoring continues and assessments are administered based on students' needs during small-group instruction.

Tier II Supplemental and Tier III Intensive support for mathematics include intensive intervention curriculum programs such as AMC, i-Ready tools for instruction, Missing Number Probes, Quantity Discrimination Probes, and Easy CBM. These diagnostic and progress monitoring tools chart the progression of math skills to determine when intensive instruction is needed and when a supplemental level tier plan is appropriate for each student.

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

Science instruction at W.A. Bess Elementary School embodies the North Carolina Science Essential Standards. These standards are organized into three main strands – earth science, life science, and physical science – and outline what students must be able to know, understand, and do. Instruction is inquiry-based in order to engage students in their personal learning process through hands-on activities and experiments. Units of study use the “E” learning cycle to lead students through the five phases of engagement, exploration, explanation, elaboration, and evaluation in order to learn through discovery.

W.A. Bess teachers generate curiosity by posing a topic such as "Where does soil come from?" and then students collaborate to explore potential conclusions supported by evidence. In another lesson, students are given various types of rocks to observe and sort based on similar properties. The teacher discusses the concept of weathering, and students evaluate their original response to the question based on the new knowledge obtained. Ongoing assessments of students' pre- and post-tests, observations, discourse, and products allow teachers to chart mastery of the science standard using proficiency scales.

Science resources used by W.A. Bess Elementary teachers are standards-based and include Discovery Experience and Discovery Education Techbook. The content is tied closely to reading and writing. Learning A-Z is another valuable resource as it provides content-specific text to support literacy integration in the science block. Students are assigned reading passages that are differentiated and aligned with their personalized reading level and are incorporated into instruction to enforce the standards taught. W.A. Bess Elementary teachers incorporate A+ experiential learning activities by combining the science and arts standards, which stimulate student curiosity to want to learn. In a second-grade classroom, the DNA strand comes alive when students create models using marshmallows and Twizzlers. Students crave to learn more about genetics and how DNA strands are responsible for unique individuals.

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

The North Carolina Social Studies Essential Standards center around the strands of history, geography, economics, civics and government, and behavioral science. W.A. Bess Elementary School incorporates the C3 (college, career, and civic life) inquiry framework to teach these standards and provide social studies instruction for students. Our students recognize that social studies are an essential component of the daily curriculum as they develop self-awareness, study different cultures around the world, develop an appreciation of our diverse world, and consider different perspectives. Students also learn to understand the influence history has on their lives as they identify the contributions of historical figures and examine why events and people are celebrated and remembered. Teachers implement the use of questions to spark curiosity, facilitate instruction, and deepen investigations into real-world scenarios to help students become active and engaged citizens.

Content reading, shared reading, and writing is implemented throughout social studies units to better understand the concepts. Differentiated reading resources are provided based on individual reading levels. Teachers use the Learning A-Z curriculum resource to implement content-specific text for supporting literacy integration. An inquiry strand that focuses on improving critical thinking skills is first incorporated into the units. For example, one question posed in an inquiry strand asks "What is special about the culture

of North Carolina?" Students choose a topic to research about our state's culture. As an A+ School, W.A. Bess teachers integrate the arts through standards related to music, art, and dance to help students answer the question. The incorporation of arts standards into the social studies curriculum provides a more enriched curriculum by exposing students to research-proven methodologies to achieve grade-level proficiency. W.A. Bess teachers use the Discovery Experience curriculum resource to support social studies standards-based instruction through teaching and assessment tools. Supplemental resources and extension activities are assigned to assess students based on pre- and post-test results and how mastery is defined on the social studies standard in the proficiency scales.

1f. For secondary schools:

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

The prekindergarten program at W.A. Bess Elementary is administered separately by the Gaston County Schools Pre-Kindergarten Department. The school is not responsible for the program, therefore, information regarding the core curriculum, instruction, and assessment is not included per application instructions.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

W.A. Bess Elementary School's curriculum areas offer students robust choices and opportunities to enhance their essential skills and knowledge.

Our school is proudly associated with the A+ Schools of North Carolina, a program of the North Carolina Arts Council that is an agency of the N.C. Department of Natural and Cultural Resources. The program is a whole-school transformation model that views the arts as fundamental to teaching and learning. As a result of collaborative efforts and infusing the arts curriculum across all grades, the creative culture of W.A. Bess has been transformed through collaboration and multi-discipline integration. Students' talents, abilities, and creativity are nurtured and validated as the arts are continuously woven into daily instruction.

Students attend physical education classes each week, learn the importance of maintaining a health-enhancing level of physical fitness, and learn how to work together as a team while respecting others and achieving a common goal. As an A+ school, classroom teachers incorporate movement through integrated lessons that include music and dance. For example, a fourth-grade A+ integrated lesson named "Math and Movement" teaches the math and music standards by using a multiplication game in which students move in pairs and discover musical patterns.

LEGO Education aligns with the North Carolina Standard Course of Study and is promoted through Innovation Stations during a rotation of our school's art, music, physical education, and library classes attended by all students once each week. District curriculum specialist staff have visited W.A. Bess to observe how the school successfully integrates LEGO education and plan to replicate our model and develop a summer camp option this year for elementary students throughout the district.

The W.A. Bess robotics team consists of fourth and fifth grade students who meet after school twice each week to refine their teamwork while practicing math, science, computer programming, and critical thinking skills. The team works together to design and build a robot to solve missions. Students learn to write computer programs to make their robot complete required missions. The team also conducts research on a topic and presents their findings to a panel of judges at the annual RoboGASTON district level competition during which W.A. Bess has proudly claimed trophies.

We emphasize social-emotional learning by using Responsive Classroom's "Morning Meeting" concept to build a strong sense of community among students and provide opportunities to practice social skills through greeting, listening, expression, and cooperative interaction while providing valuable feedback to students. We also use The Compassion Project course that aligns with the CASEL SEL framework to use storytelling,

reflection, and interaction to build a strong foundation for compassion.

Through our 1:1 Chromebook initiative, our school has transitioned to a new Schoology Learning Management System (LMS) which supports students' personalized learning pathways. Students enjoy digital citizenship lessons facilitated by our school media specialist and school counselor during which each grade level participates in four lessons during the first half of the school year. Students learn the importance of accepting responsibility for themselves, their community, and the world by creating a positive digital footprint. Students learn about online safety and the importance of protecting themselves and their identity while keeping interactions fun when participating in digital media.

3. Academic Supports

3a. Students performing below grade level:

W.A. Bess Elementary School uses data to drive instruction and school improvement. Formative and summative assessments are used to identify students who are below grade level and to measure deficiencies in learning in order to create personalized learning opportunities, set growth goals, and continuously assess academic proficiency and growth. The subgroups in the student population that are currently performing below grade level are the English Second Language students, Exceptional Children students, African American students, and economically disadvantaged students.

Students are assigned an iReady diagnostic upon enrollment and twice more during the school year to monitor academic progress in reading and math. Diagnostic data identify learning gaps and place each student on an individualized learning plan. Tier (performance level) identification is imperative as it identifies the starting point of instruction and specific interventions each student requires in order to promote progress in mastering core standards. Assessing Math Concepts (AMC) measures student understanding of math concepts, and mClass assessments measure reading skills. Pre- and post tests are administered in units of study to monitor progress, and proficiency scales provide descriptions of what students are expected to know and be able to do to achieve standards mastery. Teachers continuously monitor student progress and make adjustments in student pathways to ensure students are challenged and engaged to improve their proficiency toward and beyond grade level expectations.

The Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) involves all staff analyzing each student's data received from formative and summative assessments to determine student tier placement and required interventions. Grade level teachers analyze individual student performance to make recommendations if Tier 1 (Core) differentiated instruction or if Tier 2 (Supplemental) supports are required to maintain proficiency. Student data is presented to the MTSS team to determine if a student needs intensive instructional support (Tier 3), individualized instruction, and/or small group instruction.

3b. Students performing above grade level:

Academically and/or Intellectually Gifted (AIG) students have an exceptional academic or intellectual potential that must be recognized, challenged, and nurtured through differentiated services beyond those ordinarily provided by the regular education program. AIG students are diverse learners provided with a high level of intellectual stimulation through meaningful, rigorous, and technologically advanced instruction and opportunities. For example, gamification is encouraged through a STEAM lesson that demonstrates motion and physics using balloons as racing reindeer. Instruction is collaborative with the general education teacher and addresses the North Carolina Standard Course of Study (NCSCOS) curriculum through differentiated services that complement each student's needs.

Two subgroups of students at W.A. Bess Elementary School, the AIG subgroup and the Asian American subgroup, are categorized as performing above grade level. These students are challenged to use advanced deductive thinking and logic reasoning skills, and students participate in STEM activities to solve problems. For example, projects include the use of advanced technology like 3D printing using Tinkercad software and Green Screen products using iPads. Coding in computer science is also introduced and explored. At W.A. Bess, enrichment opportunities are provided to students who have mastered the standards. iReady diagnostic

results provide students with a personalized lesson path of engaging instruction and practice. District pacing guides outline extension activities teachers can use to address the personalized learning plans for students performing above grade level.

Students who master standards and perform above grade level serve as peer tutors to help students who are struggling in the classroom. During flex time, W.A. Bess students also work on iReady lessons to reach individualized goals. These lessons are personalized and meet the needs of all learners. Teachers conduct data chats with each student to promote accountability for individual academic growth and encourage the lifelong pursuit of academic excellence.

3c. Special education:

Students who qualify for the school district's Exceptional Children (EC) program due to disabilities are placed on an individualized and personalized learning pathway to ensure they develop educationally, socially, emotionally, and vocationally in the least restrictive environment. Direct instruction is used in small groups and 1:1 settings. Progress is continuously monitored to gather data and track proficiency levels. iReady personalized lessons are assigned to reinforce standards being taught in the regular education classroom. Lessons are targeted to specific skills that need to be practiced based upon individual student needs. The Individualized Education Plan (IEP) goals are integrated throughout instruction for students with special needs. Parents are involved with the development of written goals in their student's IEP. Authentic assessments such as performance tasks are tailored for each student as a more valid representation of individual progress.

The MTSS process at W.A. Bess ensures all students are provided with the instruction needed to make progress toward standards mastery. All students receive targeted academic support including students in our Exceptional Children (EC) program. This school year, W.A. Bess implemented flex time, which is dedicated time in the master schedule for each student to work in the personalized learning pathways in math and reading. As part of flex time, teachers provide differentiated instructional interventions in small groups, addressing the specific needs of students who require Tier 2 or Tier 3 instruction and qualify for EC services. During small-group instruction, teachers have time to observe and document student progress. Tier 2 students are asked to work at least 30 minutes each week in reading and math with the goal of achieving 70 percent proficiency in at least one completed lesson in both subject areas. Tier 3 students are encouraged to pass at least two to three lessons per week in each subject area while also working at least 30 minutes.

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

Our English as a Second Language (ESL) program supports English Learners (ELs) in order for students to attain English proficiency while simultaneously achieving academic success.

The first step in identifying W.A. Bess English Learners (ELs) is the completion of the Home Language Survey (HLS). The HLS is completed by every student upon initial enrollment. If a language other than English is listed on the HLS, then the ESL teacher/department assists with making a determination as to the student's primary language. The HLS must be placed in the student's cumulative folder. The student's World-Class Instructional Design Assessment (WIDA) determines if EL students are eligible to receive services.

English Learners receive ESL content-based services with small-group instruction. ESL instruction is based on the student's language proficiency and grade level and is designed to develop all four language domains: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. North Carolina is part of the WIDA Consortium, and the W.A. Bess ESL teacher plans lessons based on the North Carolina English Language Development (ELD) Standards as well as the NCSCOS. The MTSS process at W.A. Bess is used to appropriately analyze student proficiency data and determine if Tier 2 supplemental instruction or Tier 3 intensive level supports are needed.

In order to communicate information to limited English proficient parents in a language they can understand about any program, service, or activity, W.A. Bess requests the assistance of our district interpreters and

translators. Our teachers also use such tools as Google Translate, Class Dojo, and Remind to provide assistance when students and parents have questions regarding assignments. As the W.A. Bess EL student population continues to grow, we take particular pride in strengthening our relationship with district support staff to help ensure our students and parents receive the translation services and resources they need in a timely manner.

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

The social worker at W.A. Bess Elementary School is proactive in identifying and assessing students and their families for services and needs related to the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. Should the student be absent, then immediate follow-up occurs in order to discover if the family has any special needs for which W.A. Bess or the school district can provide assistance. The school social worker also alleviates barriers to school attendance by delivering assignments, including a Chromebook and wireless hotspot, for students to use if unable to be present at school. The school social worker collaborates with the school counselor and the Department of Social Services to ensure the basic needs of these children are being met and that appropriate community resource referrals are made to assist with housing. Referrals are made for Site-Based Therapy for students who experience emotional or behavioral struggles due to homelessness. W.A. Bess has a donated clothing closet and school supplies readily available to assist students and families in need. These families are enrolled in the BackPack Weekend Food program to ensure homeless students do not go hungry over the weekend. Transportation to and from W.A. Bess is never an issue as special accommodations are made to ensure that no matter where the students sleep overnight, they can get to school on time in the morning. W.A. Bess school professionals strive to achieve a stable educational environment for our homeless students while life outside of school may be uncertain.

The W.A. Bess community strives to ensure that all students feel valued and respected. The Student Support Services (SSS) team leads social and emotional learning (SEL) and works with teachers to implement the SEL curriculum and bring awareness to students and adults regarding how their actions and behaviors affect others. The SEL curriculum promotes empathy while appreciating diversity, teaches skills to develop positive relationships, and models how to create and achieve personal goals.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

The Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) is the driving force of W.A. Bess Elementary School's positive environment that supports students' academic, social, and emotional growth. The process began with the principal, who participated in district training and later provided training for W.A. Bess teacher-leaders who serve on functional committees that drive the MTSS. These committees include Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), School Improvement Team (SIT), Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), and Student Support Services (SSS). This model of distributed leadership promotes shared accountability for student engagement.

The critical focus of the PBIS committee is creating and maintaining a positive school climate and culture. This team establishes schoolwide expectations and an acknowledgment system with positive behavioral feedback while also analyzing discipline data to identify trends and make recommendations for behavior plans. The SIT analyzes data to create schoolwide student growth goals and establishes assessment and monitoring methods to determine if goals are being met. Grade level teachers meet within their PLCs to analyze assessment, attendance, and behavior data to determine the instructional and behavioral needs of each student. The SSS team monitors our social and emotional learning initiative, analyzes attendance and behavior data, and makes recommendations for behavioral interventions.

The successful implementation of W.A. Bess's MTSS framework proved to be crucial toward the success of all students when our school district transitioned in March 2020 to full remote learning and later implemented a blended learning ecosystem during the 2020-2021 school year due to the pandemic. Blended learning delivered engaging and personalized learning experiences for students both in school and while at home. Schoology was adopted as the method to organize instructional content online and provide personalized lessons for students.

Our MTSS committees maintained conversations during this time to monitor all student attendance, academic engagement, and social and emotional learning with an emphasis on how to best provide academic support for students and how to modify and provide required accommodations (IEPs, 504s) for students. Other critical successes included how we ensured all students had access to the online materials and devices necessary for remote and blended learning to be effective during this time. Our school district returned to traditional face-to-face instruction this school year, 2021-2022. The school principal continues to ask all staff to reflect and recall that through our continued collaboration and implementation of the MTSS framework while our school was engaged in remote and blended learning, our students continued to grow academically and that this successful framework will become even more effective as we continue using this whole school improvement model.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

W.A. Bess Elementary School maintains open communication with parents and our community to support student success and school improvement. School leadership regularly collaborates with the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) to discuss school needs. For example, the PTO has contributed to an A+ supply closet with materials that specifically support our school's A+ initiative and give teachers access to instructional resources to integrate the arts into the curriculum. Conversations lead to an understanding of instructional strategies and assessments implemented by teachers that are research-based and proven to increase student growth and mastery.

The PTO generously provides \$150 to each teacher every year to purchase classroom supplies that support instruction. Partnerships with local churches provide supplies for students who are in need of not only instructional materials, such as book bags and earphones, but also coats, shoes, and clothing. W.A. Bess also has a partnership with the local Backpack Weekend Food Program to provide a healthy bag of non-perishable food for the weekend to students who are in need, thereby enabling students to return to school on Monday better prepared to learn because they were not hungry during the weekend.

In celebration of student success, a local pizza eatery provides a free pizza to all students who meet their spring reading goal to read 500 minutes during the month of March. Parents are invited to participate in Parent Nights and conferences throughout the school year that are dedicated to explaining strategies and assessments that are used to promote and track student proficiency. Teachers are able to have more in-depth conversations with parents concerning their student's progress and how parents can assist their children at home.

It is important to celebrate our successes with parents and our community. We constantly strive to express appreciation for our stakeholders' continued support as W.A. Bess remains focused on school improvement. We send thank you notes and acknowledge appreciation of parental and community support through social media posts, videos, morning announcements to students and staff, Parentlink weekly phone and e-mail messages, and our school website.

W.A. Bess has tremendous pride in the fact that our students cheerfully contribute to the betterment of their community through such good deeds and acts of kindness as a canned food drive for the Salvation Army and Hats for Hearts, which raises funds for Holy Angels, a specialized care facility for children and adults in our community, as well as a local animal shelter. Through these actions, students demonstrate empathy, and the W.A. Bess vision is realized through students who "contribute to their community."

3. Creating Professional Culture:

The manner in which professional development is provided at W.A. Bess Elementary School makes teachers feel valued and supported. Our mantra at W.A. Bess is to "Celebrate Success!" Teacher successes are highlighted in weekly faculty bulletins, during staff and committee meetings, and through our school social media platforms. The school principal recognizes that professional development needs differ among staff, including the types of training and manner in which training is incorporated into opportunities throughout the school year to support continuous improvement and growth. Accordingly, one-to-one coaching is provided by administrators to teachers to support instructional strategies and converse with teachers to address individual professional needs and concerns. Additional one-to-one coaching is provided to beginning teachers by administrators and mentor teachers.

Observations and walk-throughs provide feedback to teachers to improve research-based instructional and assessment strategies. Roadmaps are created by the administration to assist teachers with pacing toward successfully completing professional development opportunities. Teachers are provided opportunities to share with colleagues what was learned during professional development and how they successfully implemented concepts in the classroom. The importance of time is recognized to allow for teachers to be reflective practitioners who observe one another, share best strategies, and identify areas of opportunity for their own professional growth. School leadership actively participates in professional development along with all school staff and engages in PLC meetings to encourage teachers and provide feedback.

W.A. Bess staff has experienced tremendous professional growth during the pandemic and worked diligently to provide our students with modern blended learning environments. The school principal has worked side-by-side with teachers and encouraged them throughout the transition from a traditional brick-and-mortar environment toward digital blended and remote learning. W.A. Bess teachers have successfully implemented lessons learned during Modern Teacher training to embrace the digital ecosystem and deliver engaging and personalized learning experiences for students both in school and while at home. Schoology has served as an additional comprehensive platform for our teachers. Professional growth in Schoology is continuously encouraged by using checklists for essential elements for engaged student learning, reviewing each teacher's website, and providing personalized feedback to support teachers' Digital Learning Environment (DLE) progression. The school principal models the use of Schoology as a tool to provide resources and distribute communications to teachers.

Local businesses support professional development at W.A. Bess after school, during teacher workdays, and during summer months through their generous contributions of supplies, meals, snacks, and door prizes to teachers as a means of recognizing their appreciation of continuing education efforts.

4. School Leadership:

W.A. Bess embodies a student-first, student-centered philosophy that requires continuous change management and improvement throughout the school year. The school principal cultivates a shared leadership mindset where each school staff member is responsible for student achievement. From the smile of a friendly custodian to the helpful hand of a cafeteria worker while serving a meal, a student's comprehensive school experience requires an understanding of shared responsibility and leadership among all staff. Teachers must feel empowered to have an active voice toward continuous school improvement. The school principal and other school leaders not only listen to ideas and suggestions, but also work to support and implement those concepts as catalysts of change that contribute to student well-being and academic success. For example, vertical and cross-curricular planning reminds both administrators and teachers to circle back to data-driven decision making while maintaining focus on the school's vision and mission.

School leadership recognizes that all roles necessarily shift throughout the day to serve students' needs at that exact moment in time. Whether lending an attentive ear as a counselor and providing encouragement and reassurance, nursing an injury while wiping away tears and providing words of comfort, or facilitating excellent moments of learning during which obvious student epiphanies light up a classroom, the team of educators at W.A. Bess Elementary School understands the impact they have daily toward not only student achievement but more importantly the foundation of each student's successful future.

The school principal observes, listens, and learns. From greeting students with smiles and hugs in the morning to ensuring they safely board our buses and arrive home in the afternoons, the days of the administrator at W.A. Bess Elementary School are well spent directly supporting students in a nurturing, safe environment to learn, inspire success, and instill an appreciation for lifelong learning. Those same days are also filled with supporting faculty and staff, addressing parents' questions and concerns, implementing local, state, and federal policies and procedures, and tending to a myriad of responsibilities. School administration is active in all committees working side-by-side with staff to provide coaching and support, promote collaboration and communication between teams, and maintain focus on promoting total school-wide improvement by focusing on the needs of each student at W.A. Bess Elementary School.

W.A. Bess Elementary School's improvement goals are at the heart and forefront of all decisions. Through participation in the MTSS supporting committees, teachers are empowered with an active voice and understand their responsibility to ensure that policies, programs, relationships, and resources focus on student achievement that is fostered by a culture of information sharing.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

W.A. Bess Elementary School has always strived to ensure all students feel valued and respected. With the implementation of our Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) to initiate actions for total school improvement, the processes to address the diverse needs of our student and family populations have become more intentional due to the formation of our Student Support Services (SSS) team and our Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) committee. The SSS team has been charged with leading social and emotional learning (SEL) at our school by working with teachers to implement the SEL curriculum taught to students while also providing strategies for the faculty and staff to address individual student needs. SEL brings awareness to students and adults regarding how their actions and behaviors affect others, promotes empathy while appreciating diversity, teaches skills to develop positive relationships, and models how to create and achieve personal goals.

W.A. Bess Elementary School dedicates daily time for SEL through the implementation of Morning Meeting. Morning Meeting creates an inclusive classroom environment and builds and enhances relationships among students and between teachers and students. Teachers actively model respectful interactions and desired behaviors and then encourage students to share with their classmates and practice social skills. Subjects discussed are relevant to the students, include current events, and affirm students' diverse backgrounds and cultures. A trustful environment is created to provide students a safe place to practice skills without fear of ridicule. Teachers and staff reinforce the social skills practiced during Morning Meeting throughout the school day to continue to promote equity among students.

The PBIS committee helps keep our stakeholders focused on maintaining our schoolwide approach to recognizing positive behavior. Students earn PAWS bucks when practicing self-control, accepting responsibility, working safely, and showing respect. Discussions are held with students that these PAWS behaviors should be practiced not only at school, but also at home and in the community. Families are educated about our school's PBIS initiative and are encouraged to be a partner in its implementation by supporting positive behaviors at home. Classroom and schoolwide procedures are practiced, retaught, and reinforced throughout the school year. These PBIS supportive practices are aligned with the skills modeled and taught through our SEL curriculum. Members of the PBIS committee track discipline data and recommend interventions that need to be implemented to ensure equity, cultural awareness, and respect at W.A. Bess Elementary School.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Data-driven assessments that are used to continuously refine instructional strategies throughout the academic year have proven to be the most instrumental factor in the successful educational model at W.A. Bess Elementary School. Numerous formative and summative assessment instruments are used to develop personalized strategies and increase each student's academic performance. Information regarding these assessments is shared with parent stakeholders throughout the year in an effort to ensure students' families are well informed to support these strategies at home.

Beginning, middle, and end-of-year assessments, such as the i-Ready diagnostic, track student growth during these intervals and allow opportunities for the refinement of instructional strategies and personalized instruction. During the middle of the school year, data is provided to teachers that highlight student growth from beginning to middle of the year with updated end-of-year growth targets. Conversations during Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings focus on data to maintain typical growth and achieve stretch growth. Teachers conduct data chats with students throughout the year, promoting student ownership of learning. Students learn how to track their data and set goals in order to meet the end-of-year typical and stretch growth. Students become more engaged in their own learning path as they chart their success based on data collected from assessments.

Pre-assessments measure students' knowledge of standards at the beginning of each unit. This snapshot in time becomes a critical data-driven comparison point to each post-assessment, which measures if grade-level knowledge of the standards was obtained during the unit of study. Learning gaps are reflected by the proficiency scales so that personalized instruction may be delivered throughout the unit of study in order to achieve standards mastery at the conclusion of the unit.

As the school's instructional leader, the principal strives to keep instruction focused on data obtained from formative and summative assessments and endeavors to help overcome teachers' fear of data and eradicate students' fear of analyzing their own data in order to chart their learning pathway to success. Weekly and monthly iReady challenges are held among classes in each grade level to keep faculty and students focused on meeting proficiency goals. Parents are encouraged to ask their children to share their progress in meeting weekly goals. School progress is shared during morning announcements and weekly results are distributed to teachers and district leadership. At W.A. Bess, data-driven assessments have become an integral part of the culture that sustains growth and sets expectations for success.