

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

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

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

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

School Mailing Address 49 Brunswick Avenue  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Metuchen State NJ Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 08840-2601

County Middlesex

Telephone (732) 321-8770 Fax (732) 452-0571

Web site/URL https://www.metuchenschools.org/o/ems E-mail sazevedo@metboe.k12.nj.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.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Principal's Signature) Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Superintendent\* Dr. Vincent Caputo E-mail vcaputo@metboe.k12.nj.us  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Metuchen School District Tel. (732) 321-8700

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.

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

Name of School Board President/Chairperson Mr. Brian Glassberg  
(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.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature) Date \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

## **PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION**

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

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

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

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

## PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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

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

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 2 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 1 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 4 TOTAL

**SCHOOL** (To be completed by all schools. **Only include demographic data for the nominated school, not for the district.**)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located. If unsure, refer to NCES database for correct category: <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/> (Find your school and check “Locale”)

- Urban (city or town)
- Suburban
- Rural

3. Number of students in the school as of October 1, 2021 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent at the school. Include all students enrolled, in-person, participating in a hybrid model, or online only. If online schooling or other COVID-19 school issues make this difficult to obtain, provide the most accurate and up-to-date information available:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	0	0	0
1	0	0	0
2	0	0	0
3	0	0	0
4	0	0	0
5	87	76	163
6	103	90	193
7	101	82	183
8	92	81	173
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	383	329	712

\*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):
- 1 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 25 % Asian
  - 5 % Black or African American
  - 13 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 47 % White
  - 9 % 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: 3%

If the mobility rate is above 15%, please explain:

This rate should be calculated using the grid below. The answer to (6) is the mobility rate.

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2020 until the end of the 2020-2021 school year	8
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2020 until the end of the 2020-2021 school year	12
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	20
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2020	745
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.03
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	3

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

Bengali, Bulgarian, Chinese, Danish, English, Estonian, French, Fulah, Gujarati, Hebrew, Hindi, Hungarian, Indonesian, Japanese, Kannada, Korean, Marathi, Nepali, Persian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Aromanian, Russian, Sinhala, Slovak, Spanish, Tamil, Telugu, Tajik, Tagalog, Turkish, Ukrainian, Urdu, Vietnamese

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 4 %

Total number students who qualify: 28

8. Students receiving special education services with an IEP or 504: 16 %  
115 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>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>29</u> Other Health Impaired                |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>57</u> Specific Learning Disability         |
| <u>5</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>11</u> Speech or Language Impairment        |
| <u>0</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: 2
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to the nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below. If your current staffing structure has shifted due to COVID-19 impacts and you are uncertain or unable to determine FTEs, provide an estimate.

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	53
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	15
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	13
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	10

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 11:1

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

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

<b>Post-Secondary Status</b>	
Graduating class size	0
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	0%
Enrolled in a community college	0%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	0%
Joined the military or other public service	0%
Other	0%

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.

Yes  No

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award.

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

Edgar Middle School offers its students a challenging and enriching educational experience. We strive to support the students' academic, emotional and social growth and development. As we focus on the whole child, we empower students to strive for excellence in all aspects of their lives.

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

<https://www.straussesmay.com/seportal/Public/DistrictPolicy.aspx?policyid=5750&id=6a8a1efd7df0417c8d1421fbb1dab640>

17. **For public schools only**, if the school is a magnet, charter, or choice school, explain how students are chosen to attend.

## **PART III – SCHOOL OVERVIEW**

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Edgar Middle School (EMS) is located in the increasingly diverse suburban community of Metuchen, New Jersey, often referred to as the Brainy Boro. EMS has a strong partnership with parents and guardians. The Parent-Teacher Organization meets regularly and collaboratively, allowing many opportunities for family involvement. A school newsletter, The Bulldog Briefs, is emailed weekly to keep all families in the loop with regards to events, activities, and other school information. EMS continues to foster new opportunities for involvement with the community, with the goal of creating a culture of helping others. Community favorites have included “Adopt A Family” to buy and wrap holiday gifts for Edgar families in need, the “Souper Bowl” for the local food pantry, and organized community/school drives requesting socks, toiletries, and other items to be donated to a local homeless shelter. Similarly, Edgar sports teams collect funds for the Fuce Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting local families impacted by recent tragedies.

EMS develops the middle school student through diverse programming, by fostering a positive and safe environment and embedding evidence-based social emotional learning (SEL) and metacognition across academic content areas as well as social and emotional contexts. Recognizing that middle school is a time for great emotional and intellectual growth, EMS takes pride in what it has to offer its students. As soon as one enters the building, the inclusive vibe is evident; whether it’s the signage promoting positive self-image posted throughout the school, the periodic table celebrating Black leaders, or displays in hallways bringing awareness of autism through special programming. As part of the culture, and district mission, at EMS, teachers are encouraged to get to know and teach the whole child. One of the ways to achieve this is through an Advisory program. The Advisory program was instituted years ago, and we continue to expand upon its implementation. Additionally, Ian Hockley’s Wingman program, centers on 7th and 8th grade students serving as role-models of social emotional growth for our younger students by providing ‘building empathy’ lessons. Finally, we have started to employ empathy maps so that our teachers can foster relationships with our students, by sharing/learning about what makes them ‘tick’ as individuals. Each student has a file in the staff’s shared drive, where staff members can add and share information, with a goal of connecting with our students. By making use of these collaborative empathy maps, teachers have been able to build relationships with their students, consistently promoting the message that we care about our students as individuals.

Academically, EMS provides excellent and equitable opportunities for learning. Using the STAT (Students Taking Action Together) pedagogy, the Social Studies and English language arts (ELA) departments increase awareness of diverse viewpoints and foster an ability to communicate about diverse topics. Additionally, Response to Intervention (RTI) Math and ELA programs provide targeted academic support. We believe in continual growth and excellence in the programs we offer. Learning continues with the STREAM summer program which engages the students through interdisciplinary activities. STREAM (science, technology, reading, engineering, arts, and math) is an inclusive program that combines science, technology, reading, engineering, arts, and math allowing students to work on project-based learning. In the summer STREAM program of 2021, for example, the mayor of our town worked with the students to brainstorm solutions to some local issues. Students are encouraged to use a self-questioning model to work through and solve problems. The intention and goal is that making use of this model will help students with their academics as well as when addressing their real-life concerns.

When students returned to school in 2020-21, they attended on a hybrid (every other week) schedule. A new Student Support Team was created and this team considered, on a case-by-case basis, whether students could return to the building on a full-time in-person schedule, based on individual needs. In addition, for students who remained completely virtual, a teacher was hired to provide specific support for those who struggled with remote learning. She worked with them individually and virtually to address their needs. In the summer of 2021, the school provided support via transition ‘groups’ led by mental health clinicians. At the start of the 2022-23 school year the school counselors met with the entire student body, via counseling groups, to monitor their transition back to ‘normal.’ In addition, students who are required to quarantine are permitted to observe class virtually via Google Meet. These students have been provided with weekly virtual tutoring sessions for each subject. This will be the first year since COVID that the 5th grade will participate



in an SEL camp. Students will hone problem-solving strategies and skills, working together for a common goal and with a focus on leadership foundations.

## **PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

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### **1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.**

#### **1a. Overall approach, which may include overarching philosophy or approaches common across subject areas:**

The overarching philosophy of the district is that all students can learn how to be adaptive, autonomous critical thinkers and problem solvers in every academic content area, as well as across social and emotional contexts. Without sufficient time to teach social and emotional learning (SEL), critical thinking and problem-solving skills separately, Metuchen’s curricular approach “threads” the critical thinking and problem-solving skills found throughout the New Jersey Student Learning Standards (NJSLs) as well as evidence based SEL curricula. Metuchen then built one metacognitive curricular framework for all academic content areas and grades that empowers students to be more aware of their thinking and problem-solving skills and to better manage, apply and transfer these skills inside and outside their classrooms.

Metuchen’s metacognitive curriculum framework was built upon the evidence based SEL curriculum developed by Dr. Maurice Elias, Rutgers University Psychology Professor, called Social Decision-Making/Social Problem Solving (SDM/SPS). SDM/SPS recommends that teachers provide a problem-solving strategy that students can internalize and transfer to all kinds of problems. This led to the establishment of the Metuchen Problem Solving Process, a metacognitive strategy that all teachers teach in their NJSLs-aligned curriculum. By establishing this one process for all problem solving, all teachers are empowered to embed evidence-based SEL curriculum into their NJSLs-aligned curriculum and instruction without the need for additional time.

The instruction and assessment approach for this metacognitive curriculum framework was also derived from SDM/SPS which recommends that teachers first ask students open-ended questions. Since the teacher cannot be at every student’s side, Metuchen structured a limited number of open-ended “SELf-questions” for each step of the Metuchen Problem Solving Process. Questions such as “What is the problem? What do I know? How can I solve this problem?” scaffold students as they guide their own thinking through complex, multi-step problem solving.

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

The English/Language Arts Curriculum at Edgar Middle School is organized around several universal themes, including “Relationships and Interdependence” and “Taking a Stand” that students explore as they learn and apply New Jersey Student Learning Standards in reading, writing, speaking, and listening, and language. As students practice literacy skills, they also seek to answer essential questions that address both content (How do we shape our identity? How do stereotypes affect our perception?) and process (How can I make and support inferences while reading? How do writers develop voice?).

Curricular content includes a diverse collection of anchor texts such as *Shooting Kabul*, *The Watsons go to Birmingham*, *The Misfits*, *Refugee*, and *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Each core text is paired with multi-genre text sets that include informational readings, biographies, poetry, interviews, and/or short fiction works. Students are continually synthesizing information, drawing conclusions, and considering diverse perspectives through their reading and writing. Students also learn and practice vocabulary in the context of their reading.

Within the classroom teachers facilitate inquiry-based investigations and problem-based learning tasks utilizing the Metuchen Problem Solving Process as a universal research process, student-led discussions, and social awareness lessons and reflections. These research-based practices allow students to engage with each other as they learn, and for students to investigate and navigate real world topics, such as school improvement, immigration, and social change. The New Jersey SEL competencies of Social Awareness and Responsible Decision-Making are embedded into curriculum and instruction, as well as the sub-competency of demonstrating the need for mutual respect for differing viewpoints. Additional day to day assessments

include journal entries, text dependent responses, student generated questions, Socratic Seminars, student self-reflection and goal-setting forms, and more traditional tests and quizzes.

To monitor student progress and identify students and standards in need of additional attention, teachers administer and analyze Link-It Benchmark Assessments (Grades 6-8) and iReady Diagnostic (Grade 5) at three points in the year. Locally developed writing benchmarks and rubrics help monitor student progress with the narrative, informational, and argument/persuasive writing genres. Teachers review data, plan for instruction, and reflect on student performance in weekly Professional Learning Community teams.

As fifth grade is a transition year, students receive a double block of ELA instruction. This allows the time to dive deeper into concepts as well as provide targeted instruction based on formative assessment and the iReady Diagnostic data. The fifth-grade teachers utilize choice boards and provide differentiated assignments based on student data to spiral back to unfinished learning. In addition, a Response to Intervention Teacher pushes in to provide support for students who have been identified as performing below grade level benchmark.

While our curriculum has always included technology integrations, teachers have expanded their use of instructional technology in the past two years. Teachers provide targeted writing feedback to students through Google Classroom, formatively assess student understanding through Peardeck, and elevate student voice and presentations through platforms such as Screencastify and Flipgrid.

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

The Edgar Middle School mathematics program emphasizes student-centered instruction supporting NJ Learning Standards. Our goal is to provide equitable opportunities for our students to achieve academically. Beginning in Grade 6, EMS provides a variety of leveled classes, allowing students to advance to either Algebra or Geometry. One of our district goals is to increase students' subgroup representation in honors and accelerated courses. Moreover, we offer academic enrichment and support based on data analysis to meet the needs of our diverse population.

Classroom instruction is focused on student development of strong mathematical practices and skills. Students are given ample opportunities for collaborative work and discourse, independent problem solving, and application in both small and larger tasks. We implement the Workshop Model to maximize student engagement in the work, and to provide opportunities for differentiated instruction.

To enhance student problem solving and application, math and science teachers collaborated to engage students in a series of interdisciplinary STEM projects. An important part of the projects includes implementation of our interdisciplinary Metuchen Problem Solving Process. Students have been using this model across disciplines to self-monitor and to gather experience in strategic problem solving. This is part of our overall SEL integration.

The EMS mathematics program is in year two of a three-year transition to the Reveal Math program. The program received endorsement from Edreports.org for its high level of standards alignment and usability. It provides strong support for all learners and includes diagnostic tools to aid teachers in monitoring student progress and identifying needs and opportunities for differentiation. Another resource used is IXL software, which includes diagnostic tools, and provides targeted learning and practice at the student's level.

As fifth grade is a transition year from elementary school, students receive a double block of Mathematics instruction. This allows the time to dive deeper into concepts as well as provide targeted, differentiated instruction based on formative assessments and the iReady Diagnostic data.

Link It (Grades 6-8) and iReady (Grade 5) are used as our benchmarking assessment tools. They provide detailed information on each student's progress toward proficiency in NJ Learning Standards skills in Math. It is particularly useful in identifying areas of focus for our Response to Intervention (RTI) program. Students have the opportunity to target specific weaker concepts by strengthening foundation skills in math and building background knowledge. This program offers an extra period of math each day for general

education students who struggle. In addition to their regular math class, a math specialist works in a small group setting to provide targeted instruction. Students may enter or exit the program at various points throughout the year based on performance data.

Our recent Link It and iReady analysis reveals many areas of success and high growth, especially in our grade level math course for Grade 8. We are particularly proud of the success we have had in reducing our achievement gap for minority students. Our use of detailed individual data has allowed this to happen.

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

EMS embraces the Metuchen district's Science Mission Statement, which states: The Metuchen Public School district will strive to provide a strong scientific foundation for all students to become productive citizens of a global society, and to prepare those who may wish to pursue further education and careers in science and technology.

Students learn in a program that embraces the three stranded approach inherent in the Next Generation Science Standards. Students learn Disciplinary Core Ideas and Cross-Cutting Concepts while practicing Science and Engineering Practices. They do this through exploration of phenomena, student development of models – conceptual, mathematical, physical, and visual models, application of learning, and the Metuchen Problem Solving Process as our scientific inquiry process and engineering practice to solve real world problems.

The STEM project initiative that is described in the math section of this portion of the application is a truly interdisciplinary approach to application of math and science to real world issues, especially those relating to the United Nations (UN) Sustainability Goals. Thoughtfully posing UN Sustainable Goal challenges to students in Science, Computer Science, Art and in Math classes, students are engaged in relevant STEAM projects. STEAM projects provide EMS students a meaningful, engaging platform for all students to collaboratively practice and transfer the Metuchen Problem Solving Process as an interdisciplinary design thinking and inquiry-based approach to solving real world problems.

Fifth grade students utilize Mystery Science to explore the topics of Space, Matter, Ecosystems, and Water. Lessons include hands-on investigations, technology use and student-centered learning. Our students in Grades 6-8 use Smithsonian Science for the Classroom, a research based, field-tested program designed to engage students in phenomenon-based learning. They learn Earth and Space Science in Grade 6, Life Science in Grade 7, and Physical Science in Grade 8.

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

The Social Studies Curriculum at Edgar Middle School includes a two year study of U.S. History, and two year study of World History. Students demonstrate their learning of core content and Social Studies practices through participating in class discussions, reflecting on current events, drawing connections between historical events and civilizations and today, examining primary source documents, and producing formative and summative writing pieces. Students create three document-based writings throughout the year, and teachers use English/Language Arts rubrics to assess and provide feedback on students' writing.

Core readings, prompts, and synthesis activities from Teachers' Curriculum Institute are used to provide differentiated content and assessments to students. Students examine historical people and events from multiple perspectives to develop and practice social awareness skills. For example, in U.S. History, students examine primary and secondary sources to evaluate the effectiveness of foundational documents, policies, and leaders. Students use evidence from multiple sources to create critiques and conclusions. For each unit of study, students are asked to consider: Where do we see this today? Who is missing? Whose story do we not hear? In World History, students examine geographical themes and apply them as they study ancient Civilizations.

Civics and active citizenship are also embedded into core content instruction. Social Awareness lessons help students to evaluate current world events from multiple perspectives. Through the use of respectful debate

students learn to appropriately discuss these topics. In World History, students study the economic, social, and political structures of early civilizations, and apply their understanding to real-world tasks. As an example, students apply their understanding of the architectural strengths and flaws of Pompeii to create their own proposals and critiques for urban development and improvement in Metuchen. In U.S. History, students study the history of the Disability Rights Movement in the United States to identify evidence of progress, and continued needs, for people with disabilities.

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

Throughout middle school our students are exposed to careers through activities that range from hands-on construction projects to creating Apps for Good where students design their own app prototype to address one of the 17 UN Global Goals. Within our curriculum, students learn about a variety of careers in each subject. They are given opportunities to study careers as well as influential people in each content area. Our Gifted and Talented (G&T) program further prepares students for college and careers through research and problem based projects.

School counselors use Naviance to give our students a jump start on college and career exploration. Activities they facilitate include goal setting, learning style inventories, as well as opportunities to identify their strengths and potential matching careers. Our 8th grade students learn about the High School Program of Studies to begin planning for the next four years. Before COVID, our counselors organized Career Fairs where parent and community professionals came in to speak about their careers. During the Career Fair students were encouraged to ask questions and then reflect on the careers which interested them the most.

As we prepare students for the next step in their journey to the future, we look to challenge them to achieve success. Beginning in sixth grade, our most advanced students have the opportunity to begin a math sequence that starts with Pre-Algebra and allows them to complete Geometry by the end of 8th grade. This sets them up to be able to take Advanced Placement courses in high school. We are constantly encouraging students to challenge themselves by setting strong SMART goals.

With our whole child approach, we not only strive to lead our students to succeed academically but also to improve soft skills. We encourage them to advocate for themselves and communicate effectively. Through problem solving, they learn about teamwork, critical thinking, and creativity. These are all essential skills for success in college and careers.

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

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

Edgar Middle School offers courses in grades 5-8 such as Art, Band, Orchestra, and Chorus. Art meets every day for one cycle in Grades 5 and 7, every other day for one cycle in Grade 6, and every day for one semester in Grade 8. Band, Orchestra, and Chorus meet once per week all year as large group ensembles and once per week all year as small group/individual lessons.

Art, Band, Orchestra, and Chorus curricula have been updated and adopted the new 2020 New Jersey Student Learning Standards for Visual and Performing Arts (VPA). VPA curriculum focuses on building skills rather than producing final art products or memorizing concert repertoire. The VPA curricula also infuses social and emotional based SEL-question sets from the Metuchen Problem Solving Process to assist students in monitoring their own feelings as well as academic progress. Both have proven effective for improving not only individual growth but ensemble growth as well.

In addition to Art and Music courses, our students engage in practical art courses, including, Woodworking, Engineering & Design, Computers, and Computer Science. These courses offer hands-on, problem-based learning lessons designed to provide opportunities for students to explore their potential in Practical Arts.

The Physical Education (PE) and Health Program at EMS is well-versed in child development, PE teachers ensure that the curriculum consists of age-appropriate activities that support growing minds and bodies. The benefits of the PE program include improved physical fitness, the development of motor skills, reduced risks of obesity, and helps to teach self-discipline. The health education program has adopted the Metuchen Problem Solving Process and structured SELf-questions to teach coping skills in order to further promote mental health. Our PE & Health curriculum teaches children key life skills alongside improving their health and wellbeing.

EMS offers World Languages, such as Spanish, French, and German. Students in Grade 5 enroll in Spanish every day for one cycle and in Grade 6 every other day for the full year. Beginning in Grade 7, students choose either Spanish, French, or German as their course of study. World Language teachers use a combination of research based best instructional practices such as comprehensible input and total physical response to build foundational skills in all modes of communication: interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational.

In addition to a variety of courses available, students have the opportunity to join one of our after school clubs. Along with the Music and Art clubs, students may participate in one of our 20 other clubs including Intramurals, Library Club, Student Council, Gay Straight Alliance, and others. We also have 10 middle school interscholastic athletic teams that compete with other schools. Educational field trips are also taken every year. One of those field trips we are proud of is the 5th grade trip to Camp Mason, a three-day trip targeting common goals and leadership foundation. Our athletics, clubs and trips further support our students' academic, emotional, and social development.

### **3. Academic Supports**

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

At Edgar Middle School we believe that instruction and student learning improve when teachers continuously revisit their instruction together, share ideas across classrooms, and work to tailor assessment and practices to match the individual needs of the student population we serve. To that end, teachers meet weekly in data-driven Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) by content area to determine students who may need support and collaborate on strategies to support them within the classroom.

Each marking cycle the Response to Intervention (RtI) Committee meets to analyze summative and formative data, identifying students performing below grade level standards in both English Language Arts and Mathematics. Students are identified based on established cut scores on each data set, and then the list of students is reviewed with classroom teachers for feedback prior to final enrollment in the program. The Response to Intervention teachers consult with each student's ELA or Math teacher to develop a personalized learning plan that targets gaps in learning to support students' ability to access grade level learning. The RtI teachers follow a push-in and pull-out model where some students receive additional support within the classroom and others receive intensive small-group support outside of the ELA or Mathematics classroom. Data on student progress towards their goals is collected weekly and communicated to parents. At the end of each marking cycle, each student's progress is analyzed and compared to the established exit criteria; parents are advised if their child has met the exit criteria or if they are recommended to remain in the program.

When students demonstrate a continued need for support a teacher or parent can request support from the Intervention and Referral Service Team. The team collaborates with parents using a problem-solving approach and may recommend an action plan of strategies or more intensive interventions. The team collects data and reassesses student progress in six to eight weeks.

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

Students performing above grade level are first given opportunities to excel through differentiation and modifications provided by the classroom teacher. This may include, but is not limited to, providing above grade level work, or assigning extension projects to current assignments. Students performing close to or

above a full grade level within Math courses are accelerated a full year or even two when supported by multiple sources of data.

Students are also given the opportunity to be considered for our Gifted and Talented (G&T) programs at Edgar Middle School. Using multiple measures, students may qualify for G&T Humanities, STEM, and/or Interdisciplinary in Grade 5 where they participate in a variety of building challenges. These courses meet daily for one cycle. Students in Grades 6 and 7 may qualify for G&T STEM or Humanities. Both courses meet every other day for one semester in Grade 6 and every day for one semester in Grade 7. Students may also qualify for G&T ROGATE which meets every day for one semester in Grade 8.

Students performing above grade level who are enrolled in STEAM-based classes are faced with building challenges that require more than just rote memorization of Math facts and Science knowledge. Compared to their peers, these students access critical thinking skills, problem solving, and innovative thinking to complete difficult classroom experiments or competitions. Two competitions include Future Cities in Grade 6 and the First LEGO League Challenge in Grade 7. Humanities courses focus on making connections between English Language Arts and Social Studies. Students utilize skills such as conducting research, presenting, and debating to articulate at a more advanced level compared to their peers. Students use these skills in a Mini Model Congress program in Grades 6 and 7. Students in Grade 8 ROGATE are challenged with developing a hypothesis and building an analytical research paper followed by an oral presentation.

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

Edgar Middle School provides a continuum of services for students with special needs. Our academic programs include in-class resource, pull-out resource replacement and self-contained programming based on students' individual needs. Additionally, we offer programs focused on specific areas of instruction, such as Specialized Reading for students requiring additional reading comprehension support, Orton Gillingham services for students who require additional more intensive, direct phonics instruction, as well as Social Skills groups, and Community Based Instruction. Our teachers also partner with a variety of community resources to develop service-learning projects for our students, such as the Sock Drive to provide socks to shelters, initiated by our self-contained class.

We also provide support services to our students through Speech Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, Board Certified Behavior Analysts, School Psychologists, Social Worker, and Learning Disabilities Teacher Consultant.

Our case managers provide, develop, and oversee student programs, consult with staff members, and monitor student progress. Additionally, they provide community referrals and resources for families and support school wide initiatives and programs. They are also members of the Student Support Services team that meet twice a month to discuss students who may be struggling academically or emotionally as well as students who are part of our N.E.S.T program (Nurturing Empathetic Supportive and Trusting).

The N.E.S.T. Metuchen School Based Program is a dynamic partnership between the Metuchen School District and University Behavioral Healthcare (UBHC), a division of Rutgers University. The primary objective of the program is to help ensure that children and adolescents will obtain needed assistance in an accessible location. They provide a range of free and confidential mental health services at the Metuchen School District.

At Edgar Middle School all of our special education teachers, support staff and general education teachers regularly collaborate to ensure that they are meeting the students' academic, social and emotional needs. Our paraprofessionals participate in professional development sessions including ABA to help meet our students' needs.

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

Edgar Middle School provides support to English Language Learners through a whole child approach. At the beginning of each school year, the English as Second Language teacher creates and shares profiles for

each student. Each profile contains information on the child's home language, educational background, family dynamics, ACCESS test scores and accommodations to help staff members understand the child. The profile contains resources from Rhode Island Teachers of English Language Learners' Language Project, and provides a deeper cultural understanding of customs and the child's home language. ACCESS scores paired with the WIDA Can Do descriptors help teachers understand the child's English proficiency levels and ways to modify assignments. This document helps to provide a wrap around approach in understanding the individual student's needs.

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



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

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

Edgar Middle School engages and motivates students not just by acknowledging their academics, but by celebrating who they are as active members in our school community. Along with Honor Roll achievements, teachers at each grade level meet monthly and select a student who demonstrates hard work, growth, and good citizenship. These students are awarded a certificate of acknowledgement and a gift certificate to the local ice cream shop donated by the Metuchen Downtown Alliance. Teachers recognize those individuals who demonstrate hard work, kindness, and compassion by nominating them for a Bright Bulldog Award. Bright Bulldog Certificates are emailed to students' families and added to a wall of fame in the building. Students can also give shout outs to one another for doing something kind, helpful, or thoughtful. Classmates, recognized for positivity at school, have their names and deeds displayed around the school as a "thank you" for their actions. Students receive a personalized birthday email letting them know just how special they are and inviting them to the main office for a small birthday gift. Bimonthly students meet in advisory groups as structured time for them to build relationships with peers and adults through common interests while developing executive functioning skills as well as participating in No Place for Hate lessons outlined by the Anti-Defamation League.

To maintain student engagement during remote learning, teachers implemented focused instructional strategies and the Student Support Services Team was developed. All teachers implement the Workshop Model. This model allowed for teachers to meet with students individually or in small groups. Teachers included strategies to build relationships with students weekly to keep them engaged and help them interact with one another. Daily class attendance was tracked and analyzed. Students who demonstrated a pattern of missing classes or academic struggle were brought to the Student Support Services Team for a collaborative approach to identify support, including counseling or action plans. There was a targeted focus to return the most struggling students in need to school full time during hybrid learning. The team took recommendations from parents and teachers, analyzed student attendance and academic progress to determine which students to invite for full-time in-person instruction. Most clubs continued to meet virtually and sports teams played modified seasons.

Returning to full-time instruction, a Restorative Justice program was launched to support students with behavior challenges. Students work with a faculty mentor to plan and complete community service projects.

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

At Edgar Middle School, we believe in order to meet the needs of the whole child, it is essential to build strong relationships with their families and community. Communication is key. The Principal publishes a weekly newsletter for parents. It includes upcoming school events and highlights cultural months and community events. The messages in the newsletter are positive and encourage relationships between families and the school. Parents and community organizations are able to contribute to the newsletter, using the platform to promote community events. The newsletters are shared with parents and published on our website for easy access.

Our Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) is very active. The Principal meets with the Executive Board to discuss hot topics they are hearing about from other parents. The topics are then addressed at the general PTO meeting. Our PTO supports our school in many ways. They offer mini grants for teachers to enhance their instruction. They support school activities like the Fall Festival, Gaga Tournaments, book fairs, and dances, as well as sponsor events like Mother-Daughter Brunch and Father-Son Top Golf Night.

The EMS community is inclusive and giving. EMS hosts Structured Learning Experiences for high school students with disabilities where they volunteer in the Media Center and job shadow teachers daily. We participate in several drives each year in addition to helping our own families who have suffered fires or a tragic loss as needs arise. During the holidays, we adopt families in our school who are in need. We ask the families in need to send us wish lists and then share it with the community on Signup Genius; the list of

items range from money and toys to grocery gift cards. This year we were able to support four families celebrating the holidays. Our self-contained class, along with the other district self-contained classes, ran a sock drive for the homeless. Not only did they collect within the schools but also throughout the community. Our paraprofessionals also conducted two fundraisers for childhood cancer and K.I.N.D. (Kids In Need of Defense).

Throughout the year, our Student Council hosts activities. Through the activities, they collect money to help different organizations. During the Fall Festival for the 5th and 6th grade students, we raised and donated money to St. Jude's Children Hospital, Team Seas, and the American Cancer Society. The 7th and 8th grade Student Council hosted a Gaga Pit Tournament and donated to Embrace Kids in honor of one of the high school students who has cancer.

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

Edgar Middle School follows a coaching model to provide job-embedded professional development for teachers and staff to collaborate and grow in a Professional Learning Community (PLC). Teachers meet weekly by content area in PLCs to collaborate and plan instructional activities in response to classroom data. Social Studies, Language Arts, Special Education, and Mathematics teachers are provided scheduled release time with their content supervisor and instructional coach. During this time, teachers adopt specific strategies to address students' academic needs as evidenced in summative assessment data. Teachers then collaborate and plan in response to the data. Content supervisors use monthly departmental meetings as professional development opportunities for teachers to share best practices used in their classrooms. Teacher input is sought to identify professional learning goals and if needed, a specialist is contracted to meet their needs.

During remote learning, a coordinated effort was made to support teachers in learning to use online learning platforms and instructional strategies. At the onset of remote learning, the school's Media Specialist and Computer Science teacher collaborated with the Technology Supervisor to develop a coaching model that supported individual and small groups of teachers based on their personal interest and needs. A resource hyper-document was created and shared with all teachers aligning online platforms to instructional strategies or activities with links to instructional videos. Throughout hybrid learning, teachers were provided with support on how to implement the workshop model in their specific content area. Teachers learned to use independent work time to meet with small groups of students in-person or virtually. The district's professional development days included wellness activities for teachers to meet their own mental health needs. Transitioning out of hybrid learning, the technology supervisor schedules regular drop-in hours for teachers to receive one on one support.

Teacher input is sought through collaborative teams and their suggestions are implemented. The building administration meets with the School Leadership Team monthly to discuss, plan, and receive feedback on new initiatives before sharing them with the school community. The School Leadership Team works on initiatives including: the Advisory Program, updating the dress-code, and developing a framework to support teachers with classroom discipline. Various school-wide collaborative teams also meet to plan for state assessments, provide support for students in RTI and I&RS, and develop morale-building activities for teachers. Grade-level collaborative teams meet to coordinate cross-curricular activities and collaborate with administrators on assignments and duties.

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

If there was one word to describe the school leadership at Edgar Middle School, it would be collaborative. Our school has several committees offering opportunities for staff members to participate and help improve the school. The committees include a School Improvement Panel, School Leadership Team (SLT), Intervention & Referral Services Committee, and Student Support Services Team. Some committees are comprised of members based on job titles while others are volunteer. Each committee analyzes data related to attendance, behavior and academic needs to determine and provide additional student support.

Our ScIP (School Improvement Panel) is comprised of the Principal, Assistant Principal, and Union

representative. This group is tasked with ensuring, overseeing, and supporting the execution of the district's evaluation, professional development, and mentorship policies at the school level. The ScIP also ensures that teachers have a strong voice and a considerable role in shaping evaluation methods.

The SLT is voluntary and made up of the Principal, Assistant Principal and staff. We are fortunate to have a team that includes a member of each department. Our SLT worked with administration in preparing for the return to school in the Fall of 2020. They met throughout the summer to develop a plan that helped make our school safe for our students and staff to return to school. Throughout the year, the team works on projects to improve the school. This year, they worked on developing an Advisory program where students were grouped based on their interests. The goal is to bring staff and students with a common interest together to form relationships. We have surveyed the teachers to get input on the next project the School Leadership Team will be working on.

When working on shared decision making, our school and district have adopted a common inquiry-based research cycle, including: selecting a focus, gathering information, brainstorming, and implementing change. Reflecting on progress, we revise as necessary. This process facilitates stakeholder voices to be heard and allows for sustainable change.

The Intervention & Referral Services Committee consists of the Assistant Principal, school counselors, a member of the Child Study Team, grade level team leaders, and the nurse. They meet twice a month to discuss students who have been referred due to learning, behavior, or health difficulties in school. The team collaborates to develop interventions that will assist students in becoming successful.

The combination of work from all the committees within the school structure has helped EMS become the successful school it is.

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

Diversity is embedded in our school culture. From morning announcements that celebrate multilingual voices and a multicultural community, to a curriculum that demonstrates our efforts to explore issues, both contemporary and historical, we purposefully promote a culturally responsive community.

The respect for our community of learners is on display in our halls. During Black History Month a large periodic table strikingly displays the contributions and influence of people of color. During Autism Acceptance Month our appreciation of individual differences is apparent in visual and written messages.

We celebrate diversity in our daily activities. Morning announcements by Tech Club students highlight diverse cultures and accomplishments. During World Language Week our students read the Pledge of Allegiance in a different language every day. This was so popular that students now read the Pledge in a different language weekly.

Culturally responsive teaching and learning has been one of our school goals since September 2020. During the 2020-2021 school year, the Principal and Assistant Principal conducted presentations during faculty meetings. Our teachers reflected on their own biases after taking Harvard's Project Implicit Test. The administrators then shared how to create culturally responsive classrooms.

District goals have focused on equity, which includes a diverse collection of literature across the curriculum. Before the sixth grade read the book, *Melissa*, by Alex Gino, the staff received training, read, and held a book discussion. Our Gay Straight Alliance advisor presented, "Things to Know"; a presentation prepared by students in the GSA (Gender & Sexuality Alliance). Our GSA engages with their peers while expressing their pride in their own identities. They led our participation in International Pronoun Day. Students are also given opportunities to share preferred names and pronouns with staff.

During Black History Month, high school students prepared presentations for fifth-grade students about accomplished members of the African American community in New Jersey. Students then completed projects later displayed throughout Metuchen.

For the past 29 years, Sally Frishberg, Holocaust survivor, has visited EMS providing a unique learning experience to students, staff, and parents. She shares her journey during the Holocaust. This is a culminating event highlighting an in-depth Holocaust unit for our fifth graders.

We are an inclusive school and pride ourselves in helping our students feel included and safe within our community through our curriculum, school activities, and interactions with them.

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

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Focusing on the whole child has been the driving force behind Edgar Middle School's success. All aspects of school life focus on the students' academic, emotional, and social development challenging our students to maximize their potential. An important strength of EMS is the vision shared by staff and administration that students are to be nurtured and cared for yet challenged to grow and mature. This child-centered focus is clear within the school community and is closely aligned to the Metuchen School District's Whole Child Initiative.

Each year we dedicate our efforts to a particular pedagogical area to support the academic growth and development of our middle school aged children. This year, the focus has been on developing relationships that support and foster social, emotional, and academic needs to ensure individual student success. We continue to create a positive climate and culture by intentionally promoting gender inclusivity and culturally responsive practices. These school-wide initiatives have provided an on-going and sustained learning community in our middle school.

EMS offers a comprehensive program with challenging learning experiences in core subjects. To further support our students, we have implemented a Response to Intervention program. This support program, which is in addition to general education instruction, targets identified skills and progress monitors the students. The core subjects are enhanced with courses in the areas of Art, Music, Computer Science, and Industrial Arts. A daily program of Health and Physical Education supports the physical development of our students. Students can also participate in an extensive music program which includes ensemble performance groups in band, orchestra, and chorus. Individual lessons are provided to all participants. A Gifted and Talented Program provides enrichment opportunities for our highest achievers. We also have mental health support in a tiered system of support. Besides our school counselors, CST case managers, and student assistance counselor, we have partnered up with Rutgers University Behavioral Health Care with a full-time school-based clinician made possible through a community supported referendum. We also offer a variety of after-school clubs, intramurals, and sports.

The vision that we share for our students along with the committed efforts of our staff has allowed EMS to grow and enrich the lives of the members of our school community. The overall school program supports academic achievement and social development. Our middle school provides students with a positive and nurturing learning environment where they can grow academically, emotionally, and socially thereby ensuring Edgar Middle School's students will "Learn in a Caring Community."