

***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) [X] Title I [ ] Charter [ ] Magnet [ ] Choice

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

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

School Mailing Address 247 Delaware Avenue  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Delmar State NY Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 12054-1499

County Albany County

Telephone (518) 439-4996 Fax (518) 439-7546

Web site/URL https://www.bethlehemschools.org/elsmere E-mail kkloss@bethlehemschools.org

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

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

Name of Superintendent\* Ms. Jody Monroe E-mail jmonroe@bethlehemschools.org  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Bethlehem Central School District Tel. (518) 439-7098

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 Ms. Holly Dellenbaugh  
(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):
- 5 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 1 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 7 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	24	17	41
1	23	16	39
2	22	17	39
3	18	20	38
4	24	15	39
5	14	29	43
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
<b>Total Students</b>	125	114	239

\*Schools that house PreK programs should count preschool students **only** if the school administration is responsible for the program.

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 3 % Asian
  - 3 % Black or African American
  - 5 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 82 % White
  - 7 % 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: 10%

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	14
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2020 until the end of the 2020-2021 school year	10
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	24
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2020	239
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.10
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	10

6. Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):  
Our non-English language students are serviced in other district elementary schools.

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 18 %

Total number students who qualify: 42

8. Students receiving special education services with an IEP or 504: 17 %  
40 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>6</u> Autism                  | <u>3</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>19</u> Other Health Impaired                |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>9</u> Specific Learning Disability          |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>6</u> Speech or Language Impairment         |
| <u>1</u> Hearing Impairment      | <u>1</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>1</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: 19
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	1
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	12
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	9
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	11
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	2

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 20:1

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	97%	98%	96%	97%	97%
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. 2013

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

Our mission at Elsmere Elementary is to be a community of lifelong learners who nurture and inspire the highest standards in academics, accountability and character to contribute to an ever-changing world.

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

<https://www.bethlehemschools.org/about-us/policies-and-procedures/>

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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Elsmere Elementary School is the smallest of five elementary schools in the Bethlehem Central School District, adjoining the New State capital city of Albany. Surrounded by trees and big lawns, the classic 90-year old two-story brick schoolhouse sits fifty yards off the main road of the town of Delmar in front of a four block neighborhood of single family houses. Over the course of the past ten years the families of Elsmere have become increasingly diverse, reflecting a nationwide trend. Nine years ago, 8% of students qualified for free or reduced lunch. That number has increased to 17%. In 2013, 90% of students at Elsmere identified as white. Today, that number is 83%. The vibrant evolution has given us the impetus and opportunity to grow.

A majority of our 239 students live within two square miles of the school, with approximately a quarter enjoying the daily walks between school and their houses, duplexes and apartments. Elsmere families are quite involved in their children's education despite a majority of parents and caregivers working full time. It is not uncommon to find second generation Elsmere students sharing in the joy of learning with children who are brand new to the school community. English is the primary language for most of our students, yet a good handful of our students also speak another language at home. An additional area of diversity at Elsmere is our blend of children with significant disabilities, as we are home to the district elementary students with intensive special education needs.

The motto of Elsmere is PRIDE; an acronym for Personal Best, Respect, Responsibility, Integrity, Determination and Enthusiasm. These tenets are the backbone of all we do at Elsmere in class, on the playground, at assemblies, during extracurriculars, at home and in the neighborhood. Students are encouraged to start and end with these traits when approaching all academic and even social challenges. Opportunities for students to put these traits into action are presented frequently. For example, our third graders planned, organized and ran a gently used book sale to benefit Ukrainian refugees living in our community. Our students know that we will continue to support them and to expect them to demonstrate these traits well beyond their elementary school years. From the time they are kindergartners, Elsmere students look forward to returning to school as graduating high school seniors for our Senior Assembly, where they share their words of wisdom with their admiring fans, most of whom are under ten years old. When our graduating seniors and kindergartners share in this joy of present, past and future learning, all of the parents and staff know that we are doing a good job preparing the future together.

Elsmere is fortunate to be home to our district elementary students with intensive needs. The children in these classes bring a special quality to our student body. Each child's unique perspective helps us all to see things in a different way. We have been able to use this good fortune as an opportunity for growth for all students, staff and families in the creation of Teachers' Helpers Inc. Teacher Helpers Inc. is a service organization which pairs students with special needs and general education students to gather and complete jobs for teachers each morning. More than typical mainstreaming, students work together on teacher requisitioned tasks such as delivering items to classrooms and sorting paperwork. This provides opportunities for students with special needs to develop skills of daily living and friendships while general education peers glean practice in assisting and befriending even non-verbal peers with significant learning needs. General education students say they better understand and appreciate people with different abilities.

In 2013, Elsmere joined the ranks of other fine learning institutions through being awarded the National Blue Ribbon School distinction. Our school community was tremendously proud and humbled by this recognition. This honor gave us the voice and opportunity to share some of our meaningful practices and approaches, which in turn helped countless other teachers, students and communities. Success breeds success. The Pygmalion effect brought by this award further drove our school staff, students and the community to hold ourselves to continuously high expectations and the mindset to pursue our highest goals.

For over 90 years, the halls of Elsmere School have echoed and absorbed the laughter and fun in learning. An estimated 20,000 children have called Elsmere their "home away from home." We are a small neighborhood school in which families and school staff share a vision. Our size and common mission enable us to form the relationships in which to appreciate each person for their unique qualities and potential.



Whatever changes we undergo, be it an increasingly diverse student body or a global pandemic, we are ready to use our collective strengths to continue to make the world a better place.

## **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 at Elsmere Elementary includes three tenets: learning should be enjoyable, childhood is precious, and everyone has something to offer. We work to create a warm and loving environment, so students and adults feel safe to take risks and express themselves. Everything we do is through the lens of: Is it best for kids? Staff see all students in the school as their own. Staff are friends as well as colleagues, which sets the tone for the school.

In each subject area, Elsmere Elementary follows the New York State Next Generations Learning Standards. In the summer of 2020, faculty teams in our district reviewed and prioritized curriculum in each subject area at each grade level. We continue to use and modify this “living document” thanks to the flexibility in instruction it provides. Students have also shared that they enjoy this scaffolded curriculum, with more interdisciplinary units and hands-on instruction.

We approach teaching and learning with the belief that children do well if they can. Our multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) first insures that all students are provided the environment and the instruction to do well: academically, socially and behaviorally. Using researched-based methodology, we teach expected school behaviors and growth mindset along with academic content and skills. Our focus on early intervention includes therapist-run weekly lessons.

We attempt to connect learning at school with the world at large, building on prior knowledge and uncovering misconceptions. We believe that instruction should be genuinely meaningful. Embracing the science of learning, we look for ways to capitalize on children's natural curiosity. Our classrooms are busy but organized places with spaces for quiet exploration, messy science projects and artistic expression. Students are given regular opportunities to collaborate with younger and older peers as well as visiting experts from outside of the school. School faculty and staff demonstrate collaboration and the joy that can be derived from hard work.

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

Acquisition of English Language Arts (ELA) skills is the cornerstone of our academic program at Elsmere. Following the NYS Next Generation ELA Standards, we have dedicated time and materials for ELA instruction, and weave reading, writing, speaking and listening into all other subject areas as well.

Our district faculty selected Teachers College Reading, Writing Workshop and Phonics Units of Study as the primary elementary ELA curriculum. These were chosen for their flexible, engaging and spiraled curriculum. Embedded professional development included on-site mentors, release time and collegial study groups. We have found that the units provide a strong framework of important skill building and students find them fun. Over the years, we have personalized the units to include interdisciplinary texts, grammar, spelling and handwriting as well. Throughout instruction, we aim to foster a life-long love of reading and writing.

We believe that all children want to be excellent readers and writers and that we all learn best when we are having fun. Beginning in kindergarten, students play with sounds, letters, environmental print, books and writing. They are supported and encouraged by additional teachers who push into classrooms, including a speech language pathologist, a reading specialist and even older peers. As students progress through the grades, ELA instruction remains the primary focus. If teachers are challenged to find the best approach, appropriate differentiation or adequate time to address a student's reading needs, reading specialists and special education teachers work with the student using other instructional methods including those found in Leveled Literacy Instruction and Sonday Reading.

All students above kindergarten are formally assessed three times in the year using iReady reading diagnostic tests. Before and after each testing period, data chats are held with students to help them understand the purpose of the assessments and to set personal goals. The iReady platform then self-adjusts so that each student can engage in lessons and games specific to their needs when using the program two to three times a week. Teachers observe, conference, administer Fountas and Pinnell running records and discuss progress with students. Our learners self-assess with rubrics, peer edit and goal reflection.

COVID closures and masking requirements presented us with new puzzles. Teachers College responded to this by creating videos for phonics instruction and at-home learning videos. We further adapted by updating our reading to include diverse, multi-lesson book studies that were created by teachers and taught at each grade level. For an added dose of fun, our library specialist developed the schoolwide Book Madness Challenge, with classes reading and voting on sixteen highly rated diverse picture books.

As learners ourselves, we continuously research ways to improve. A large district team, spearheaded by an Elsmere teacher, are taking an online course together titled: The Six Shifts: Where Science of Reading Meets Balanced Literacy by Dr. Jan Burkins. From this, a book study team of more than thirty faculty has begun meeting.

Reading, writing, speaking and listening are the core of our academic mission at Elsmere. We understand that the skills to self-educate and communicate clearly are some of the most powerful tools each person can develop in order to make their impact on the world.

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

Our math instruction begins with the New York State Next Generation Mathematics Learning Standards. Updated in 2019, these are built on process, proficiencies and a productive disposition with a specific focus on reaching the needs of diverse learners. At each grade level, these guiding principles help to formulate solid instruction in math concepts and skills through a variety of curricular materials. Our district math cabinet, consisting of teacher representatives from all grade levels and led by our math supervisor, evaluated and piloted various math curricula before selecting Ready Math as our primary districtwide resource. Ready Math includes online assessment and instructional tools as well as a high rating from What Works Clearinghouse, making it fortuitously well-matched with our instructional needs during the three month COVID-19 closure.

Now back in school, we aim to create a rich classroom environment with strong Tier 1 support where all students have an active role in the learning process which focuses on collaboration, discourse and problem solving. Curriculum trainers work directly with teachers to support the learning needs of all students. An enjoyment of math is emphasized with other resources including Greg Tang math games and challenges, taught by Mr. Tang who provided onsite professional development for all of our Elsmere faculty. Greg's "Tangy Tuesdays", periodic online lessons and fun games maintain a high level of student engagement. We also use Reflex Math for fact mastery and are dabbling in First in Math, a game based online program. We emphasize the use of math in daily life and an enjoyment of using math to solve problems. We incorporate classroom routines that foster a positive environment for students to discuss, share ideas and construct viable arguments with supportive evidence.

Students participate in iReady diagnostic assessments three times per year to gather evidence about their performance and growth. Prior to assessing students' math knowledge and skills, teachers conduct individual data chats with students to predict the results and set goals, engaging students in their own learning. This formal assessment, student class performance and teacher observation are useful in determining the level of tiered support provided for each student.

All students are provided in-class Tier 1 solid instruction and differentiation. In math this year, our more individualized Tier 2 and 3 supports are provided in the classroom versus as a pull out service. This model supports less transitions for students and more time in class. In addition, some students, generally those new to our school district who have not yet grasped foundational math skills, have the benefit of working with

our retired teacher volunteer to “fill the gaps,” using concrete math representations. These students also continue with structured online math lessons and progress monitoring.

Above all, we look for ways to incorporate math into everyday school operations. Charts measuring our progress toward reading goals, most recently in our Ronald McDonald House Charity Fundraiser, demonstrate the usefulness of math. At our Gently Used Book Sale, third graders served as cashiers, making change and keeping records on earnings.

Our two mindset goals are to help everyone recognize the importance of math in our daily operations and the realization that although math may sometimes be challenging, it is within students’ reach and worth the effort.

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

School faculty, led by our district science supervisor, evaluated and piloted various curricular materials to address New York State Science learning standards, which are a modified version of the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). Elsmere selected Smithsonian Engineering Design kits to expose students to the addition of engineering practices and design at each grade level. Smithsonian Science for the Classroom kits are geared to include all populations of students and bring equity and access to all students. Students with special education needs participate successfully in the three-dimensional philosophy of the kits.

The instructional approaches of science are varied and thorough. We are transitioning from an inquiry-based approach to a phenomena based approach. Instruction engages students in local science phenomena and brings problem-based learning to students. Hands-on learning is incorporated into every investigation. Students commonly used their 1:1 Chromebooks to access research and data as needed on topics including solar power and erosion. Teachers contribute to the easily accessible and vibrant, in-district google site which includes STEM activities, LEGO activities, Mystery Science, science read alouds. Each resource supports supplemental and differentiated instruction.

Analyzing learning progress is an important part of our science instruction. Formative assessments prior to and during instruction include rubrics that help set a course of learning for students. Summative assessments are occasionally used at the upper grades. Students create models of their understandings and are asked to support their predictions and explanations with data and evidence. Rubrics are used here too to provide a framework for expectations.

Elsmere moved during the pandemic to a prioritized curriculum to address the most important curricular needs of students. Faculty teams reviewed and made recommendations for each lesson in each science kit to assist with the virtual learning model and spaced learning. A prioritized science curriculum was and is the core of instruction since March 2020.

We believe that our engaging science program is foundational for students' understanding of the world and that it can spark a curiosity for lifelong learning.

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

Our Integrated K-5 Social Studies/English Language Arts Program was developed by teachers to provide structure and resources within the New York State Social Studies Framework. It is shared with all faculty, including librarians, art and music teachers so everyone may incorporate the concepts and content into instruction. We value interdisciplinary instruction in which new content is integrated with purpose and real world understanding.

Social Studies units are updated annually to incorporate current events and new resources. Lessons are standards-based and include project-based learning aligned to key ideas, conceptual understandings, content specifications, and social studies practices found in the Framework. The curriculum incorporates reading and discussing informational texts and primary sources. Special opportunities are embedded, such as our virtual partnership with a school in Kenya, allowing third graders to better know people around the globe as

they talk about sports, food, school, climate, geography and even politics.

Our comprehensive and spiral approach to historical contextualization and geographic reasoning includes a healthy dose of fun. From kindergarten through fifth grade, students engage in collaborative learning, conduct research, use data and work for higher level thinking. As students grow, so does the curriculum. The youngest grades start by investigating their immediate surroundings through units such as “My Family and Others.” This worldview expands to fifth grade when students embark on a study of the Western Hemisphere. Engaged learning is prevalent with videos, investigating artifacts, guest speakers and field trips, including visiting the Erie Canal and the state capitol building when studying New York State history.

To assess students, teachers use observation, rubrics for written work and media produced by students, and unit tests in the older grades. Students research and create their own projects to demonstrate their understanding.

Through content linked to enduring understandings, we aim to help students recognize connections between events and guide students to understand the interdependency of people. We ultimately hope they understand the value of all people and how their actions can make a positive influence in the world.

**1f. For secondary schools:**

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

**2. Other Curriculum Areas:**

All elementary students participate in “specials” for 40 minutes each day, with instruction in art, music, library / media science and physical education which occurs twice weekly. At Elsmere, this special class occurs at the same time each day for both sections of all grade levels. While each has their own curricula, collaboration with classroom teachers further the knowledge and skills taught in both areas. One of our newest enhancements is the addition of technology in specials to connect students with content in a vibrant and engaging manner.

Our health and physical education program is based upon the acquisition of the knowledge, skills and attitudes foundational for healthy living to empower all students to sustain regular, lifelong healthy habits and physical activity. The curriculum first introduces students to general physical skills such as ball handling and movement. It progresses through the years to include specific team and individual sports. Students in the older grades may enjoy our intramural program twice weekly where they start their day with vigorous exercise, teamwork and plenty of laughs. The gymnasium Viewsonic board provides all students the opportunity to watch and critique sports like the pros.

The music program in our district is very popular thanks in part to the educational offerings starting in elementary school. Beginning in kindergarten, students engage in activities learning about rhythm, tempo, musical styles and instruments. Through song and dance, they enjoy singing, dancing and playing simple instruments such as Boomwhackers. In fourth and fifth grades, students participate in choir and may choose to take percussion, woodwind, string or brass instrumental lessons at school and participate in our school performance band or orchestra. Again, students use technology to increase learning including individual composing software and a Viewsonic board for interactive musical experiences.

Our visual arts classes introduce students to master artists and their styles. Children are guided to closely investigate art as they learn about the use of color, line and space. Different mediums are explored with students digging right into painting, drawing and even clay sculpting, creating three dimensional pieces that are fired in our school kiln. Our art program partners with the curriculum in other areas to add a new dimension to learning. For example, those studying Native Americans learn basic weaving techniques and

make pieces modeled on those of the peoples studied. The classroom interactive whiteboard allows students to peek in artists' studios and virtually visit museums halfway around the world where they can zoom in on famous works.

Library media sciences round out the special classes through incorporating reading and media across all subject areas. Students select new books weekly from the extensive library collection. Our instructor teaches students research skills including evaluating internet resources. As our school technology specialist, the librarian also offers robotics instruction and professional development for staff in technology use.

A well-rounded education is so much more than reading, writing and arithmetic. Our students are fortunate to have daily opportunities to explore the variety of ways that people express themselves and to appreciate the work of others.

### **3. Academic Supports**

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

For various reasons, individual students sometimes work below grade level in specific areas. To address this, we collect formal and informal data to determine specific areas of need or misunderstanding. Classroom teachers then differentiate instruction to hone in on these needs during 1:1 or small group time, providing hands-on instruction and partnering with families to address the area of need. Resources include individualized support materials and games from iReady and Ready Math, working with older students, or individualized tutoring with retired faculty. Students' progress is monitored to adjust the level or type of instruction. Our Child Study Team may also assist the classroom teacher select or create additional supports.

If these Tier 1 interventions do not help to significantly close students' academic gaps, they may then participate in Tier 2 small group support two to three times a week for 15- to 30-minute sessions led by specialists. Specialists either work in the classroom or utilize interventions that address more than one area of need. For example our speech language pathologist leads a phonics program taught through articulation therapy. Our Sonday Reading Team of older students focuses on phonics acquisition and develops self-confidence through reading to kindergartners. Leveled Literacy Intervention and decodable books are additional Tier 2 resources.

If the first two tiers of support are inadequate, students may receive Tier 3 support of individualized daily instruction with service providers. This one-to-one approach is aimed at uncovering and addressing missed foundational understandings. Only a small percentage of students qualify for this level of service. These students are often children who have moved into our school system after the primary grades.

Throughout the tiered interventions, we address the whole child and how their academic success may relate to other areas of strength or need. This individualized approach most commonly provides students the support needed to close academic gaps.

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

At Elsmere, students demonstrating above grade level competencies are provided both formal and informal ways to shine and grow. Our prioritized curriculum provides numerous growth opportunities for students who work above grade level in academic areas. We actively look for both academic and social strengths in all students.

Our iReady formal diagnostic assessment, administered in the fall and winter, helps to formally identify accelerated areas in students. Those with above grade level skills are provided small group instruction in class and individualized instruction through iReady "My Path." All students are eligible for the accelerated distinction, advancing through fact fluency in Reflex Math, a rewarding and motivating game-based program. Greg Tang math games offer accelerated learners opportunities to further stretch and grow their skills. Fifth graders may participate in the self-guided ALEKS program purchased by the district. Students demonstrating accelerated skills in language arts are identified through teacher observation and iReady

diagnostics. Acceleration opportunities for these children include teacher and student run book clubs providing opportunities for enrichment, engagement, and differentiation. Student progress is reviewed formally and informally at weekly grade level meetings and twice yearly data team meetings.

When a passion for a topic is identified through observation, it is fostered within the school. We provide a structure that encourages students to create interest clubs under the umbrella of our Kids Teachers Association (KTA), which introduces students to the basics of Robert's Rules of Order and action plans. These clubs meet weekly during their recess and are facilitated by the principal and parent volunteers. Student clubs have provided accelerated students opportunities to grow while contributing to our school environment. For example, the Junior Environmental Club (JEC) created the "Recycling Olympics" which led to our school wide practice of daily single-stream recycling. This inspired a subgroup to devise and promote a highly successful school wide composting program.

We believe all students have something special to offer. We continuously seek to identify and grow these talents and interests.

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

Elsmere offers a range of services to address various individual student needs. We utilize a multi-tiered system of support as the first level of intervention. When we determined that a critical mass of kindergarten students needed more exposure to foundational fine motor and oral language skills, the speech language pathologist and occupational therapist created a series of fun and engaging foundational skills activities. Each week, kindergarten students look forward to "game time" with the special educators. For students with minor articulation and fine motor deficits, therapists provide short-term, individual or small group sessions, such as 5-10 minute articulation games each morning and a trip down the hallway movement path. For academic needs, students participate in varying degrees of targeted instruction. When these supports do not significantly help a child, the Committee on Special Education determines the most appropriate supports in the least restrictive environment.

We have two "co-taught" classes at Elsmere this year. Here, a special education teacher and classroom teacher partner to plan and differentiate instruction. They aim to help identified students access the grade level curriculum and learn with their peers while better understanding how they themselves best learn. Each co-taught class also enjoys the support of an aide who further assists all students.

Two self-contained special education classes are also part of the Elsmere community. These classes utilize a modified general education curriculum and teach functional, social, communication, and motor skills. Supplemental curricula such as TouchMath, the Souday System, and the Autism Curriculum Encyclopedia (ACE) help provide individualized practice for students and data points to best inform instruction.

All children can and want to learn. We recognize that learning through a traditional presentation model is not the best modality for every person. A student's failure to learn is actually an educator's failure to present skills and content in the way best suited for the learner. It is the educator's job to find these methods and teach the student how to access them for their own, unique learning style.

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

Students identified as English Language Learners (ELL) attend two other elementary schools in our district and do not attend Elsmere, however we provide translation services for parents or guardians requiring this. Along with translation services, we make close personal connections and try to learn about the cultural norms of families. As we understand more about the cultures of our students, we are more equipped to partner with them. For example, after we learned that it was not a part of our Karen family's cultural norm to readily accept support, we were better able to communicate with them about providing a specialized education for their child with a significant disability. The student is now flourishing through our Intensive Skills program. Our school social worker is a liaison for these families, helping to connect them with community resources.

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

Over the past several decades, Elsmere has had very few students who are identified as homeless or migrant. When two students lived in a shelter and at a friend's home respectively, we provided technology including a hotspot, food, clothing, counseling, and our social worker partnered with outside agencies to coordinate any support needed. One Elsmere family currently has their family of Ukrainian refugees living with them. The children of this family have been enrolled in our district and are receiving standard school supports for ELL students. Their family has been given basic school necessities and assistance from our school social worker to receive other support. Elsmere recently held a Gently Used Book Sale, earning several hundred dollars to give directly to this family.



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

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

COVID-19 requirements including masks, social distancing and limited opportunities for interaction, presented us with new and intriguing challenges. We stretched ourselves to research, develop and modify ways to engage students in learning. Since March 2020, ever-changing pandemic issues require great flexibility. Throughout this time, we have maintained strong academic outcomes and our tight-knit school community.

Elsmere prioritizes students' engagement in academics and our school identity as The Elsmere Family. Academic engagement is easy when students enjoy the learning. Our prioritized curriculum across the subject areas provides a wealth of opportunities for this. For example, a 4th grade history unit led to the development of the Hallway Museum which displays 3-D designed and printed symbols of Native Americans of New York, along with a short write up about the piece.

Being a part of something bigger develops a feeling of security. This feeling helps us all be in the best state for learning. We refer to ourselves as a family and foster our relationship through student buddies and school wide events such as Book Madness, Recycling Olympics, and Wellness Day. These events, co-designed by students, help keep us focused on learning and growing as a team. Student voices are valued at Elsmere as their self-created clubs work to make our school a great place to learn. The Junior Environmental Club's composting initiative is used as a role model for other schools.

When school buildings were closed March to September 2020, students were provided daily virtual instruction with district-provided technology, meal delivery, and extra tutoring. Additionally, we delivered our school mascot to each home, organized parades, made several staff videos for the students and ran virtual spirit days.

When school reopened in fall 2020, approximately 230 district elementary families took advantage of our Virtual Learning Academy (VLA), which used the district prioritized curriculum and was staffed by faculty and an administrator dedicated solely to the VLA. At marking periods during the 2020-21 school year, families could opt to move their children into the VLA or back to a physical school. The 2021-22 school year no longer offers the virtual option and all students returned to campus.

Maintaining a high level of engagement in a socially distant world offered us unexpected opportunities for growth. With student engagement and relationships at the forefront, we used student interests and academic goals to formulate programs that will continue into the future.

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

The single most successful strategy we have found for engaging families and the wider community is the development of relationships based on a shared responsibility and mutual respect. We look together continuously to enhance the learning environment for our students. Our Parent Teacher Association is a true partnership with seemingly endless programs and materials to help grow this environment.

High staff retention and relatively small student enrollment make it easy for all of us to know each other at school. Relationships with families begin prior to the start of the school year when newcomers visit for a scavenger hunt around the school, staffed by student ambassadors. We kick off each new school year with a meet-and-greet on the eve of the first day. This allows students to see their classroom, drop off supplies, and exchange stories with classmates, while parents and teachers begin to develop their important relationships.

As our school community changes, we see new opportunities to support children. Student success requires a strong home-school partnership so our methods of communication have evolved to include greater accessibility for families. We invite all families to share their knowledge and skills as mystery readers, presenters of hobbies or jobs, and facilitators of a 1,000 book exchange project. Students are building a

Little Free Library to be installed on school grounds this spring. We work closely with our PTA to provide most school supplies and “extras” such as school spirit wear and yearbooks, for those who may not be able to afford them. We offer a Backpack Program supported by local businesses to address food insecurity on weekends and during school breaks.

Our location on the main street in the business district of our town provides us the natural venue for community partnerships, such as the one we enjoy with the daycare next door to our school. The daycare uses and purchases materials for our school playground and serves as our emergency relocation shelter. Many of our families work in neighboring businesses creating a natural liaison between school and the community. Community members visit to enhance learning as well. Some favorite visitors include therapy dogs and local Veterans of Foreign Wars who teach our fourth graders the skills necessary for their role as daily school flag tenders. Many of our families work in neighboring businesses creating a natural liaison between school and the community.

Mutual respect and a shared mission in the community are keystones for our strong and positive learning environment. The benefits of these relationships makes Elsmere a reliably secure and supportive place for children and adults.

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

The professional culture of Elsmere is supportive and forward thinking. We share a vision that each person can and should contribute to learning.

Collegiality begins with congeniality. We know that we work better with people we like. To develop and maintain these relationships, social events occur throughout the year including Crafting Club, Soup Club, a staff Halloween costume contest, a running team and Wellness Day. Morning announcements include staff trivia facts, we add our family and pet photos to school bulletin boards and we often walk together through the neighborhood. We know each other's children, support each other through difficult times and celebrate joyous occasions together including our elaborate retirement traditions. Our retirees remain a part of the family through events such as our Alumni Assembly. During COVID closures, weekly virtual happy hours and group videos made for students helped us to maintain and bolster our unity.

Love of learning is a special bond demonstrated by our staff. This intrinsic enjoyment of gaining knowledge/skills and puzzling out problems are key to professional development at Elsmere. Time for professional growth is built-in with two daily meeting times. Our one hour together each morning has been used to develop strategies based on resources such as “Hacking Questions: 11 Questions that Create a Culture of Inquiry in Your Classroom” by Connie Hamilton. Each grade level team has an additional planning time together and has used this time to develop more interdisciplinary instruction. New teachers are provided professional development and are assigned a mentor. These pairs often speak about the mutual benefits of mentorship. During the year, work with buddy classes at different grade levels exposes faculty to curriculum and instructional methods of their colleagues. Finally, regular meetings to discuss data keep us focused on student needs. During the COVID closure, all teachers met as grade levels and departments twice weekly to plan.

Evidence of faculty commitment to maintaining a vibrant professional culture can be found in the learning opportunities they provide for their colleagues, including technology workshops and sharing of information learned at courses taken online. Our Coordinated Care Team serves as a support for the mental health needs of staff, providing resources, breaks and feedback. Vaccination clinics and flu shots were provided on site to help support staff physical health.

We recognize that the people, not just the programs, make our school a high quality place for learning and growth. Our school is widely known for the supportive environment that exists at Elsmere.

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

Elsmere has one district-assigned leader who has served as the principal for the past 19 years. Following a servant leader philosophy, she cultivates Elsmere as a place for learning for all children and adults of the school community. The principal collaborates with many district leaders to further this vision. A fellow learner, she works with all staff to develop programs that add to academic growth, social skills, joy in learning and a fun childhood. Teachers are encouraged to take risks, students are given leadership roles and individuals' strengths are drawn out to support the community, perpetuating the servant leadership model that defines our school as "A Place to Love and Grow."

One example of this is the Wellness Initiative. In October, Elsmere adults identified that our children's mental health and social skills continued to be affected by the pandemic, just like millions of children their ages. Staff quickly began creating ways to address this. One such program was Wellness Day, which organically grew to a Wellness Initiative. Three Elsmere faculty, including the principal, served on the district Wellness Committee. When this committee was asked to plan the Superintendent's Conference Day, the Elsmere team embraced the opportunity to address the identified needs. For Wellness Day, the Elsmere committee encouraged all staff members to help plan and run Wellness Stations. Staff embraced the opportunity. From clerical staff to our speech language pathologist, people planned and led stations including Nature Walks, Zentangle, fidget making and backyard games. Teachers circulated with their buddy classes through stations, having fun together while learning important skills and strategies. When students left midday, staff continued the day together for a group neighborhood walk, team games, and a healthy meal. This has since grown with staff still enjoying their neighborhood walks and students making more fidgets and Zentangles.

Education is truly a team effort but educators are leaders by nature, which can create controversy in some schools. At Elsmere, the respect we have developed for each other as educators allows us to assume various roles. All staff members contribute to the caring, learning environment in big and small ways such as the custodian leading the fourth grade flag tenders. We also work within a larger district, state and national systems that sometimes hold competing priorities or different values. When priorities or values compete, the principal works to maintain the focus on supporting all learners in "A Place to Love and Grow."

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

In the nine years since Elsmere was last awarded the Blue Ribbon distinction, our student demographic has become more diverse, reflecting a nationwide trend. This has offered us important new opportunities to expand the education of our students, families and staff.

Addressing the diverse needs and backgrounds of others begins with openness and conviction. In 2019, a professional evaluation by Generation Ready measured cultural competence in our school and how our district addresses equity. On the cultural competence continuum used, our school was identified as being "culturally blind" with an environment that was emphasizing equality rather than embracing differences. As such, we were only about halfway to the ultimate goal of being "culturally proficient." This was our call to action. We began talking, researching and brainstorming. The staff now collectively recognize culturally responsive teaching as a mindset rather than a curriculum. Developing an inclusive and equitable classroom is the responsibility of every teacher, every day.

Several Elsmere staff, including the principal, serve on a district diversity and equity committee to further our goal of doing better. We provide more diverse libraries and displays, invite people from other cultures to share their experiences and knowledge, and have weeded out instructional resources that did not present an honest world view. Teachers plan grade level book studies with rich texts to generate class conversations about appreciating differences. The ripple effect of open conversations about these texts has spurred many more valuable conversations. We learn more about our diverse families to better communicate and work together. Current events are shared through vetted educational news sources written in language that students can read and understand. We do not shy away from controversial topics in class, but emphasize that our success hinges on our ability to listen, grow, and work together.

For our families with current financial need, we have established an array of supports to insure students have, at a minimum, their basic needs met. This includes the Backpack Program, winter clothes availability, NBRS 2022

PTA-purchased yearbooks, school spirit clothing and school supplies for students.

We recognize and embrace the impetus for growth that we have been given. Our goal is to educate all children with the skills, knowledge and mindset to contribute positively to the world. Although change can be hard, we know that outside one's comfort zone is a place of growth.

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

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Strong social-emotional health is integral for optimal learning to occur. This health has been greatly impacted by the pandemic of the last two years. Fortunately, Elsmere has been able to effectively provide much of the support needed to allow children and adults to focus on and enjoy learning.

Shortly before the pandemic, Elsmere created a Coordinated Care Team (CCT) to offer a multi-tiered system of support for the social emotional health of our students and adults and help people become the best version of themselves. Since March of 2020, the CCT has become more important than ever so our mental health professionals, school counselor, school social worker and school psychologist, together with the principal and school nurse, meet weekly to review progress and plan next steps.

To begin the year, the CCT helped to articulate and teach clear behavior expectations for common daily school routines. They assist teachers in creating meaningful and simple classroom management plans. The school counselor then provides Tier 1 weekly social-emotional lessons for all classes to share a common vocabulary for emotions, teach self-regulation, empathy and perspective taking, and growth mindset. Classroom teachers participate in lessons and the social worker reinforces topics in small group or individual sessions. Each student makes a personalized “toolbox,” and each class is provided with a “calming caddy.”

School staff, parents and even students may request additional support from the CCT. The school counselor’s hallway mailbox allows students to easily and discreetly ask for help. The CCT collaborates to create meaningful supports for students including informal individual discussions, targeted small group sessions with the counselor and creative leadership opportunities, such as tutoring a younger student.

During the three months of virtual learning, members of the CCT joined classes weekly, met with students virtually and helped develop coping strategies that were home based. Weekly counseling newsletters were developed for families on anxiety, goal setting, gratitude, anger, loneliness, kindness and celebrating small victories.

When we returned to in-person learning, being masked and distanced brought new challenges which the CCT rapidly addressed. For example, they prepared “mindful minute” videos shown at the start of each day. These introduce simple strategies to mentally prepare for learning. Each ends with the mantra “you are here, you are safe, and you are ready to learn.” It was a minute for the entire school community to be singularly focused on mental health.

We are proud of the ways our entire school community has embraced a robust social-emotional program to help create the best possible learning environment. The school-counseling program is at the helm of this work with its strength in the engagement, cooperation and support of every member of the school community.