

U.S. Department of Education
2023 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Mrs. Sheri Modderman

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

Official School Name Deer Park School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 2105 Middle Road

(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Columbia Falls

State MT

Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 59912-9322

County Flathead County

Telephone (406) 892-5388

Fax (406) 892-3504

Web site/URL <https://www.deerpark.k12.mt.us>

E-mail moddermans@deerparkedu.org

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

Date _____

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent* Mrs. Sheri Modderman

E-

mail moddermans@deerparkedu.org

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

District Name Deer Park Elementary

Tel. (406) 892-5388

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

Date _____

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board

President/Chairperson Mrs. Cindy Barnes

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

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

Date _____

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

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

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

PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION

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

1. All nominated public schools must meet the state's performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
2. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2023 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 2018 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for at least the three years prior to September 2022.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 or 2022.
6. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. If irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state, the U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's application and/or rescind a school's award.
7. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as "persistently dangerous" within the last two years.
8. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
9. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
10. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district, as a whole, has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution's equal protection clause.
11. The nominated school has, or is subject to, a nondiscrimination policy (provide either a link to the policy or submit a text of the policy), is committed to equal opportunity for all students and all staff consistent with applicable law and does not have any outstanding findings of unlawful discrimination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's nomination and/or rescind a school's award if unlawful discrimination is later discovered.

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

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

PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Data should be provided for the current school year (2022-2023) unless otherwise stated.

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

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 1 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
0 Middle/Junior high schools
0 High schools
0 K-12 schools
- 1 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, 2022 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 Students
PreK	0
K	22
1	20
2	22
3	28
4	25
5	19
6	19
7	19
8	25
9	0
10	0
11	0
12 or higher	0
Total Students	199

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

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 0 % Asian
 - 0 % Black or African American
 - 0 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 93 % 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 2021 - 2022 school year: 4%

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

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

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2021 until the end of the 2021-2022 school year	5
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2021 until the end of the 2021-2022 school year	2
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	7
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2021	169
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.04
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	4

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

Ukrainian, Spanish

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 0 %

Total number students who qualify: 0

8. Students receiving special education services with an IEP: 8 %
Total number of students served 15

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 should be reflected in the table below. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

<u>0</u> Autism	<u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities
<u>0</u> Deafness	<u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment
<u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness	<u>0</u> Other Health Impaired
<u>1</u> Developmental Delay	<u>9</u> Specific Learning Disability
<u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance	<u>5</u> Speech or Language Impairment
<u>0</u> Hearing Impairment	<u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury
<u>0</u> Intellectual Disability	<u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness

9. Students receiving special education services with a 504: 2 %
Total number of students served: 3

10. Number of years the principal has been in the position at this school: 2

11. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to the nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below. If your current staffing structure has shifted due to COVID-19 impacts and you are uncertain or unable to determine FTEs, provide an estimate.

	Number of Staff
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	9
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	5
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	3
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	3

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

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

Required Information	2021-2022	2020-2021	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018
Daily student attendance	92%	94%	96%	94%	95%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

14. **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 2022.

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

15. 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.

16. In a couple of sentences, provide the school's mission or vision statement.

In partnership with home and community, Deer Park School provides a safe and positive learning environment where learning is personalized for all students, preparing them to succeed in a global society.

17. Provide a URL link to the school's nondiscrimination policy.

<https://www.deerpark.k12.mt.us/page/mission-statement>

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

Students who are in the district's boundaries are given priority for space in classrooms. Students who are out of our district's boundaries are given a spot if there is space in the grade they are entering--according to state accreditation standards of class size.

PART III – SCHOOL OVERVIEW

As visitors drive up Middle Road to Deer Park School, an ancient ash tree greets them. Planted in 1921, it has far surpassed its original sapling size. Students of the school donated five cents each to purchase the tree. Sheltered by that now robust ash, Deer Park School is nestled between grazing cattle, a small forest of tall conifers, and the awe inspiring Columbia Mountain range. Three years before Montana became a state, the first Deer Park schoolhouse, a log cabin, was built in 1886 and attended by farming families. The earliest record of the teachers began in 1893 with Frank Wright, whose monthly pay was \$27.76, and his educational supplies included maps and crayons. In the early 1920s, a one-room school with a bell tower was built on land donated by a local farmer, making it the oldest, standing, in-use school building in the Flathead Valley. A tradition of generous community donations has continued into the 21st Century with the gift of land by a stakeholder of the school in 1984. And the ensuing monetary gifts helped fund the expansion that now houses our gym, kitchen, library, and several classrooms that were built and painted by volunteers consisting of students, their families, and staff.

It is little wonder that Deer Park is the oldest, continuously active, elementary school in Flathead County. Unlike other rural school districts that have consolidated, Deer Park has kept its small, rural school ambiance. The dedication and care can be seen in the continuing generational participation, such as within our School Board of Trustees. Two of the five trustees attended Deer Park themselves, our school clerk followed in her mother's footsteps, both women dedicating their careers to our school, along with several current students who can trace their families' attendance at Deer Park through several generations.

Even though Deer Park School has evolved from that one-room schoolhouse into a thriving community of nearly 200 students, the staff, and faculty, the district has a small property tax base, the second smallest in the county. In spite of this monetary shortfall, the district has been able to attain academic excellence. We believe it is because the attitudes of the early settlers continue to embrace the community. What is that attitude? Rugged individualism. We believe that all people, no matter their circumstances, gender, faith, socio-economic status, culture, or country of origin, should be treated with respect and open arms. We believe that if circumstances don't work out, we don't give up; instead, we work harder. We figure out how to move forward with less.

Students lucky enough to start their educational journey in kindergarten at Deer Park rarely leave. Because Deer Park has enjoyed a smaller student population for years, the entrenched culture is one of knowing every student from their name to their successes. Several of our teachers and staff have been at the school for most of their careers, allowing middle school students to regularly visit their primary teachers for hugs and updates.

Students are seen as unique individuals rather than an age group. Individualized learning is an element that Deer Park has embraced for years. We also welcome all students' input into their daily learning, to maintain the ideal of ownership in education. The concept of “outward learning” is also on the forefront of the daily adventures of each classroom, where the outside world is connected to each student's life in an authentic way. The classroom lessons are introduced in ways that encourage critical thinking, problem solving, and projects that support each concept. It is not just about the exchange of knowledge, but about developing skills, abilities, and competencies that allows each and every student to thrive.

Deer Park prepares students for their future. Each educator has developed a toolkit of professional skills to ensure that personal attention, positivity, grit, recognition, and appreciation grows not just in the classroom, but follows every student as they develop and mature. We have found what works, and we consistently embrace best practices in addition to the wisdom of our beloved staff and faculty.

As those same visitors climb the wildflower strewn hill to our campus at the closing of a spring school day, they gain an understanding of how a rural school can attain excellence. Open gym doors provide a glimpse of sweaty, dedicated students repeatedly shooting basketballs at hoops. Children of all ages play together on the broad blacktop that connects the buildings on campus. A wide porch, centrally located on the original school house, is filled with parents and teachers talking at the primary school door, with children sitting on

the steps or hanging from the bannister. Greetings called across the pavement mingle with shouts of joy and shrieks of protest. It is a happy, busy chaos without a hint of disquiet. Dedicated. Connected. Safe.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

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

For language arts, the end goal is writing for a real, authentic audience, clearly and coherently, across a wide variety of genres.

In the primary grades, reading and writing instruction follows a process approach with ample, individual attention. A strong focus on phonics pervades the mini-lessons, with plenty of time for practice using decodable stories and word work. Primary teachers employ the tenets of Daily Five, giving students time to read both fiction and nonfiction independently, with a teacher, and with their peers. The goal is to build stamina and decoding automaticity. The writing curriculum follows Lucy Calkins; students select their own writing topics within the genre, with the expectation that several pieces in each genre will be written. Individual conferences with the teacher provide the opportunity for direct feedback, allowing the students to grow at their own pace. Student-published stories are excitedly read to the school clerk and principal, a delightful interruption to their day.

The intermediate grades transition primary students toward middle school expectations beginning in 3rd grade. While students are still allowed to select their own writing topics, more structure is imposed with a focus on skills including writing Restate, Answer, Cite, Explain (RACE) responses. For paragraph and essay writing, the same structure is expected, thus firmly ingraining the expectations for organized statements and coherent communication. Intermediate teachers supplement Scholastic's Storyworks with whole class novels and literature circles. Intermediate students are expected to identify story structure and to think critically about their reading. Emphasis is placed on comprehension, with explicit teaching of reading skills via book club roles: the questioner, the artist, the character expert, the connector, the theme thinker, and the summarizer. These are concrete and explicit terms, created or refined by our middle school ELA teacher, allowing students to embody the role and to practice the skills for deep comprehension.

In middle school, in order to prepare students for not only high school, but also college and career, students are empowered to discuss literature using literature circles. The literature circle “roles” are research-based approaches to reading a text. Students lead intelligent, coherent, independent discussions where the teacher is a participant/coach and not always the director. In writing, the process is frequently modeled, beginning with a paragraph and building to an essay. Rewrites are required but also rewarded accordingly. Writing lessons cover an exploration of expository writing, argumentative writing, and creative writing. Often, students respond to unique, engaging prompts like the following: “Why middle school students should be given a dragon, how to prepare for a sock puppet invasion, and what to do if garden gnomes invade.” Students not only learn new vocabulary words, but each word’s etymology as well. Frequently, the morphemes can be found as neologisms on teacher-created assessments to determine a student’s ability to decode. Daily mini-lessons are used to teach grammar, writing tips, or other skills based on frequent, formative assessments. Some examples of assessments and checks for understanding used are rubrics, short answer responses, daily progress check-ins, shared Google documents, requiring embedding quotes/research to support analysis, embracing the Six Traits writing model, and the use of engaging learning platforms (Quizlet, Gimkit, Kahoot, etc.).

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

For the last several years, Deer Park students have enjoyed the workbooks, online components, and lessons of enVision, which is a rigorous program. The lessons scaffold well, but definitely require mastery from previous units in order to complete the next objective. The curriculum is designed beginning with an investigative question or challenge to spark student engagement. Teachers often implement their own questions as well: “Are two medium pizzas a better bargain than one large pizza? How do I use the Pythagorean Theorem to see if my ladder will reach the cat stuck in the tree?” Active participation is the preferred method, and predominantly, the norm, while lengthy lectures delivered to a large group are

limited. Students typically solve problems first by hand, carefully showing steps by writing on their erasable whiteboard desktops before checking with calculators or Chromebooks. After a period of guided practice, teachers are constantly moving around--assessing by observing and questioning for understanding--while also offering assistance. The extended math period of 90 minutes allows for more practice time, partner work, leveled grouping, advanced enrichment work, and even less homework. Paraeducators are also available to offer immediate, individual support.

Middle schoolers work on quarterly projects as well. An example would be the designing and engineering of a model farm, including design components and making calculations to scale. Students are frequently asked to synthesize curricula for authentic purposes. For this project, that meant students must consider the area, perimeter, cost of supplies, available space, and sustainability of the farm as though the farm were a real business venture. Students then transform their farms using a computer graphic design program such as Geo-Sketch into a 3D model.

Our math program does an excellent job of providing opportunities for students to work through multi-step problems. Though this can be challenging for them, it provides an opportunity for students to learn how to break down the problem in an efficient way. Younger students are explicitly taught the language for understanding story problems, phrases like “in all” and “difference,” and what is being asked of the students. Fourth and fifth graders learn the “3 Reads and Solve” strategy for solving word problems, which has bolstered their mathematical understandings and fostered subsequent achievement in middle grades.

Assessment is accomplished through a variety of approaches. Formative assessment is achieved via questioning throughout the period, teacher review of the practice items with individual students, observation/listening as students work together to solve the problems, exit tickets, and stimulating games, like the whole class flashcard game of “Capture.” Summative assessments occur at the end of each unit, and at the end of the year, through the use of SBAC and MAP testing. Regardless of the type of assessment, teachers carefully review how each student is performing and reflect on how to better support the student to achieve even more. The faculty and staff meet regularly, which provides the opportunity to discuss overall trends within the classroom and the school, with teachers making changes to their teaching strategies or classroom organization as needed and inspired by their peers.

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

The introduction of a new science unit begins not with a textbook, but rather, student inquiry, experimentation, and curiosity. Knowledge isn’t dispensed, rather it’s constructed. Many teachers incorporate an art project, like a poster or a 3D model, to present to their peers. As an example, the 4th grade students built volcanoes for their rock unit--not as part of a prescribed curriculum, but as part of a teacher’s desire to augment and supplement. Students enriched their knowledge by further examining the rock cycle and how rocks, mountains, and volcanoes are formed.

While elementary teachers use Mystery Science as a guide, middle school teachers use a textbook, experiments, and group projects to implement the Montana Science standards. For example, students were asked to research a plant: its processes of growth, harvest, and manufacture into a final product that people use. Examples of the plants chosen were cotton, cacao bean, and vanilla bean.

Students then designed and built an interactive exhibit to teach young children how plants can produce useful products. A trial run with the 2nd grade students allowed 7th graders to provide a student-crafted questionnaire that the visitors answered at their exhibit. The questionnaire was then reviewed to see how well the 7th grade met their objectives. From the information gathered, the 7th grade students reflected, made modifications, and redesigned some of their products. The middle school students then presented their projects again to the kindergarten class.

Formative assessments include rubrics, created by both the teachers and students, as well as a variety of techniques including the use of thumbs up/down to indicate understanding. Some science teachers use exit tickets, encouraging students to write something they learned at the end of the lesson while other teachers close the lessons with a group conversation about what they now understand.

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

Social Studies/History classes follow a district outline to guide instruction with a goal of real world relevance. In these classes, through projects, readings, debates, and discussions, students examine historical and modern moments of import. Students wrestle with challenging concepts, some directly affecting them individually: mackinaw and bull trout concerns in our Flathead Lake, rapid population growth in the Flathead Valley, the importance of recycling and sustainability for the preservation of our lands, and even how local government, the school board included, affects and empowers change.

Students learn to think critically about the effects of transitioning from mining and timber industries to one of tourism, our valley's ability to support population growth, how climate change affects the world (and our very own Glacier National Park), and even the conflict in Ukraine. Via a thorough review of literature, media, primary and secondary sources, and a series of discussions or debates, students naturally construct an opinion on a topic. Regardless of that opinion or perspective, students are asked to support their ideas using evidence, reason, and logic rather than emotion and instinct. In every history/social studies class, students are encouraged to ask: How does this relate to me? What can history, mishaps and miracles included, teach me about my current circumstances? What action can I implement to make a difference in the future?

These topics are differentiated by grade level and aligned to the state standards beginning with young elementary students studying communities and careers, and eventually culminating in an 8th grade semester of Montana History. The 8th grade class then finishes up their year with a three day history trip that includes touring the state capitol, visiting several museums with a Lewis and Clark emphasis, and surveying the Berkeley Pit in Butte where solutions are contemplated for this massive reclamation project. Hands-on projects, community involvement, and field trips are strongly encouraged and serve as a way to enhance learning.

Formative assessments are made throughout the process of acquiring information through observations of student interactions, ample journaling, and presentations assessed using a rubric. Summative assessments can include tests, final projects, and essays.

1e. For schools that serve grades 7-12:

Student leadership is at the forefront of Deer Park through Student Council, fundraising, and our athletic program. Student Council listens and responds to student, staff, and administrator opinions to develop and organize school functions including school dances, spirit weeks, and dessert sales. In the organizing process, these governing students are looking at benefits for the school, families, and community to help Deer Park continue in its positive growth and mindset. In the past, the Student Council has given support and helped raise money for several families who experienced trauma and loss. Additionally, the Student Council has taken an active role in governing the school by successfully petitioning the school board to implement a change in the hat policy.

In order to help fund their history trip in 8th grade, middle school students take the lead in fundraising by running concessions during sporting events, selling raffle tickets, bringing and selling baked goods for weekly bake sales, and discovering novel ways to generate money. Their efforts help them learn skills needed in secondary education, the workforce, and within their own families and communities, like working within groups, discovering needs in multiple environments, and implementing resources to help address those needs.

Student leadership is also cultivated through our athletic program. All the coaches emphasize life skills first, athletics second. Sportsmanship and academics are more important than the sport itself. Through this, students learn to prioritize their studies and are supported with the implementation of weekly grade checks. Students are required to address any unsatisfactory grades prior to participation in the school's athletic program. There is zero tolerance for unsportsmanship conduct, on or off the court or playing field. All are taught and reminded to work as a team, using a positive work ethic, while displaying and owning a growth mindset. All these skills are essential for the emerging workforce.

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

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

2a. Arts (visual and/or performing)

Our school prides itself on providing a well-rounded education, and to do that successfully, an examination and appreciation of the arts is paramount. Though we offer rewarding classes exploring painting, drawing, and drama, teachers at Deer Park consistently weave artistic elements into their classrooms. Our halls are decorated with silhouettes, mountain sunsets, infographics on the elements of fiction, student-created posters on life cycles, and our blacktop is blanketed by afterschool sidewalk chalk sketches.

Art classes are required K-5, and they are almost always selected as electives at the middle school level. Varying from year to year, students have opportunities to explore artistic fundamentals like color theory, cubism, perspective, surrealism, portraits, and sculpting in classes like Introduction to Drawing, Introduction to Painting, and a new class added as recent as 2023, Zentangles, an elevated form of classic sketching.

Not all artists use paint brushes, pens, or pencils; instead, some artists use their voice, their cameras and computers--and even themselves. For this reason, students may also express themselves through electives like choir, band, digital media, or even on stage in Introduction to Drama. In each of these courses, teachers devote themselves to empowering each student to build confidence and share their artistic talents with the world.

2b. Physical education/health/nutrition

While primary students have Physical Education (PE) once a week, PE/Health is a required course for all middle school students meeting several days a week for the entire year. The three main objectives are participation, cooperation to achieve goals, and making positive, healthy choices. Some of our more unique activities include downhill skiing, ice skating, hiking in Glacier National Park, indoor rock climbing, and snowshoeing. Thanks to the award of a recent grant application, the school now has enough snowshoes for an entire class.

A goal of the PE/Health program is certainly to promote and maintain lifelong fitness levels; however, a child's mental health is equally important. In health courses, students learn ways to deal with conflict, navigate complicated emotions, make nutritious choices, and to ask for help. Students are encouraged to develop a personal care routine that not only involves physical exercise, but also incorporates care for spiritual and mental health. School counselors, community presenters, and public health organizations often serve as guest speakers. A fitness class is also offered as an elective class, and this class focuses on cardio and strength training with an emphasis on proper form to avoid injury. In this elective, students are given the opportunity to design their own fitness class and lead their peers through their workout.

2c. Foreign language(s), if offered (if not offered, leave blank)

Spanish is offered as a semester elective to all middle school students meeting three or four days a week. This interactive class provides students with ample opportunity to explore the language. The rote, but important, practice of counting is taken outside in the abundant sunshine to pass balls to each other while saying the correct Spanish number in sequence. Students are given scavenger hunts and riddles written in English whose answers are in Spanish. After enough vocabulary has been acquired, students are asked to construct a demonstration of their understanding. Project options include writing simple vocabulary books to read aloud to the first graders and labeling all the nouns in the school's classrooms and offices. Students listen to current Spanish music while working on the visual aspects of their projects.

Conjugating verbs in the present and past tenses with correct pronoun usages is also a main objective, knowing its importance in high school language courses. Food, customs, and holidays are emphasized in studying the diversity of Hispanic culture. For example, students made Dia de la Muerte skull masks after researching traditional symbology. A celebration of the holiday included bringing in pictures of deceased loved ones and enjoying traditional foods prepared by students earlier in the week. Supplemental curriculum includes using “Duolingo,” an online resource, and “Que Tal,” a monthly publication.

2d. Technology/library/media

Deer Park’s library is a warm, safe, and fun-filled environment with STEAM activities, educational opportunities, and an excellent alternative for academic improvement and emotional support. The librarian encourages curiosity, innovation, and problem solving. Deer Park’s library is a central point for reading, cultural activities, access to information, knowledge building, deep thinking, and lively discussion. When a student or staff member needs assistance, the librarian happily provides the literature, and scholarly, and physical support needed. The library is filled with an up-to-date, multicultural, and diverse collection of books. Working alongside the teachers, the librarian helps students to develop strong research and citation skills. Library classes are provided for grades K-5 on a weekly basis. Grades 6-8 can access the library as needed, while also attending technology classes two to three days per week to strengthen their coding, understanding of various software programs, and Google Suite abilities. From the early grades on, students explore the types of books available, genres, authors and their literary awards. Students also learn to navigate the Dewey Decimal system and how to shelve and care for books. Before her yearly book purchases, the librarian frequently surveys the students on their interests, needs, and wants so that the love and passion for reading and comprehension can continue to grow and develop.

2e. Any other interesting or innovative curriculum programs you would like to share

We promote respect for Montana’s Native population by acknowledging tribal sovereignty, history, and expertise. Annually, a Montana Native reservation and associated tribes are researched and woven into all subject areas. In kindergarten, students examined photographs of the Charlo family including Marine Private Louis Charlo, one of the original (but not photographed) flag raisers of Iwo Jima, and his brother, Victor, a poet of the Bitterroot Salish. Chief Charlo was their great grandfather. Victor’s daughter, April Charlo, is the Chief of Programs for Snqweylmistn, a Native led, nonprofit organization serving the Flathead Native Reservation in Ronan, MT. Seeing the family connections from history to present helped the kindergartners realize that the Salish are still here--Not Living in Tipis, as one of Victor’s books of poetry is so aptly titled. As inspired by a powwow in Polson, Montana, focusing on the watershed and bird migration, fifth grade math students practiced adding fractions using the migration of geese and their frequent stops. In middle school, students and teachers researched traditional meals and foods consumed by local Native populations. Afterwards, those dishes were shared at our open house as we celebrated our local Native American cultures. Deer Park has hosted and enjoyed the songs and stories of Blackfeet member Jack Gladstone, founder of The Native American Speaks Program.

3. Academic Supports

3a. Students performing below grade level:

At the start of the school year, armed with the list of new and potentially concerning students, the Title 1 Coordinator uses DIBELS 8 to screen reading fluency and comprehension. Acadience and GLOSS are used to screen students in math. Parents are advised of the screenings and encouraged to openly communicate with the Title 1 Coordinator regarding any concerns or questions. After carefully analyzing screening results, family input, and teacher observations/concerns, the newest MAP/SBAC scores are also considered. This data is then used to best ascertain and target students most likely to benefit from our Title 1 program. Students are frequently moved in and out of Title 1 as needed. Likewise, as struggling students manifest throughout the year for teachers, consultation with parents and the Title 1 Coordinator will decide the student's entry into Title 1. From that point on, the Title 1 teachers will update families and teachers during conferences, through email, and calls.

To address the needs of the Title 1 students, teachers use SIPPS for reading and Bridges Intervention for Math for intensive group and individual pull out. Both of these programs have progress monitoring. In order to also have normed progress monitoring, DIBELS 8 is used for reading and Acadience for math.

In addition to the Title 1 supports, teachers differentiate their assignments and instruction to meet the needs of the students. Students are offered a variety of avenues for showing their mastery of the subject, from the visual arts, to writing essays, or to verbalizing with the support of a multimedia presentation. The length of assignments and deadlines are modified to meet the stamina needs of a given student.

Because of the excellence of the teachers, curriculum used, and the invaluable time invested, students enrolled from 1st grade on, almost invariably, are reading at grade level by the end of 3rd grade.

3b. Students performing above grade level:

For students performing above grade level, kindergarten is quite different from 8th grade, but the approach is the same: challenge all students and hold high expectations.

The primary and middle school teachers always look for ways to further challenge their students in ELA/RDG. For example, students in 5th grade were reading about Shackeltons's exploration and the demise of The Endurance. One high performing student was to act as though she was reporting on the incident for a newspaper by digging deeper for tonality, author's purpose, and inferences.

Elementary math students are given the opportunity to advance their understanding through the curriculum's enrichment, personalized learning online (e.g., "IXL"), and through math projects. For example, a math student, who demonstrated mastery of the current skills, was offered the opportunity to "open a restaurant." He had to mock-purchase a building and all the necessary supplies for the restaurant, create a menu with pricing, and develop a final budget to present to the 'banker,' (the teacher), the "loan officers" (i.e., students) in an attempt to have the plan approved for a loan based on the sales pitch.

By 7th grade, students have the option for fast tracking, completing both 7th and 8th grade curriculum in one year, in order to complete Algebra 1 in 8th grade and begin Geometry as freshman in high school. For years, students have participated in MathCounts tournaments, Montana Council of Teachers of Math competitions, and AMC 8 tests. In MathCounts, Deer Park's math team regularly advances to state and has even enjoyed a three year run of achieving first place at regionals.

Science and social studies are generally project-based. Several students invest time in science fair competitions with the support of the science teacher. Several students have won awards at state competitions and have competed nationally. One particular time, a couple of brothers continued their project into high school, where they placed in the top three internationally.

3c. Students with disabilities:

The Special Education teacher is continually working to improve not only academic outcomes for students with disabilities, but also behavioral outcomes. She is in constant communication with the students' teachers and families to ensure transparency, collaboration, and to allow everyone to support the students in similar ways. Deer Park students that receive special education services are valued and included in the general education classrooms by both the teachers and the other students. Our Special Education teacher establishes effective routines and practices, and crafts a warm, respectful, and joyful relationship with even the most challenging of our students.

For example, two frustrated and overwhelmed middle school students were expected "to determine a theme or central idea of a text; analyze its development over the course of the text; and provide an objective summary of the text" (RL.7.2). Because of their reading level, she chose to have them read the fairytale "Hansel and Gretel," and to motivate them, allowed them to create the witch's house by using a gingerbread house kit. Having the students independently read and follow the directions for the house also helped satisfy the IEP goals for these two students.

Individualized Education Plans (IEP) are drafted using a team approach and input from teachers and families is critical to the process of creating annual goals and objectives. Progress monitoring of the IEP goals is done regularly, and parents are informed of their student's progress toward their IEP goals on a quarterly basis.

As with the Title 1 program, both SIPPS and Bridges are used as interventions, along with Reading Mastery and Read Naturally. Because it is often the Title 1 students who might be recommended for Special Education, it is of particular excellence that both departments use the same, proven programs, thus better facilitating a seamless and successful transition from one department to the other.

3d. English Language Learners:

3e. Other populations, if a special program or intervention is offered:

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

At Deer Park, students are motivated to do well because of their enthusiastic teachers that adhere to high expectations for all. Lessons and units are aligned with real world applications and challenges. Highly successful sports programs and positive extracurricular activities translate to a strong work ethic in the classroom, leadership roles, and desire to achieve ever higher goals.

Engaged students persevere in the face of struggle. Most of our students are avid athletes. We have a stellar coaching staff who teach the importance of patience and practice. Athletes also learn the importance of the team vs. the individual. Many group projects are highly successful with our students because they have learned that cooperation and encouragement are needed in order to win tournaments and achieve goals. These values translate beautifully to the classroom.

Aligning curricula and objectives with student interest leads to engaged students in the classroom, and because of that, educators consistently make personalized/individualized learning a goal. As an example, in recent years, a group of motivated, high achieving middle school students wished to produce a poem that “would go viral.” Students chose to address the subject of bullying in school, its tragic effects, and offer encouragement to their peers to be better. Students wrote letters to national daytime talk show hosts like Ellen, local filming agencies, and even our state’s Office of Public Instruction. The poem received recognition from national, celebrity-endorsed anti-bullying organizations, and the students were even invited to become anti-bullying ambassadors for the state. Today, the poem is proudly displayed on Montana OPI’s website. By aligning learning objectives with student interest, our classrooms are replete with engaged learners.

For many years, the motto of the school has been "conquering high expectations together." High expectations at Deer Park have a variety of faces. Regularly, teachers sacrifice early mornings, prep time, lunch, and afterschool times to offer students a place to complete missed work or to provide tutoring. Often, staff and faculty on their way across campus talk compassionately to a visibly upset middle school student. Daily, teachers actively listen for teachable moments, an opportunity to coach and inspire. Woven all through the countless, small interactions like these is the message that each student matters, and that they can--that they will--attain any goal to which they put their effort. Our students achieve high expectations because of the countless examples of caring, high achieving teachers who believe in them, encourage them, support them, and hold them accountable--not just accountable to an established rule--but accountable to their personal potentials as well.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

By far our most enduring connection is to Glacier National Park. Our longest serving principal was a Glacier Guide, and our kindergarten teacher is part of the Park's Ranger Service. Because of their connections, our middle school students enjoy the tradition of hiking in the “outdoor classroom” of Glacier, and our primary students also visit Glacier National Park every year to explore and learn about the plants and animals therein. Even without these helpful connections, our students enjoy Glacier, from middle school skiing and snowshoe trips to spending three days at the Big Creek Wilderness Camp sponsored by the Glacier Institute. These incredible, awe inspiring experiences include survival skills training, journaling, mapping in the style of Lewis and Clark, and measuring/monitoring trees...all critically important to understanding and solving current problems of the environment.

Much of Deer Park's connections to the community are home grown. Because the student population has been built on the families and farmers that comprise the neighborhood, traditions of walking to our neighbors' homes and visiting their farms is a welcome component of each age group.

Elementary students visit Anderson Farm, whose owners are both past students and integral members of the Deer Park community, one a school board member, and the other serving in the office. Their children

attended, and now their grandchildren attend Deer Park. They open their property to primary classes who, literally, walk across a meadow to reach their working farm. Across the road are the Hemmingways, whose bees garner a great deal of interest from the upper elementary students as they consider and investigate reports that pollinating bees are endangered.

The Hannon's farm, replete with goats, is a traditional walk and visit for the third grade. Fischer's Greenhouse, a short drive from Deer Park, enjoys their yearly visit from the middle school. There students learn about operating a local business as well as the plants and trees that thrive best in our climate. Bad Rock Fire Department, whose volunteer firefighters have long had their children enrolled at Deer Park, visit the school annually, awarding prizes for safety-inspired poster contests while also offering tours of emergency equipment and vehicles.

Our students know their community in an intimate way that translates into a bond between the school and its surroundings. These families have sent their children to Deer Park, and in turn, annually welcome the community's students back into their lives, long after their own children have grown up.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

Teachers are supported from the moment they are hired by laying the foundations for an open line of communication and developing a trusting relationship. At the beginning of the year, teachers are asked to reflect and set one or two personal goals. The staff and principal nominate one or two goals for the whole district as a point of focus and professional development is aligned to these district and individual goals. As a result of clear communication, established trusting relationships, and opportunities to learn, evaluations are a collaborative effort between principal and teacher. This allows the opportunity to reflect upon and plan how to effectively meet personal and district objectives.

Leadership that allows for personal learning outcomes in their own growth provides a potent model for the teachers of Deer Park who reciprocate the same thoughtful and reflective approach when discussing and planning the goals of their students.

Teachers' input is valued, creativity is encouraged, and their request for schedule changes or teaching assignments is often granted. Flexibility is key, and recognition of strengths to support areas of concern sets a tone that translates directly to the classroom as teachers make adjustments to their plans as needed to support the mastery of the material by the students.

The principal strives to create a positive, collaborative, inclusive working environment in which the teachers are recognized for their efforts and supported during their struggles. For example, the principal writes notes of praise and encouragement to teachers and staff when they have done something particularly valuable, kind, or noteworthy.

Our active and dedicated Booster Club also provides gifts and treats to show their support and appreciation for our teachers. Once a month, a homemade teacher lunch is provided, and during Teacher Appreciation Week, there is a mobile coffee shop parked in the lot, and parent volunteers hand-deliver coffee orders to teachers and staff. This appreciation of hard work can be found in the classrooms as teachers and students take an afternoon to enjoy a movie or class game to honor their hard work.

The principal often visits classrooms to work with students and support teachers. The principal regularly steps in to teach a class when a teacher has an emergency or would like to observe a colleague. A collaborative environment in which every voice is heard is a priority at Deer Park School. A positive climate is continually reinforced as our teachers make excellent instruction happen.

4. School Leadership:

Deer Park has a shared leadership policy where staff and community input is encouraged and valued, and tough decisions are made together with all voices being heard. The principal models effective leadership by taking an active role in all facets of the district by teaching a class, coaching, and promoting every special

event. Nothing is asked of the staff that the principal is not willing to do personally. Teachers are placed in roles to best employ their expertise and talents. For example, a certified accountant teaches math, and a certified nurse teaches science, thus offering students opportunities to learn from real world experiences and experts. The principal works collaboratively with teachers to create a schedule that works for everybody; teachers lead classes that best play to their strengths. Electives in the middle school are offered based on students' interests and teachers' ingenuity. Teachers are empowered to supplement curriculum with additional resources and individualized best practices to meet state objectives and are not required to follow a scripted program. Decisions are data based, which led to a block schedule where math and language arts times increased to 90 minutes and additional support staff was recruited to provide extra support while maintaining our ability to offer electives.

An honor roll breakfast is celebrated each semester with the principal helping the staff serve pancakes and bacon and then sitting down to eat with the students. Annually, these high achieving student leaders receive medals and certificates at the end of the year awards assembly.

The school board and principal work closely together ensuring every grant is pursued, every policy in place, and every dollar is spent for the betterment of students. Several of the trustees attend and support the premier school events: graduation, winter Christmas program and dinner, and kick-off open house barbecue. A small committee composed of the principal, clerk, two teachers, a community member, and a trustee were rewarded a total of \$199,000.00 from three separate grant applications.

As the school continues to grow and enrollment numbers increase, the administrator's role has begun to change. The connection to the community is precious and will be protected. For the administrator, knowing each student's name, their families, and their interests is vital to the continuation of the Deer Park legacy of community and family. There is a district leadership belief permeating the air, "All children can learn every day, and it begins and ends with love for each student."

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

Deer Park is a welcoming district and is often described as a large, extended, second family—a community that supports one another. Everyone in our community knows they are welcome.

Students experiencing homelessness and struggling families are self-identified and discreetly assisted. Deer Park has several ties to the larger community in order to support our families in need. "Coats for Kids" comprises a large collection of new winter apparel in a variety of sizes, donated by our local Jaycee club, and "Boots for Kids" provides a wide selection of sturdy footwear, donated by our local Toyota dealership. A weekend backpack program of food supplies is made possible by our "Land to Hand MT" organization, and free school supplies and backpacks are donated by both the Salvation Army and local church communities. Beautiful hats and mittens are hand knitted by local community members and provided free to students in need. "Books for Bikes" is sponsored by the local Columbia Falls Masons. In this program, the more books read, the more tickets a student receives to enter in the spring drawing where one student from every grade (K-5th) wins a new bike. Additionally, a free (or greatly reduced) before and after school program called the "Crash Zone" is available to all students daily before school starting at 7:00 AM and after school until 6:00 PM. Our homeless liaison has numerous connections for community outreach programs and resources in the county (e.g., Abbie Shelter, Samaritan House, A Ray of Hope).

Deer Park is a "community school" because of our strong relationships with our families. Parents often coach, volunteer, chaperone, and even guest lecture on areas of their expertise and culture, such as Ukrainian language and food. We have helped families negotiate their grief in the death of primary caregivers and supported them as they reconfigure their lives due to domestic violence, fires, and homelessness.

The teachers and staff build a strong connection with our students and families, permitting them to recognize which students may need to be given a snack because there is little money for food, or which students may need a scholarship to attend a field trip or other special event. A dedicated booster club spearheads many

fundraising events with volunteers from both community members and staff, and through these events, they make sure all students' and families' needs are met with scholarships, clothing, or other necessities.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR EXCELLENCE

Individualized learning. It sounds simple: find out how each student learns best and what motivates each one, then implement. These maximum efforts lead to maximum achievements. Implementing this strategy means personalizing staff development, goal setting, and even class scheduling to find the best fit for everyone.

When a transition of leadership occurred twelve years ago, it was a prime opportunity to identify our district's deficiencies and collaboratively institute change to satisfy curriculum gaps so more students would be inspired to achieve, and fewer students would need individualized interventions.

At that time, our largest area of concern was a lack in writing skills, which we knew, if bolstered, would lead to improved reading comprehension, improved spelling, and boost problem solving in math. Thus we implemented a writer's workshop model and trained the entire staff. Chromebooks were purchased for every student to assist in the writing process. Soon elementary students were proudly parading across campus to read their "published books" (short stories) to the clerk and principal in their offices.

Additionally, middle school novels offered to students reflected more interesting choices instead of requiring them to all read the same book. Literature circles were implemented by our new English teacher, and our new, dynamic librarian updated the library by adding thousands of new titles. She has also implemented book fairs and a "Battle of the Books Competition." An enthusiasm for reading ensued, and comprehension scores soared. One short 45 minute time slot for reading, language, and writing was increased to an expansive 90 minute block.

A 90 minute block of math was also incorporated so practice homework could be done with the math teacher readily available to assist and reteach. This resulted in more students enjoying math because they were able to understand and successfully complete their assignments.

Trophies or plaques are awarded to top performers for academic excellence: honor roll, spelling bee, geography bee, valedictorians, etc. Because of this, school spirit surges, and more students are motivated and encouraged by each other. Elective classes were not eliminated to allow for these events; instead, electives were bolstered by surveying students to see what they wanted to learn. As a result, drama, coding, and multimedia classes were developed and immediately offered. A systematic intervention program was implemented, coupled with online individualized learning opportunities, to improve basic skills and to also challenge advanced students. Individualized learning drives our lesson planning, scheduling, and our purpose as a small, community school that always puts the students first.