

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

Official School Name Pender High School and Pender Elementary School
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 609 Whitney Street
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Pender State NE Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 68047-5036

County Thurston

Telephone (402) 385-3244 Fax (402) 385-3342

Web site/URL https://www.penderschools.org E-mail keballi1@penderschools.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* Dr. Jason Dolliver E-mail jadolli1@penderschools.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Pender Public Schools Tel. (402) 385-3244

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

Date _____

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board
President/Chairperson Mr Matthew Peters
(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)
 - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 1 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 3 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	54
K	27
1	22
2	24
3	39
4	31
5	30
6	34
7	29
8	39
9	25
10	25
11	26
12 or higher	38
Total Students	443

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

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 1.6 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 0.7 % Asian
 - 0.2 % Black or African American
 - 9 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 85.1 % White
 - 3.4 % Two or more races
 - 100 % Total**

(Only these seven standard categories should be used to report the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.)

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2021 - 2022 school year: 5%

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

NA

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	15
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2021 until the end of the 2021-2022 school year	4
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	19
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2021	417
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.05
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	5

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

Spanish

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 2 %

7 Total number ELL

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

Total number students who qualify: 193

8. Students receiving special education services with an IEP: 16 %
Total number of students served 73

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>6</u> Autism	<u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities
<u>0</u> Deafness	<u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment
<u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness	<u>11</u> Other Health Impaired
<u>4</u> Developmental Delay	<u>32</u> Specific Learning Disability
<u>1</u> Emotional Disturbance	<u>18</u> Speech or Language Impairment
<u>0</u> Hearing Impairment	<u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury
<u>1</u> Intellectual Disability	<u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness

9. Students receiving special education services with a 504: 0 %
Total number of students served: 0

10. Number of years the principal has been in the position at this school: 14

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	3
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	31
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	6
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.	6

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 14:1

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	95%	94%	96%	94%	96%
High school graduation rate	100%	100%	94%	100%	100%

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	19
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	68%
Enrolled in a community college	21%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	11%
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 X No

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award. 2017

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

To provide quality educational opportunities in a safe, positive learning environment that motivates and challenges all students to become productive and responsible citizens.

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

https://core-docs.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/asset/uploaded_file/214/District/2805906/1200-Anti-Discrimination.pdf

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

NA

PART III – SCHOOL OVERVIEW

Pender Public Schools (PPS) is a P-12 school district serving approximately 443 students this school year. The school serves residents of Pender and Thurston as well as the rural areas surrounding those two communities. The community of Pender has a population of approximately 1000 people and is in Thurston County in Northeast Nebraska. The district is rural in nature and relies heavily on a successful agricultural economy. The community boasts a diverse business district with a mix of professional and retail businesses as well as a new critical access hospital, medical clinic, rehabilitation/living center, and an assisted living facility. The students and families served are primarily traditional in nature, with average to low-average income.

The district's student population is minimally diverse with low mobility and high attendance rates. PPS's enrollment trend is unlike many rural districts in Nebraska and across the country. The K-12 enrollment is as high as it has been since the 2004-2005 school year. The birth to age 4 census data indicate strong numbers for the future. The enrollment trends are strong, and that is a promising sign for our small rural district.

PPS continues to be in a strong financial position, which has been the case for several years. The financial condition, however, is going to potentially be challenged in the years ahead. Fortunately, those individuals responsible for the governance of PPS have worked tirelessly in planning for the future, in the event that financial challenges present themselves.

The history of the school is rich with tradition. The school was built in 1922 with additions in 1949, 1961, and 1975. Construction of the K-6 building, gymnasium, multi-purpose room, and secondary science rooms occurred in 2001. The Nebraska Department of Education has accredited Pender Public Schools since 1917. In the 2019-2020 school year, the district worked through the Cognia accreditation process. A Cognia external accreditation visit was conducted in Pender in October 2020, resulting in a recommendation to continue to fully accredit the district.

One unique feature of the school district is its mascot. Pender is the only school in Nebraska and possibly the United States that is proud to call its mascot the Pendragon. The Pendragon name is not just a simple combination of Pender and Dragon. The Pendragon comes from medieval times when dragons were the leaders of clans. The most powerful dragons were called Pendragons.

Pender is classified as a C-2 high school by the Nebraska School Activities Association and is a member of the East Husker Conference from which competitive events are provided for students.

The mission of the Pender Public School District is to provide quality educational opportunities in a safe, positive learning environment that motivates and challenges all students to become productive and responsible citizens. The district features high-quality educational and extra-curricular facilities that more than meet the needs of its students and its patrons. Led by an excellent certified and classified staff of 65 people, the school district provides educational opportunities that will lead students down the path to success.

One of the outcomes of the aforementioned accreditation process was the creation of a slogan. PPS has had a mission statement for quite some time. A more succinct and recognizable phrase was needed, however. After a process that included staff, students, and patrons, "It's a Great Day to be a Pendragon" was adopted as the District's slogan.

Several key strategies are in place within the district to help students reach their maximum potential. The district is a proud member of the TeamMates mentoring program. The goal of TeamMates is to positively impact the world by inspiring youth to reach their full potential through mentoring. The district staffs a Beyond the Bell afterschool program, which is free of charge to parents. Students who attend receive a snack, help with homework, and participate in planned activities until their parents arrive. The district also partners with the local ministerium to provide backpacks of food each weekend for any family who may be in need. PPS has a school-wide title program as well as a top-notch special education program to help meet

the diverse needs of all of our learners. We have also recently added professional mental health and counseling services available for our students without leaving the building. Guidance and nursing programs round out a broad range of services provided to reach all students.

PPS continues its focus on PRIDE, which is an acronym for Preparation, Respect, Integrity, Determination, and Excellence. PRIDE is a P-12 initiative that began in the 2014-15 school year. Elementary students have PRIDE assemblies one time per quarter to recognize positive behavior, classroom success, and more. P-12 students are awarded PRIDE t-shirts when they are caught doing the right thing. Our community, parents, and students embrace our focus on PRIDE and are active participants in this district initiative.

Finally, as a previous recipient of the National Blue Ribbon School award, we would be so honored to receive this award again. Our previous recognition validated the hard work and dedication of our staff. Their jobs are hard...what we do is hard! The award provided so much motivation to all of us to continue plugging away. When we discussed this question as a staff we all said our National Blue Ribbon Schools Award was a driving force in our culture of excellence. It was a springboard to keep growing, learning, and pushing to do our best with PRIDE!

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

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

The reading/language arts curriculum was locally developed. Its foundation is found in the Nebraska State Standards with a rich blend of local input and influence as well. We feel the state and local standards together create a well-rounded English/Language Arts curriculum. We have implemented a standards-based grading system K-6 that gives students, teachers, and parents great feedback regarding proficiency and performance on the established standards. 7-12 grade teachers utilize common grading practices when providing feedback to students and parents. Pender High School meets these curricular standards with grade level ELA classes 7-12, a beginning speech class, and a dual credit English Composition course. They utilize a MacMillan/McGraw Hill series for general ELA programming. Formative and summative assessments are created and graded by classroom teachers. The materials used by Pender Elementary to meet curricular standards are two-fold. First, the core reading series, and second, our guided reading program. The core reading series used is the MacMillan/McGraw Hill Journeys Reading Series. Journeys is a research-based, comprehensive K-6 reading program. Priority skills include differentiated instructional resources in the areas of comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, grammar, phonics, spelling, and writing. There are a variety of assessments included that measure the priority areas of the program. Our core program is supplemented strongly by our Guided Reading program. Guided reading is one component of the shared reading block during which the teacher provides support for small, flexible groups of readers. The teacher helps students learn to use reading strategies, such as context clues, letter and sound knowledge, and syntax or word structure, as they read a text or book that is unfamiliar to them. The goal of guided reading is for students to use these strategies independently on their way to becoming fluent, skilled readers. Guided reading also incorporates the use of The Daily 5 (Read to Self, Read to Someone, Word Work, Work on Writing, Listen to Reading) in every lesson. The Daily 5 holds the literacy block together. It allows students to do meaningful work independently while the teacher is working with small groups. The Daily 5 helps build learning stamina and independence. At the 4th, 5th, and 6th-grade levels, there is also an increased focus on writing. We implemented a 40-minute block of writing instruction daily for all 4th, 5th, and 6th graders. This allows us to focus on the writing skills necessary to be successful, not only on assessments but as students enter junior high and high school as well.

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

Our locally developed math curriculum is centered around both local and state standards. Our standards-based grading system K-6 gives students, teachers, and parents great feedback regarding proficiency and performance on the established standards. 7-12 grade teachers utilize common grading practices when providing feedback to students and parents. Pender High School meets curricular standards with grade-level math classes, tech/business math, and dual credit stats/college trigonometry. They utilize a MacMillan/McGraw Hill series for math programming. Formative and summative assessments are created and graded by classroom teachers. The materials used by Pender Elementary to meet curricular standards come from the Saxon math program. The Saxon Math curriculum has an incremental structure that distributes content throughout the year. This integrated and connected approach provides deep, long-term mastery of the content and skills associated with local mathematics standards. No matter how well students initially learn a concept, if they are not able to retain their learning, connect it to other concepts, and apply it in problem-solving situations, they have not reached mastery. Saxon Math is designed to support the long-term mastery and applications that will make a difference during testing and in students' future education and careers. We found that this incremental approach enhances overall comprehension and skill development. In the same way that our Guided Reading program meets the individual needs of learners with small, flexible groupings we do something similar in the area of math as well. Currently, these groupings occur only in grade-level bands, but we hope to expand that philosophy to a lower/upper elementary grouping as well. Mathematics skills are integrated into morning meetings and study time throughout the day. This philosophy also helps with skill retention and content readiness. Students are set

up for success on assessments as well as being exceptionally prepared for entry into junior high and high school.

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

In the last revision process, the Nebraska State Science Standards took a major shift. The standards now reflect three dimensions of science learning including a disciplinary core idea, a crosscutting concept, and a science and engineering practice. We spent a tremendous amount of time unpacking and understanding how to best implement the standards with our students. Pender High School meets these curricular standards with grade-level science classes, general science, and dual-credit biology. They utilize a MacMillan/McGraw Hill series for science programming. Formative and summative assessments are created and graded by classroom teachers. The materials used by Pender Elementary to meet curricular standards come from the Inspire Science program. Inspire Science is a comprehensive elementary science program. The print, hands-on, and digital curriculum provide options for all students in any learning environment (home or school, traditional or paperless) and align with the Framework for K–12 Science Education/Next Generation Science Standards. We believe, even at the elementary level, in a STEM focus. Science, technology, engineering, and math together help develop important critical-thinking skills that prepare students for success in future science courses. A science night/science fair is also held in the spring, which culminates with a science show designed to intrigue and excite students about science education.

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

The primary purpose of our social studies instruction is to help our students develop the ability to make informed decisions for the public good. Inquiry learning is a focus in our new Nebraska State Social Studies Standards. We feel our state and local standards combined create a well-rounded social study/civic-learning curriculum. Pender High School meets these curricular standards with grade-level science classes, sociology, and psychology. They utilize a MacMillan/McGraw Hill series for social studies programming. Formative and summative assessments are created and graded by classroom teachers. The materials used by Pender Elementary to meet curricular standards originate from the MacMillan/McGraw Hill Social Studies program. In kindergarten, we focus on living, learning, and working together. First grade focus is on our community and its assets. Second grade spends much of their time talking about what it means to be an American. Third grade centers on the United States and its neighbors. Fourth grade is traditionally Nebraska studies. Fifth grade paints a broader stroke of American History. Sixth grade tackles the history of the World in modern times. Multiple activities over the course of the year focus on civic learning/responsibility. The students lead the charge in a Thanksgiving food drive to stock our local food bank prior to the holidays. Not only do students donate the food but they pack it and deliver it as well. Finally, one important project we handle on a weekly basis is packing food bags for disadvantaged families. Our National Honor Society students donate their time to pack the bags. They have learned a great deal about civic responsibility and giving back to their community through these projects.

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

The 7-12 curriculum at Pender Public Schools plays a significant role in supporting college and career readiness for students. The well-designed curriculum provides students with the knowledge and skills necessary to pursue higher education or enter the workforce directly. Several approaches are used to achieve this, including dual credit courses, college prep classes, Career Technical Education, industry-recognized credentials, and student leadership opportunities.

Dual credit courses, providing both high school and college credit simultaneously, are taken within the high school and online. These courses allow students to earn college credit while still in high school at a reduced cost. Students can take courses in a variety of subjects, including math, science, English, social studies, and career and technical education fields.

PHS college prep classes are designed to prepare students for college-level coursework. These classes provide students with the foundational knowledge and skills necessary to succeed at the next level. They can also help students develop study skills, time management strategies, and critical thinking skills, which are

essential for success in higher education.

Career Technical Education (CTE) programs offer students the opportunity to gain hands-on experience in a variety of career fields, including healthcare, technology, construction, and education. These programs often include coursework, internships, and work-based learning opportunities that provide students with practical skills and college credit opportunities.

Industry-recognized credentials and certifications that demonstrate a student's competency in a particular skill or trade are offered in a variety of areas. These credentials can be earned through CTE programs or apprenticeships and can help students stand out in the job market.

Student leadership, community and civic responsibilities, and work-based learning opportunities all provide students with valuable skills that can help them succeed in college and careers. These experiences teach students how to work collaboratively, communicate effectively, solve problems creatively, and develop leadership skills. They also provide opportunities for students to network with professionals in their chosen fields and gain real-world experience.

The PHS curriculum plays a critical role in preparing students for college and career success. By offering dual credit courses, college prep classes, CTE programs, industry-recognized credentials, and work-based learning opportunities, PPS helps students develop the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve their goals.

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

Our preschool program boasts a strong enrollment each year. The program is organized into nine areas of development and learning. The first four are major areas of child development and learning: Social-Emotional, Physical, Language, and Cognitive. The content learning is organized into the areas of Literacy, Mathematics, Science/Technology, Social Studies, and The Arts. Students in preschool are assessed in these nine areas using Teaching Strategies Gold (Objectives for Development and Learning). Teaching Strategies Gold is an authentic, observational assessment system for children from birth through kindergarten. It is designed to get to know what children know and can do, and their strengths, needs, and interests. The Teaching Strategies Gold assessments are shared with Kindergarten teachers prior to the kindergarten round-up and then again at the end of the school year. This ongoing conversation between preschool and elementary staff provides for a seamless transition between our preschool and elementary programming. Our preschool teacher is also well versed in Nebraska State Standards and works toward them when it is developmentally appropriate. Having a preschool in our K-12 building has provided so many opportunities for our youngest children. They become accustomed to their surroundings, are introduced to their future teachers, and naturally, prepare for entrance into the K-12 world. There are obvious, notable benefits of early education on school readiness including but not limited to socialization, language development, cognitive growth, and fine/gross motor improvements. The long-term success of students who attend preschool is also noted.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

2a. Arts (visual and/or performing)

All K-12 students participate in a visual arts curriculum. Our K-6 students all have an art class once a week. The course supports the acquisition of skills through purposeful exposure to a wide variety of media and methods. Kids are encouraged to work on projects that are meaningful as well as challenging to them. 7th and 8th grade students participate in exploratory art. 9th-12th grade students have a variety of art courses available to them.

All K-12 students participate in a vocal music education curriculum. Our K-6 students all attend a vocal music class twice a week. The course supports the acquisition of skills through classroom work and

performance-based learning. They incorporate dance, rhythm, and percussion into their learning as well. Opportunities for additional learning are supported through an elementary honor choir held during our after-school program. This program is open to all students in grades 4-6. 7th and 8th grade students participate in exploratory vocal music. 9th-12th grade students are eligible to participate in choir.

All 4-12 students can participate in an instrumental music education curriculum. We have approximately 90% participation in elementary band. The course supports the acquisition of skills through exposure to a wide variety of instruments prior to students selecting their instrument of choice. There is a strong focus on individual lessons and learning as well as group performance. Opportunities for additional learning are supported through private lessons held during our after-school program. 7-12 students are eligible to participate in concert band, pep band, and jazz band.

2b. Physical education/health/nutrition

All P-12 students participate in a Physical Education, Health, and Nutrition curriculum. Our K-6 students all attend a physical education class twice a week. Our 7th and 8th grade students attend a physical education course every day. The course supports the acquisition of skills through a variety of developmentally appropriate learning experiences. Students learn recreational games with individual and team-based focus. They also learn about health, wellness, and proper nutrition. Our 9th through 12th grade students must participate in one year of physical education and a health course. Numerous other physical education and strength training classes are also available.

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

All 7th and 8th grade students participate in an exploratory foreign language education curriculum. The course supports the acquisition of skills through exposure to the Spanish language, culture, and environment. This is an exposure-based class that hopes to peak the interest of our junior high students. It also promotes knowledge of and tolerance for other cultures and beliefs. Our 9th through 12th grade students have a variety of foreign language options available to them.

2d. Technology/library/media

All K-6 students participate in a technology education curriculum. Our students all attend a technology education class once a week. The course supports the acquisition of skills through exposure to and education regarding numerous forms of technology. Keyboarding education begins early so that students are as proficient as possible. Students are exposed to computers and the programs associated with them. They are also exposed to iPads and learning apps. Technology education and preparing our students for the world they are entering is a high priority for us. Seventh and eighth-grade students participate in an exploratory class that touches on media, library, technology, and study skills. Ninth through twelfth graders have a variety of classes available to them such as web design and yearbook. Our eleventh and twelfth graders also have a Computer Science course that is dual credit. All K-3 students participate in a Library education curriculum. Our K-3 students all go to the library once a week. They learn about how the library works, and how to check out materials and items available in the library. The course supports the acquisition of skills through multiple opportunities to check out books, use reference materials, and research topics of interest.

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

All K-6 students are fortunate enough to meet weekly with our school counselor. All students attend a guidance class one time per week. The course which utilizes the Second Step Program supports the acquisition of skills through a focus on character education, career/college exploration, and review of appropriate ways to deal with feelings. These skills play an extremely important role in the well-being and emotional growth of our students. We utilize Circle of Friends groups as well as a variety of Lunch Bunch leaders. We also have Heartland Counseling available in the building for those students with mental health needs.

One additional program we offer our 7-12 students is the Pathways 2 Tomorrow program. The Pathways 2 Tomorrow program is a consortium consisting of eight school districts that pool their resources together to provide hands-on, career, and technical education for students. P2T (Pathways 2 Tomorrow), has developed an intentional and supportive education model that delivers robust career education to its students. This model includes appropriately assessing student strengths and career interests through the use of a variety of assessment tools. This information is gathered and used, by both students and staff, to advise students on meaningful course selections and completions of programs of study. It is our goal to provide highly skilled students that can transition seamlessly from high school to college, technical school, or the workforce with the certification needed to meet community and industry demands. P2T consists of five pathways: Building Construction, Welding, Health Science, Education, and Computer Science. The students also have the option to enroll in classes to earn their Commercial Driving License (CDL). All the programs offered by P2T are aligned to ensure transferability to all Nebraska public post-secondary institutions. P2T agrees with the Nebraska State Board of Education that a career-ready person capitalizes on personal strengths, talents, education, and experiences to bring value to the workplace and the community through his/her performance, skills, diligence, ethics, and responsible behavior.

3. Academic Supports

3a. Students performing below grade level:

Pender Public Schools provides our K-6 students with a three-tiered approach to reading and math instruction. In reading, classroom teachers provide high-quality classroom instruction using the Journeys Core Reading Series and leveled group instruction in Guided Reading, which allows teachers to differentiate instruction based on student needs. The teachers provide age-appropriate explicit instruction using the five components of reading; phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. In math, instruction has an incremental structure that distributes content throughout the year. This integrated and connected approach provides deep, long-term mastery of the content and skills associated with local mathematics standards. In the same way that our Guided Reading program meets the individual needs of learners with small, flexible groupings, our grade band grouping used with the Saxon Math series differentiates learning as well.

Within the first few weeks of the school year, our RtI (Response to Intervention)/MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Support) team evaluates students using three benchmark systems: MAPS (Measures of Academic Progress) or NSCAS (Nebraska Student-Centered Assessment System), AIMSweb, and the Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System. This is done to determine students' abilities and make programming decisions. This data is also used to provide classroom teachers with reading levels to establish differentiated Guided Reading Groups. Following benchmark completion, our RtI/MTSS Team spends a day triangulating data to determine the appropriate services for students. We address those students needing targeted and/or intensive interventions and identify those students who will be recommended for our High Ability Learners program.

MAPs testing and AIMSweb testing take place in the fall, winter, and spring. During each assessment window, our RtI/MTSS Team meets to review new data and compare testing data to classroom performance. Intervention groups are recalculated and reviewed at this time. The results from these assessments provide significant, ongoing data used to support educational decision-making and instruction throughout the year.

Classroom teachers provide Tier I interventions as needed and monitor student progress in core curricular areas to determine effectiveness. Students in need of additional Tier II interventions will receive them in the least restrictive environment using the appropriate research-based interventions. Examples of such interventions are as follows: Florida Center for Reading Research (FCRR), Level Literacy Interventions (LLI), Sound Partners, and Orton Gillingham Interventions. The classroom teacher, the interventionist, and the assessment team monitor student progress. The AIMSweb system progress-monitoring component is used for this purpose.

Pender Public Schools has purposely developed a 30 to 60-minute block of intervention and enrichment time for each grade level K-6. During this intervention block, a majority of our necessary interventions are

delivered. This time typically follows our Guided Reading block. Interventions are delivered by our interventionists, classroom teachers, and paraprofessionals. The intervention teacher and paraprofessionals provide the lower elementary interventions in the classroom while the rest of the students have Guided Reading and Daily 5 Stations.

Student growth rates and levels of performance are reviewed and analyzed carefully following progress monitoring sessions. Consideration of progress monitoring data, classroom performance data, intervention accuracy, and professional judgment will be used to determine the effectiveness of the intervention. Following at least six data points, decisions are made to maintain the program, change the program, or discontinue the intervention. If a student is discontinued from their intervention program, they will still receive progress monitoring to ensure the student is successful without the additional support.

Students showing insufficient improvement based on the established growth rate may be referred to the SAT (Student Assistance Team) and/or referred for Special Education assessment. Our Special Education programs are definitely a strength of our district. Two multi-categorical classrooms serve our PK-6 students needing Tier III interventions. We also have recently established our own Autism program (The Pendragon Academy) to serve students with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

We continue to be pleased with overall student performance district-wide. Subgroup performance on assessments is monitored closely and gaps are addressed each year during our data retreat. While our gaps are not great, we do continue to be vigilant in addressing subgroup needs as part of our school improvement plan and goals. Our data retreat conversation also allows us to address what is working so that we can continue to maintain high levels of achievement and success.

Our 7-12 students are placed in multigrade advisory groups each year. Students stay with the same advisor from 7th grade through their senior year in high school. Advisors carefully monitor students' academic performance as well as their social-emotional well-being. Struggling students are referred to the high school SAT team by their advisors. The High School SAT team monitors student grades and missing assignments. The Secondary SAT team coordinator is given an extra planning period to monitor and meet with students struggling in classes. Secondary students can also be placed in a SAT study hall with the SAT coordinator during the final period of the day.

3b. Students performing above grade level:

After our Fall and Winter benchmarking periods, our RtI (Response to Intervention)/MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Support) team evaluates students using three systems: MAPS (Measures of Academic Progress), AIMSweb, and the Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System. This is done to determine students' abilities and make programming decisions. Following benchmark completion, our RtI/MTSS Team spends a day triangulating data to determine the appropriate services for students. This is how we identify those students who will be recommended for our High Ability Learners program.

Our K-6 High Ability Learners program meets twice a week after school. Parent permission is obtained for participation. We try to focus on problem-solving and critical-thinking skills. This is done in a variety of ways including technology, book studies, high-level board games, and group challenges. We try to vary the content each year to continue to interest and challenge our students.

At the JH and HS levels, students are challenged with increasing course difficulty, online learning, and specialized projects/assignments. Our 7-12 students can also be moved out of regular grade class assignments to classes that are more appropriate and challenging for them. Online learning options provide additional challenges as well as college credit courses.

3c. Students with disabilities:

Students showing insufficient improvement based on the established growth rate may be referred to the SAT (Student Assistance Team) and/or referred for Special Education assessment. Our Special Education programs are definitely a strength of our district. Two multi-categorical classrooms serve our PK-6 students

needing Tier III interventions. Another classroom serves our 7-12 students. These programs utilize strong, scientifically based core programs, interventions, and assessments. We also have an established Autism program (The Pendragon Academy) to serve our students with Autism Spectrum Disorders. We contract with other local districts in need of this service as well.

3d. English Language Learners:

Our English Language Learners program has traditionally been small in nature. We have had very few students and they did not require substantial service. That is definitely something that has changed and continues to evolve each year. Our program is growing and we are having to grow with it. Last school year we added five non-English speaking students (4 of them high school students) in about two weeks. We have employed the help of our local ESU as well as our Title III consortium to help us best serve these students. On-going, strategic staff development has been provided for teachers and paraprofessionals. Training regarding best practices when teaching ELL students has also been included. We have integrated them into the classrooms as much as possible while continuing to provide opportunities for them to grow in the English language as well. Differentiated curricular options have also been made available. We have two interpreters in the building that help us provide the best possible education for our students. Our ELPA testing and NSCAS testing indicate we are making progress, but we are constantly looking for ways to better service our ELL population.

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

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

Pender Public Schools works very hard to engage and motivate students. Engaged, motivated students make things happen. They learn at higher levels and attack new skills with vigor. We have several initiatives that we turn to in this regard.

Pendragon PRIDE is a school-wide initiative designed to promote the skills we want to see most from our students. PRIDE is an acronym that stands for preparation, respect, integrity, determination, and excellence. We spend a great deal of time teaching the definition of those terms and discussing ways to exhibit those characteristics.

Quarterly PRIDE assemblies showcase students and teachers who have been caught doing the right things (showing PRIDE), honor roll, quarterly birthdays, classroom awards, spelling bee winners, science fair awards, and numerous other things. Our Parent-Teacher organization often uses this time to positively recognize students as well. We often conclude these assemblies with some team-building activities or games.

Other events used to motivate and engage students would be our NSCAS kick-off assembly. We kick off testing season with an assembly put on by the staff to encourage and excite students about the upcoming tests. We encourage them to do their very best. We also remind them about getting extra sleep, eating right, and having a positive attitude. Catchy slogans and songs are often performed and used throughout the testing window.

Social and emotional growth and support can mean different things to different kids. We work very hard to recognize what those individual needs are. Meeting those needs definitely requires a multi-faceted approach. We incorporate a high-ability learners program for grades 3-6. Our TeamMates mentoring chapter has been active for 8 years and is available to our 3-12 graders as well. Our Beyond the Bell after-school program is available to all students K-6 and is free of charge to our parents. All parents P-12 are able to sign their children up at no cost for our Back Pack Food Program. This provides a bag of healthy food and snacks for each student on the weekend. While our list of programs is not complete, we are working hard to meet the needs of all of our students.

Each year we hold a college/career signing day for our high school seniors. Our entire school comes together to recognize and honor the college and career choices of our senior students. It is a very special day capped off by our kindergarteners giving their best advice to their senior friends.

A showcase event that we are very proud of is our NSCAS awards assembly. We recognize students who achieve excellent and elite scores on their NSCAS tests. This event is quite a party, complete with balloons and the red carpet! We turn off the lights, have our very own tunnel walk, and spotlight the students as they are announced. Parents receive special invitations to the event. It is important to us that we create an environment that supports and recognizes academic achievement as well as extra-curricular activities.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Involving our community and families in the school environment has been a renewed focus at Pender Public Schools. We know that for optimum student engagement, we need to include families. Our community has so many strengths and our people have so many gifts; we hope to utilize them as much as possible.

Family-based activities in the school have been very successful for us. We hold multiple events over the course of the school year. Parent participation with their students has been very high.

Back-to-School night is an open house held before school starts. Our booster club serves a light supper for all our parents, students, and community members. This gives students and parents an opportunity to meet

their teachers and drop off their supplies. Community members can buy new Pender attire and see any changes or updates that have been done to the building.

Pendragon Literacy Night is also held in the fall. Our fall sports athletes pair up with elementary students to read between JV and varsity volleyball games. We usually have a theme for this event such as “Read in your PJs” or “Red Out to Read”. We invite the opponents and their elementary students to participate as well.

Science Night is held in March. Older students participate in a Science Fair contest with projects and judging. Younger students and parents are treated to a wild and crazy science show put on by a local college professor. The night always includes a meal and snacks for participants. This year we are hosting an entire day of science in honor of a local science teacher.

Read Across America is an annual celebration at Pender Elementary. We celebrate the birthday of Dr. Seuss with all sorts of fun activities including a community read-in. Local community members that our students recognize are invited to come and read to our students. This has included our ministers, doctors, postal workers, coaches, hair stylists, therapists, and alumni. Our parent-teacher organization gives each of our students a book of choice.

All of our parent/community events always include an education component. We provide parents with strategies for improving learning at home. We also try to give them information about additional resources available to parents and students in need.

Parents and local community members play a vital role in our school leadership and support systems. Their involvement in school improvement processes, Title One team, and various committees is vital. We have several support organizations that are comprised of community members/parents including the Pender Booster Club, Pender Music Boosters, and our Parent-Teacher Organization.

We have a very good relationship with Wayne State College in Wayne, Nebraska. WSC is our closest post-secondary partner. We host many clinical students, practicum students, and student teachers each year. We know this practice is helping better our future educators.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

Pender Public School works very hard to create an environment in which teachers feel valued and cared for. Teachers who feel valued and cared for make students feel valued and cared for. Creating an environment where teachers feel supported is paramount to our success. Like anyone in any profession, knowing that what you do is appreciated and valued makes all the difference. Our district-wide policies and procedures reflect this thinking, as do our day-to-day staff development activities. Celebrating Teacher Appreciation Week and American Education week are also very important to us. Listening to teachers' concerns, opinions, and being present for them on a daily basis may be the most important thing we can do.

The professional development approach of Pender Public Schools is twofold. First, we ask that all professional development be related to current school improvement goals. Secondly, professional development should be in a content area/area of need for the teacher. We feel this approach helps us streamline and focus on the vast array of staff development opportunities available to us. This professional development is also outlined early in the year via our teacher evaluation system.

Our school-based staff development topics are planned prior to the school year. There is always room for flexibility and change as needed. Additional staff development opportunities are available at our local educational service unit. Our staff and administration often take advantage of these ESU#1 opportunities. Another resource for staff development is our closest higher education partner, Wayne State College.

School-based staff development focuses on areas of need for that school year. An early centerpiece of our staff development is always examining multiple sources of student data from the previous year to change and guide further instruction. Keeping apprised of student data and performance is the basis for what we do.

Creating and improving our district's instructional language has been a major undertaking during our staff development time. It ties directly to our teacher evaluation system and provides direct, specific feedback to our staff. Their input and involvement in this process has been integral.

The elementary staff has been very involved in LETRS/Science of Reading training this school year. LETRS is a professional learning course for instructors of reading, spelling, and related language skills. It provides educators with in-depth knowledge and tools that they can use with any reading program. The training we are undertaking is a two-year project in conjunction with ESU #1.

4. School Leadership:

Pender Public Schools is driven by the District's mission, which reads, "The mission of the Pender Public School District is to provide quality educational opportunities in a safe, positive learning environment that motivates and challenges all students to become productive and responsible citizens." The elements of this mission statement are expanded upon when articulating the leadership philosophy.

School leaders strive to maximize the potential of each and every student. This can be done by knowing and understanding that all students have a unique set of needs and doing everything possible to meet those needs. It is also important for leadership to ensure students are provided with high-quality programs, opportunities, and resources that serve as the foundation for their educational experience and lifelong success.

A positive learning environment that encourages students to be lifelong learners is yet another essential component of the leadership philosophy. High expectations are set and students are held accountable when those expectations are not met because school leaders believe students are capable of hitting any target they are challenged to hit. It is also essential for diversity to be embraced and serve as an enhancement to the learning process. In other words, an environment that encourages and expects respect amongst and between students, staff, family members, and district patrons is essential.

These philosophies can only become a reality with an appropriate leadership structure. Pender Public Schools believes in a team concept. We believe that we are only able to reach our potential as a District if a collaborative effort exists between students, staff, family members, and district patrons. For obvious reasons, a typical organizational structure or chain of command exists. Our superintendent actively leads our district, especially in the areas of finance and policy. District principals are responsible for curriculum implementation and teacher/paraprofessional evaluation. A teacher leadership committee provides a valuable perspective when moving district initiatives forward. An open-door policy with all staff creates an environment in which everyone feels heard. Input from all stakeholders is consistently requested and utilized to improve educational opportunities for students.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

Being a culturally responsive school district, leader, and teacher is something we are all charged with. Our diversity is minimal in comparison to our peers, however, ensuring equity and awareness is still something we take very seriously. Being on the Omaha Indian Reservation, we do have a large Native American population in our area and several Native American students in our district. We have been extremely fortunate to be a part of Educational Service Unit #2's Cultural Connections Grant. The purpose and expected outcomes for the project are to develop a service plan of culturally relevant student opportunities, supports, and educational choice through the implementation of a Native American parent advisory, improve cultural awareness and culturally appropriate support for Native American students in project districts, improve access to culturally relevant and appropriate teaching, learning, and reading materials in all project districts and decrease double-digit deficits in reading and math between Native American students and their same-grade peers to reflect the district average by the end of the five years. The service area for this grant is Northeast Nebraska including the districts of Bancroft-Rosalie, Emerson-Hubbard, Homer, Lyons-Decatur, Oakland-Craig, Pender, and Tekamah-Herman. The grant has served our Native American students in a variety of capacities. It has also provided our school as a whole the opportunity to host the Many Moccasins

dance troupe as part of a cultural awareness activity. It has been such a pleasure to bring greater awareness of the Native American culture to our students.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR EXCELLENCE

Pender Public Schools has a variety of programs that make us successful. Our PRIDE program, a strong core curriculum, and our dynamic MTSS process make a huge difference for our students. However, if we had to name one thing that makes the biggest difference for us, it's relationships. Over the last five years, the school's biggest focus has been on the establishment of positive relationships between teachers and students. This focus has been the key component in the school's academic success.

Because of these positive relationships, PPS students feel more engaged, motivated, and connected to their learning environment. PPS students feel connected to their teachers, they participate in class discussions, consistently ask questions, and are able to take risks in their learning. This type of engagement and motivation leads to higher levels of academic success PPS consistently achieves.

The building of these strong relationships has improved communication between teachers, students, and parents. Pender students feel comfortable talking to their teachers and are more likely to ask for help when they need it. Parents feel free to reach out to teachers and know that there will be a positive interaction. This has led to a better understanding of expectations, material taught, and academic outcomes.

The relationships that PPS teachers and administrators have built have led to more personalized instruction at all levels. Teachers at the elementary and secondary levels are better able to understand the strengths, weaknesses, and learning styles of all students. This understanding allows PPS teachers to personalize instruction to meet the needs of each individual student at their learning level. Personalized instruction has led to more effective instruction, which again, results in greater academic success.

Most importantly, each Pender student has a sense of belonging. Pender students feel connected to their teachers and feel like they belong in the classroom. This sense of belonging leads to increased engagement, motivation, and academic success. Pender Public Schools is a family, and every student knows they have a place in our building.

The positive relationships between teachers, students, and parents are paramount to our academic success. Students feel engaged, connected to their teacher, and invested in their learning. Elementary and secondary teachers prioritize building positive relationships with their students to create a classroom environment that supports student learning. This is why each student knows It's a Great Day to be a Pendragon!