

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

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

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

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

School Mailing Address 12 Hilltop Road
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Mendham State NJ Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 07945-1215

County Morris County

Telephone (973) 543-4251 Fax (973) 543-2805

Web site/URL
<https://www.mendhamboro.org/o/hilltop-elementary-school> E-mail htblueribbon@mendhamboroschools.org

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

(Principal's Signature) Date _____

Name of Superintendent* Dr. Mitzi Morillo E-mail morillo@mendhamboroschools.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Mendham Borough Tel. (973) 543-4251

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

(Superintendent's Signature) Date _____

Name of School Board
President/Chairperson Ms. Catalina Wolfmeyer
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

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

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

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

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

PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION

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
0 High schools
0 K-12 schools
- 2 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	26
K	52
1	42
2	51
3	43
4	48
5	0
6	0
7	0
8	0
9	0
10	0
11	0
12 or higher	0
Total Students	262

*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):
- 0.5 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 2 % Asian
 - 1 % Black or African American
 - 6 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0.5 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 84 % White
 - 6 % 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:

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	9
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2021 until the end of the 2021-2022 school year	3
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	12
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2021	248
(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, Arabic, French

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 2 %

Total number students who qualify: 4

8. Students receiving special education services with an IEP: 13 %
Total number of students served 34

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>1</u> Autism	<u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities
<u>0</u> Deafness	<u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment
<u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness	<u>2</u> Other Health Impaired
<u>0</u> Developmental Delay	<u>16</u> Specific Learning Disability
<u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance	<u>8</u> Speech or Language Impairment
<u>0</u> Hearing Impairment	<u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury
<u>0</u> Intellectual Disability	<u>1</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness

9. Students receiving special education services with a 504: 1 %
Total number of students served: 3

10. Number of years the principal has been in the position at this school: 12

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.	17
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	10
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	6
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	5

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 15:1

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	96%	98%	97%	96%	97%
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.

Hilltop School is a community filled with lifelong learners who strive for personal growth, academic excellence, and act as responsible citizens who contribute to an ever-changing world.

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

<https://www.straussesmay.com/seportal/Public/DistrictPolicy.aspx?policyid=1510&id=d491063cae8a4d2d83724a6e16768c8e>

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

PART III – SCHOOL OVERVIEW

At Hilltop Elementary School, students discover ways to learn as global citizens, support others in our community, and feel good about themselves and their role in a larger community. The child's development begins as students and their families walk through the school's front doors. Families are greeted with a mural depicting many of the historical sites in Mendham. This rich culture has laid the foundation for a community of multi-generational families where many parents were once students at Hilltop. Many families walk their children to school, making the school the town center where parents and their soon-to-be Hilltoppers congregate before and after school. This small-town charm makes the Mendham Borough community special.

This feeling of school community and pride is strengthened daily by empowering our learners. Our 4th graders serve as student ambassadors by leading school-wide morning announcements. Walking into our classrooms, one will see daily classroom meetings that promote a sense of belonging while building their class community. These experiences have become a way of life at Hilltop, where students are heard and are actively engaged in learning, all while building consistent, supportive relationships. With this ideology in mind, Hilltop follows the vision of being a community filled with lifelong learners who strive for personal growth and academic excellence and act as responsible citizens who contribute to an ever-changing world.

The Hilltop community is enhanced with input from many stakeholders. Dedicated team leaders from each grade level and specialty area meet with the principal monthly to discuss planning for annual events, such as our community night and other whole school projects. Throughout the school year, the principal participates in the Parent Council, whose primary objective is fostering dialogue and communication between parents and administration. The group recommends school-wide topics to the administration, exploring ways to enhance learning and school procedures. Principal discussions with students during their morning meetings and lunch provide the student perspective of curriculum, social and emotional well-being, the school environment, and culture.

The Hilltop School community is immersed in a literature-rich environment. From students' first moments in our pre-school through their later elementary years, promoting a love of learning and books is evident in every classroom. Unlocking the power of literature and how stories can help build connections within oneself, the world around us, and others, is a common theme in all content areas.

Books are used to build community and promote dialogue. You can find books in the nurse's office when students visit, in the main office as students await to be picked up or displayed in the hallway. Literacy is the basis of how we teach the pillars of character. Each year character themes such as respect, citizenship, and responsibility are featured in our school-wide book of character, which serves as a focal point for a common language among our teachers and students. Students read, reread, and become familiar with these stories year after year, all while building an understanding and respect for others. Our building-based school counselor teaches monthly class lessons, each time reading stories that will help students synthesize complex concepts, such as empathy and inclusion, in a child-friendly way. In addition, Hilltop's teacher of the Gifted and Talented pulls small groups to build upon lessons from class, making parallels to students' lives through literacy and writing. Beyond the classroom, as part of an ongoing effort for family and community involvement, Hilltop parents are often guests in the classrooms. From visits as mystery readers to our annual poetry reading for parents, Hilltop teachers look for ways to connect parents to their child's learning. Practices such as these are what sets Hilltop apart.

Inscribed on the wall in our school cafeteria is the quote, "We have two hands. One to help ourselves and one to help others." This mural, focusing on developing students' self-awareness as the building block of all other SEL competencies, reminds school community members daily to be their best selves. The themes of volunteerism and maintaining a healthy lifestyle are depicted on the mural, helping to spark a discussion with students about empathy and the importance of community involvement.

At Hilltop, we look for ways to broaden our student's view of the world around them. One such program, Operation Shoebox New Jersey, afforded students at Hilltop School just that. As a school community,

students packed boxes of snacks and toiletries for soldiers to be sent overseas. Students were then updated on their package's arrival and received personal letters from our service members. This early exposure to world perspectives through volunteerism helps students realize that their acts of kindness can have a far-reaching impact.

Hilltop students have opportunities to learn and grow through engaging programs throughout the year. The Home School Association organizes After School Enrichment Clubs with a broad offering. Students may learn Italian from a Hilltop staff member and create their own entrepreneurial business from the ground up with the TREP\$ model, which culminates in a festive marketplace. Our school nurse, who mentors our 4th graders through her grassroots program, Helping Hands, provides additional leadership opportunities. This in-school service project instills a sense of belonging and purpose. Hilltop's Helping Hands allows students to develop their passion for service by restocking classroom first aid kits and creating bulletin boards that promote well-being. Engagement from every member of our school community helps create balanced learners.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

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

The literacy curriculum at Hilltop Elementary School is a comprehensive content-focused curriculum engaging students with worldly topics, tasks, and authentic, complex texts aligning with the New Jersey Student Learning Standards. Our curricular approach was chosen because it addresses the five essential components of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension). It focuses on the three shifts in the common core standards, balancing informational and literary texts, building content knowledge, and text complexity.

The kindergarten through fourth-grade literacy curriculum is structured with two sixty-minute blocks. The skills block focuses on mastering phonemic awareness and phonics-based skills in kindergarten through second grade. The teachers deliver a fifteen-minute class lesson of explicit phonics instruction. Then, students transition into independent work. They apply their skill knowledge through differentiated centers with multisensory activities to accommodate all learning styles. The teachers address the students' individual phonics skill needs during center time. The goal is for the students to build their accuracy, automaticity, and fluency of the words embedded in Linnea Ehri's four phases of reading and spelling. Student groups are formed based on formal and informal assessments that are ongoing. These assessments include student work, student participation in whole class and small group instruction, and results from the weekly decoding and encoding assessments. Teachers use a decoding and encoding benchmark assessment three times yearly to measure student growth and drive small-group instruction. The equivalent block is called All Block or Additional Language and Literacy Block in grades three and four. The skills taught during the All Block are complementary to the module block. During this time, the students work independently through centers focusing on building independent reading stamina, tasks related to word study or vocabulary, reading and speaking fluency, grammar, usage, mechanics, or writing. While the students work independently, teachers work with small differentiated groups, either reinforcing what was taught in the module lesson or reviewing student work from Module or ALL Block. A checklist to monitor student progress during the ALL Block is used daily as an informal assessment.

The second sixty-minute block in kindergarten through fourth grade is called the module block. This block is directed toward explicitly teaching the New Jersey ELA standards using complex texts with compelling topics related to science, social studies, and various types of literature. The unit lessons are structured around the 4 T's, topic, task, target, and text. Students are given direct reading, writing, language, grammar, and vocabulary instruction and learn how to have content-driven peer conversations. There are four modules with three units, each spanned throughout the year. The reading and writing skills increase in rigor as the students transition into each unit and module as the year goes on. The students are assessed at the end of each kindergarten through the second-grade unit. The assessment measures the student's mastery of the reading, writing, or speaking and listening standards.

The performance task after each module serves as tangible evidence of student learning. In grades three and four, each unit has mid-unit and end-of-unit assessments. The data on these assessments drive the teacher-directed center during the ALL block.

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

The mathematics curriculum in kindergarten through fourth grades aligns with the New Jersey Student Learning Standards for Mathematics. Comprised of modules, instruction at each grade level exposes students to content focused on the following areas: expressions and equations, statistics and probability, functions, geometry, numbers, and fractions. Supported by research, students move across modules, and in later grades, they repeatedly revisit concepts, advancing the choice of this curriculum approach.

Daily instruction consists of a sixty-minute lesson at each grade level. Each includes four main components

that vary within and across grade levels. Fluency practice occurs as students skip-count aloud with the teacher, respond to a flash card with a subtraction problem, or answer as many multiplication problems in a certain amount of time. An application problem links to previous lessons and requires students to apply their learning to new and unfamiliar situations, which also helps prepare them for new content. The central portion of the lesson, which includes an introduction to new concepts, often asks students to model their thinking using various tools. And lastly, a debriefing session consists of a whole-group discussion during which students can share their thinking, and the teacher can ascertain student understanding.

Content at each grade level provides a robust learning progression to prepare students to move into middle school and beyond. In kindergarten, students start their mathematical journey by learning to count, working with shapes, making numerical comparisons, and beginning to add and subtract. As they learn to group objects, they understand place value and use tools such as a Rekenrek. First-graders add and subtract up to 100, apply the concept of place value, and develop an understanding that measurements can be represented as numbers. They start using models such as linking cubes, bundles, and drawings. Word problems are included in the significant work of second grade, as are data, money, multiplication, and division. Second graders are also introduced to the Read-Draw-Write process and tape diagrams, used consistently throughout grade four. When students get to third grade, they are exposed to the relationship between arrays, multiplication, and division. They also are introduced to fractions and the necessity of being fact-fluent for addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. Fourth graders expand on multiplication and division while starting to work with fractions. Learning about different kinds of measurement and accompanying units of measure helps students prepare to move into grade five the following year.

Determining the level of student learning is a never-ending process across each grade level. In kindergarten and first grade, teachers assess students daily using classwork, exit tickets, and homework. All of which are paper and pencil. This data assists in creating flexible, small-group instruction that allows the teacher to work with students of varying abilities to provide just-in-time support as they move through the curriculum. Each student has their own Chromebook and access to various online learning tools they can use while the teacher works with small groups.

In grades two through four, we utilize various online assessment tools to assess student learning, including pre-assessments for each module that provide the teacher with information about students' mastery of prerequisite skills. End-of-module assessments show how students progress compared to the standards and the rest of the students. In addition, all students complete grade-level benchmark assessments three times a year. The results of the assessments provide information for the following interventions: recommendations for gifted and talented programs to prioritize students for Tier 2 intervention or after-school support.

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

Science instruction is based on the Next Generation Science Standards and the New Jersey Student Learning Standards for Science. The curriculum at each grade level includes a unit in the following science domains: physical, earth, and life. Each unit explores core ideas and concepts, related science and engineering practices, and crosscutting concepts. This approach was chosen because it aligns with the best practices outlined in A Framework for K-12 Science Education. The scientific inquiry begins with our youngest learners as they observe chicks hatch in their classrooms. It culminates with our fourth graders investigating the connection between water and climate, and local weather. This leads to a seamless link to literacy as students read and write about water issues such as access to water, demands on water, and pollution, and create a public service announcement presenting possible solutions.

Each unit has four investigations during which students learn the content via hands-on explorations. Each study starts with questions linking new learning to prior experiences, allowing students to engage with new material deeply. Students are then introduced to a focus question that drives each part of the investigation. Once complete, students engage in a non-fiction reading that is discussed to strengthen their understanding of each concept by stimulating discussion through critical and creative thinking. Lastly, they use a science notebook to record their experiences. Field trips such as a visit to the Frelinghuysen Arboretum or a presentation from the Hooray for Herpetology program enhance our curriculum.

Assessment in science takes various forms, beginning with formative assessments that occur while students conduct the investigation collaboratively. Additionally, the science notebook entries allow students to record and reflect on their inquiry-based observations while integrating written language with numerical data. Students judge their performance by completing a self-check task which promotes self-directed growth. A posttest is also administered, serving as a summative assessment. Analyzing multiple data points provides students and staff with feedback about learning and teaching, creating the basis for small-group instruction within the classroom.

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

Social studies instruction is aligned with the New Jersey Student Learning Standards. Each grade level, kindergarten through fourth grade, focuses on content such as relationships between students and their world, schools and families, history in the context of the local community, the global community, global awareness, and America's past. A compelling question guides each unit. Although each unit addresses specific grade-level content, it is through the same four disciplinary concepts of history, civics, geography, and economics. Across grade levels, students gather evidence, develop arguments, and take informed action. This approach was chosen because it aligns with the best practices outlined in the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards.

Social studies content at each grade level connects directly to the content in ELA. For example, second graders learn how geography affects their community and how communities differ. In ELA, they read and learn about how schools worldwide are different and how the weather and geographical location make it difficult for children to attend school. Fourth graders explore the arguments for and against colonial independence. In ELA, they read and learn how the revolution divided people and that the American colonists had many different perspectives on fighting for freedom. This unit of study culminates with the highly anticipated Colonial Day events, during which students and staff dress in colonial clothing and participate in a variety of activities emulating the life of early settlers.

Students investigate several essential questions within each unit through a series of modules. Each module contains a variety of activities, including a close read of content and review of vocabulary, a hands-on experience, a formative assessment, and an additional question to answer to further student learning. Teachers also have the opportunity to assess student learning via a summative assessment at the end of each module. This data provides the basis for future lessons, including scaffolding and extension activities.

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

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

The Mendham Borough School District provides high-quality preschool education to children ages three to five. The Hilltop preschool educates special needs and typically developing children in a nurturing environment that allows them to explore their world through art, movement, music, science, math, literacy, dramatic play, outdoor play, and sensory activities related to themes throughout the year. The research-based curriculum for Preschool has as its foundation a focus on social-emotional growth and academic development. Learning objectives are aligned with the New Jersey Teaching and Learning Standards. The preschool curriculum at the Hilltop Elementary School is augmented by a mathematics curriculum that enhances students' foundational skills as they prepare for Kindergarten.

The Hilltop preschool provides special education students with academic interventions and related services, including speech, occupational and physical therapy, and behavioral consultation. These supports work harmoniously to bolster our learners in and out of the classroom. The ultimate goal is to prepare our youngest learners for a smooth transition into the kindergarten program through developmentally appropriate tasks. While each preschool classroom emphasizes the individual child, a constant emphasis on kindergarten readiness exists for every learner. As a school community, our philosophy creates an inclusive environment for our preschoolers as members of the Hilltop School community. The preschoolers at Hilltop

School are part of all aspects of the school community, from related arts classes, cultural assemblies, character education, and social-emotional learning initiatives. All of the above allow our preschoolers to join the Hilltop School community as they embark on a successful elementary school experience.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

2a. Arts (visual and/or performing)

Hilltop Elementary School values the arts, and our comprehensive, diverse, and immersive arts programs indicate this. All related arts classes are offered, on average, two times per week. Art instruction is provided in grades preschool through four. The art curriculum is a sequential, studio production-based program designed to emphasize process and place value on higher levels of thinking that explore visual problem-solving. The learning experiences are aligned with the New Jersey Student Learning Standards and the National Core Arts Standards for creating, performing, responding, and connecting knowledge to personal interests.

Music instruction is provided in kindergarten through four grade and aligns with the New Jersey Student Learning Standards. A strong focus is placed on developing critical listening skills, reading skills, gross and fine motor skills, mathematical skills, vocabulary, and a deepened understanding of history through music. At the end of grade three, students are introduced to various brass, string, and percussion instruments and are encouraged to enroll in our grade four band or orchestra program. This offering allows interested students to explore a specific instrument and continue with the band or orchestra program into their middle school experience.

2b. Physical education/health/nutrition

Comprehensive physical education and health instruction are provided for preschool through grade four students. Engaging lessons enable all students to participate through multiple modalities. Content is linked to and promotes the transfer of learning within physical education units and among other subject content areas. In the health classroom, students learn about the human body, health challenges, and personal health via age-appropriate lessons. Both physical and lifelong fitness is the primary focus in the physical education classroom, as students learn about how their body moves and how they can engage in physical activity. Through various traditional (such as soccer, basketball, and volleyball) and non-traditional sports (such as bocce, frisbee, and cooperative games), students learn to set fitness goals, demonstrate good sportsmanship, and develop healthy habits and lifestyles. All skills, lessons, and activities align with the New Jersey State Learning Standards and promote health literacy.

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

A World Language teacher provides Spanish instruction to grades three and four students. Instruction follows the early introduction of the target language, where the Spanish culture is explored through literacy and the arts. Thematic units cover topics such as greetings, introductions, weather, the calendar, numbers and letters, families, personal and physical traits, and life at school. Students hear, speak, read, and write in the target language. Within each unit, students gain experience utilizing the three modes of communication: two-way oral or written communication (interpersonal), listening to stories, reading brief text excerpts and viewing images in various activities (interpretive), and presenting oral or written information (presentational). Students advance through the American Council Teaching of Foreign Language proficiency levels as they build the foundation for foreign language instruction in middle school and beyond.

2d. Technology/library/media

Our school library and technology programs align with the New Jersey Student Learning Standards for Career Readiness, Life Literacies and Key Skills, and the New Jersey Student Learning Standards for Computer Science and Design Thinking. Our programs also refer to the American Association of School Librarians' Common Beliefs. The school library is a unique and essential part of a learning community

where reading is the core of personal and academic competency. Led by a designated Library Media Specialist, our curriculum requires the acquisition of critical media literacy, information literacy, and digital literacy skills. The library and technology programs provide lessons and authentic learning experiences to ensure students can access, navigate, manage, evaluate, and synthesize media and information. Students are immersed in experiences that foster communication and creativity and ultimately support developing the critical thinking skills necessary for knowledge acquisition. Students apply content knowledge, integrate concepts across disciplines, collaborate, innovate, and participate in ways that prepare them to engage as responsible community members in a digital society and navigate the dynamic digital landscape. Digital citizenship and etiquette are infused throughout library and technology lessons, programs, and academic classrooms.

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

3. Academic Supports

3a. Students performing below grade level:

Hilltop Elementary School recognizes that student needs are diverse and ever-changing. The term diverse learners cover various abilities, learning styles, and backgrounds. All students at Hilltop Elementary School are part of a more extensive Multi-Tiered System of Support. Tier 1 intervention is designed for all learners by providing data-driven instruction for the entire range of students in a classroom. Our teachers plan and adapt instruction based on classroom and specific content-based benchmark assessments.

When a student's needs go beyond the support in the classroom, teachers may work with the Intervention and Referral Services Committee (I&RS) to gather additional resources and support from various school community members. Students may receive additional support via Tier 2 or 3 interventions implemented through the development of formal action plans. The building-based Intervention Specialist may work with identified students either in or out of the classroom while working in collaboration with classroom teachers. Parents are an integral part of the I&RS Committee.

Student data is continually examined when determining if students require tiered support. Hilltop Elementary School recognizes the importance of early intervention. As a result, students considered at risk based on local assessments are brought to the attention of the I&RS team. An example of an intervention that may be deployed in the early grades is strategic multisensory instruction delivered by a certified Dyslexia Specialist.

Should a student's need require greater individualized support, a referral to the Child Study Team (CST) may assist in analyzing the relevant documentation and data specific to interventions utilized in the general education classroom. The CST would decide if further educational testing is necessary. Students needing specialized instruction or related services under special education will have an individual education plan created in collaboration with their parents.

3b. Students performing above grade level:

Hilltop Elementary School recognizes that gifted learners may follow different pathways to meet their learning goals. Therefore, curricular differentiation and academic challenge focused on students' unique interests and ability levels is offered to our most able students. Hilltop has incorporated academic rigor into a thinking and evolving curriculum. Hilltop's Elementary School is committed to providing gifted and talented students enriched learning experiences that progressively deepen their understanding of the core concepts. Throughout their time at Hilltop, every student has the opportunity to showcase their unique learning abilities through enrichment opportunities.

Gifted students benefit from lessons tailored to their academic needs. Working with this target population, the teacher of the Gifted and Talented helps implement instructional strategies designed to make appropriate

curricular adjustments for students above grade level. Through the compacting of curriculum, students are accelerated by replacing the curriculum they have already mastered with more challenging content.

Students within the realm of G&T learn specialized material through research. Students are matched to specific instructional activities through flexible grouping to meet their learning needs. Students' collaborative skills are developed, and students are challenged appropriately with like-minded peers. Sandra Kaplan's Depth and Complexity prompts are integrated within Hilltop's G&T model. These collaborative prompts help inspire critical thinking skills by assisting students to go beyond the surface-level understanding of a concept. Students view new concepts through multiple perspectives, drawing parallels in and among subject areas, noting details, noticing patterns, arguing concepts as a disciplinarian, and determining the convergence of ideas and concepts.

3c. Students with disabilities:

Hilltop Elementary School is an inclusive school providing quality instruction for all students, thus increasing opportunities for differentiated learning and universally designed environments. All students with identified disabilities receive instruction aligned with grade-level standards and work within the general education curriculum. All special education students are fully integrated into the general education classroom. Pull-out services are only provided through related services such as supplemental instruction, speech, language, occupational, and physical therapy. These services range from preschool through fourth grade based on individual student needs.

Adaptations to the curriculum appear in the form of enhancements rather than replacements. These include multisensory reading and supplementary instruction in core content areas during the school day. Hilltop Elementary School prides itself in providing paraprofessionals in the lower grades holding a certified elementary teaching license. These individuals work under the guidance of our special education teachers and board-certified behavior analyst to support students across settings ranging from the academic classroom to related arts. All identified students have individual educational plan goals in conjunction with the core curriculum. Together they support learners in achieving their maximum potential.

Working closely with the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, we support students by providing access to all curricular materials. Walking down the halls, one can find a braille room and staff creating materials.

Special education students are formally evaluated on a triennial basis by the members of the Child Study Team. This frequency may be altered if new information influences programming recommendations for a particular student. In addition to the formal educational and psychological assessments, students partake in the state-mandated assessments alongside their general education peers. Students' IEPs will further mandate whether or not individuals require further modifications to achieve their fullest potential on the given evaluations. Hilltop Elementary School strives to provide special education services in the least restrictive environment. Service delivery models such as consultation and co-teaching services are available as part of the continuum of services.

Acceptance, inclusion, and equity are the pillars that Hilltop Elementary School is proud to represent.

3d. English Language Learners:

English Language Learners (ELLs) are identified via multiple measures when they enroll in our school, including a home language survey and the WIDA Screener. Students needing services receive English Language Services (ELS) in various forms. Instruction can focus on either grade-level content or supporting students' language development, utilizing the WIDA Can Do Descriptors. Push-in and pull-out models are used, depending on the student's needs.

When the teacher joins a class, it can be to work one-on-one with a student or with several in small groups to support learning the content. When students are pulled out of the classroom, the focus can be on language instruction or help to complete a classroom assignment or assessment. All English Language Learners have

a Chromebook, which is used to access a variety of educational tools and to engage in practice learning English. Some students are also provided an iPad to translate conversations with the teacher and others. All ELLs are monitored for progress and assessed yearly for eligibility to continue in the ELS program.

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

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

Engagement of our students begins with ensuring that every student feels a sense of belonging and trust amid varied pathways to success. Student engagement at Hilltop Elementary School has been reinforced this year through our Character Education book of the year, *Pass it On*, by Sophy Henn. Just as in this story, our staff, administrators, teachers, and students recognize and model the power of kindness. To build excitement around daily learning, friendly faces embrace students before entering the building. The first sound of the morning bell brings each cheerful Hilltopper to their feet as the fourth graders recite the Pledge of Allegiance and greet the entire school community. Daily quotes and warm birthday wishes fill the classrooms with smiles. Teachers begin their day with an interactive Morning Meeting based on the Responsive Classroom learning approach to exhibit a positive classroom environment. During this time, support for the social and emotional needs of the students is targeted through community-building activities. Affirmative language and meaningful connections guided by the teacher reinforce a message of inclusivity and belonging.

The concept of “Pass it On” is demonstrated within the classrooms but also throughout the hallways of Hilltop. Murals and bulletin boards are decorated with student work, reflections of our monthly character pillars, and motivational messages which connect our learning adventures directly to the lives of our students and their families. Within the halls, our Helping Hands Committee members can be spotted passing along essential classroom supplies that their younger peers may need. Signs hanging throughout the hallways remind students to compliment another Hilltopper, hold the door, or smile at one another.

Student engagement is further reinforced through our “Buddy Class” Program, in which paired grade levels collaborate on projects that echo our character pillars and celebrate annual recognition days, such as SEL Day and Read Across America. Our school counselor integrates each character pillar into her monthly class lesson and facilitates a unique program at Hilltop called “Lunch Bunch,” where critical developmental topics such as friendship, family dynamics, and being an upstanding citizen are discussed. Our unique culture empowers educational excellence and leads to a high degree of curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that our students portray as they consistently pass on these qualities of success to each other as they move on to middle school and beyond.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

There is a myriad of ways that Hilltop School has worked in partnership with both families and community members for student success and school improvement. The greatest success in working with families is being active in all aspects of school life. Teachers, staff, and administrators greet students and parents daily at drop-off and pick-up. Parent volunteers are invited into our cafeteria, library, and classrooms to lend a helping hand during special events or family participation days. Staff and school administration collaborate with the Home School Association to bring cultural arts assemblies to our school, celebrating cultural differences that promote respect. Families receive timely updates about school events and general news through our school website, social media, and paper-based Friday Folders. The principal sends a weekly Hilltop Highlights Newsletter, celebrating students and teachers at the end of each week. The Hilltop Character Education Committee also sends newsletters to families explaining the monthly character pillar, the books to guide classroom lessons, and supplies families with opportunities to contribute to the school’s character education bulletin board.

Supporting and instilling the importance of community service is evident in the varied activities throughout the year. The Hilltop School community supports local service communities by collecting canned goods for the food pantry, colorful bandages for the children’s hospital, socks for foster children, and pet supplies for the neighboring animal shelter. Each service project is linked to a character trait taught in our school. Students have raised money for Operation Shoebox NJ and engaged in a goods packing event for active military personnel. Our school counselor worked with the local coffee shop to embellish coffee sleeves with positive messages from Hilltop students for the community. In broadening our service outreach, Hilltop

School joined the middle school in creating a district-wide community partnership with the local Morris County chapter, CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children). In working with CASA, the students at Hilltop had multiple opportunities to support children who have experienced abuse or neglect by creating motivational cards with buddy classes, a collection of items for ‘care’ kits, and a walk-a-thon through Mendham in support of raising awareness for the organization. These experiences are mere snapshots that allow for real-life and concrete learning, benefitting our teachers and students, and many people in our community.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

At Hilltop Elementary School, we recognize that student success hinges on teacher knowledge of and confidence in our standards-based curriculum. Our curriculum evolves as the needs of our students continue to grow. To that end, several curricular changes have occurred at Hilltop Elementary School over the past few years. With these changes, teachers receive in-person professional development before the implementation of programs. Following initial support, teachers receive ongoing guidance from the administration, including the superintendent, building principal, content supervisors, curriculum director, and director of special services.

Analysis of student achievement measures and assessment results are the basis of professional conversations that launch each new school year. Teachers work together to analyze student data with one another, and administrative team members create student-specific goals. Utilizing an online platform that houses all of our student assessment data (formal and informal), we track student progress while identifying areas of strengths and opportunities for growth. Monitoring grade-level progress by each standard guides our programmatic recommendations. Teachers develop professional development plans that improve teaching and learning.

Our staff engages in sustained professional learning to refine and expand their practice, and help our students perform at high levels in part through an expanded mentoring program, pursuit of advanced degrees, action research, and sustained opportunities for collaboration.

Examples of high-quality, relevant, and timely professional experiences, both individualized and collaborative, include focused grade-level planning and monthly curriculum meetings, access to advanced technology applications, and use of experts inside (with staff presenting during In-service days) and outside the district. The addition of an Intervention Specialist complements our tiered support services incorporating the four essential components of screening, progress monitoring, data-based decision-making for instruction, movement within the multi-level system, and disability identification (in accordance with state law). Updated District documents have been created to assist staff in understanding and utilizing the process effectively for the benefit of our students.

In addition to having a strong professional culture, Hilltop School values teachers on an individual level. Through our district Staff Wellness Committee, the administration renovated the staff lounge, creating a space for collegial conversations and a welcoming environment in contrast to the traditional teacher workroom. The staff lounge is now a space that promotes physical, mental, and emotional well-being for teachers. One specific example of its use has been the development of theme-based snack bars; organized by a different grade level each month, such as an ice cream bar. All of these contribute to a climate where teachers and staff feel professionally and personally supported.

4. School Leadership:

“If your actions inspire others to dream, learn, do, and become more, you are a leader.” John Quincy Adams

Hilltop Elementary School is unique because it houses district administrators providing faculty, students, and parents real-time access to school and district leadership. Together they are responsible for building a safe and structured educational community while creating a trusting relationship with all stakeholders. Administrators model positive interactions with students, staff, and families alike. Hilltop Elementary School believes in and operates on a collaborative leadership model. The Board approved mentoring plan NBRS 2023

includes mentoring for all new staff to our district regardless of experience or certification status. Every new staff member is assigned a mentor that supports them throughout the year. Administrators collaborate in developing the new teacher orientation, mentoring meetings, and professional development days. The proximity to district administration is one of the cornerstones of the success of Hilltop Elementary School.

The administrators strive to empower teachers to promote their leadership skills. To maximize student achievement, the principal offers horizontal and vertical articulation opportunities during the monthly faculty meeting focused on curriculum progression, instructional strategies, and building achievement goals. Administrators promote the development of teacher-led curriculum initiatives over the summer months as they develop their departmental budgets. These initiatives result from classroom observations, student needs, community stakeholder feedback, or colleagues' direct input. For example, the Literacy Supervisor recently worked with a reading teacher to create a summer professional development seminar for early childhood teachers. Taking care of our faculty and staff is also how we care for our students.

The building principal informs faculty and staff of upcoming weekly events through his Sunday email called the "Monday Minutes." It is a collaborative document where faculty and staff can provide comments. Hilltop Elementary Faculty and Staff look forward to the principal's creative ways to promote positivity and appreciation for his team after every Back to School night. Examples include special treats using candy puns or a positive message on a coaster. Our principal and the entire administrative team's commitment and dedication positively influence our school's culture and reinforce the evident correlation between leadership and learning. During and following the pandemic, the administration role required adapting to the ever-changing needs of Hilltop students and staff. Responsibilities are often shared, and the faculty, students, and parents know they can contact any administrator for support and guidance. It is not unusual to find a member of the administrative team covering a class or serving as an instructional assistant when needed. The principal greets students by name and is visible throughout the day, alongside other administrators visiting classrooms and participating in grade-level meetings. Through our shared educational vision, our collaborative leadership philosophy inspires and motivates Hilltoppers to take risks, persevere, and remain devoted to academic excellence.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

Hilltop Elementary School values diversity and strives to create respectful, culturally aware environments and experiences for our students. Our classrooms, library media center, literary collections, related arts classrooms, school-wide programs, and supplemental learning spaces exemplify these values. Our preschool to fourth-grade classrooms are inclusive of all learners, providing in-class support systems to meet all students' needs. Hilltop educators differentiate instruction and utilize comprehensive language arts, science, and social studies curricula offering global perspectives and opportunities to incorporate various tools, texts, and resources for teaching. Our students develop a growth mindset where they are curious about differences and open to learning new perspectives.

Hilltop Elementary School's comprehensive and immersive arts programs indicate how cultural awareness and diversity are valued. Spanish instruction incorporates communication, culture, connections, comparisons, and communities. The lessons and explorations of our art program focus on introducing and emulating examples from various cultures and artists of different genders, ethnicities, and styles, and students replicate them in their creations. Music classes listen and respond to music from all eras, regions, and genres by a diverse range of composers. Students showcase their unique abilities during Physical Education through active participation in various games, activities, and sports. It is not uncommon to observe multiple adults in a physical education class supporting a student with special needs so that they may participate with general education peers.

Hilltop Elementary School is privileged to have a designated School Library Media Specialist. The librarian curates a collection focusing on representation, diversity, culturally responsive texts, and the needs of our students, educators, and programs. One current district-wide initiative, "You've Been Book'd," is in place, where the school librarian provides diverse and authentic texts to contribute to the classroom collections. Through a partnership with our local library, our annual visits inform our students of the public resources available to promote equitable access. Collaboration with the local Mendham Diversity Committee funds

our school library to bring additional diverse and inclusive texts to our collection.

The Home School Association supports students' learning through its Cultural Arts Committee. This small group of parents works with the principal to vet and book assemblies for our school that promote world cultures. From acrobats from China to Ugandan musicians, and classical Spanish dancers, students at Hilltop are exposed to new cultural experiences in language, dress, music, and more in an engaging way.

We believe in culturally responsive teaching and learning at Hilltop Elementary School because we learn from each other. We welcome new families over the summer and throughout the year as they embark on their child's educational journey. Families requiring translators receive support from the administration, office staff, and faculty. We continually identify and update our list of community resources that may serve the needs of our multilingual students and families. When needed, students are provided with the instructional tools to promote academic success in their home language. Connections with our students and families are paramount to student success at Hilltop Elementary School.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR EXCELLENCE

Understanding the importance of students' social and emotional growth, especially in elementary school, has always been a priority at Hilltop Elementary School. Success in maintaining a positive school and classroom environment begins with building classroom communities where students feel a sense of belonging and trust. The instructional day at Hilltop begins with morning announcements led by our fourth-grade students. In the classrooms, teachers lead meaningful class meetings, where students cheerfully share morning greetings, build bonds of friendship, and promote respectful interactions.

Following the District's mission, Hilltop balances rigorous academics with character development. Building upon our tradition of excellence and service, we foster social-emotional learning (SEL) through academic experiences that provide the balance children need. Our English Language Arts program seamlessly incorporates academics and character education. Through service and citizenship, students learn how to contribute to a better world. Character education is interwoven into academics and embedded in interdisciplinary lessons grounded by objectives that guide students in becoming ethical citizens, where they develop core values such as trust, empathy, and respect.

Cultivating a positive, safe school environment that promotes high levels of connection, engagement, and overall well-being throughout the school community extends beyond our school building. The Hilltop School community aims to make connections to promote citizenship in our community and worldwide. Recently, Hilltop students focused on the character education pillar of generosity. With links through literature and the book "The Perfectly Perfect Wish" by Lisa Mantchev, students were encouraged to think about what wish they wished to give others. As part of our generosity initiative, the Hilltop School community supported the West Morris Junior Women's Virtual Food Drive, donating more than \$3,000 to feed those in need. Global thinking overlapped with responsibility for the earth and the environment for the school as well. Hilltop hosted an outdoor concert by "Bash the Trash," bringing a unique global message of the impact young citizens have on the future of our planet. Students celebrated how they can be change-makers and how one voice in a small New Jersey borough can reverberate worldwide.

Mapping SEL competencies and sub-competencies allows our school to build a cohesive plan ensuring every student has valuable experiences. Learning about the uniqueness and commonalities of global communities will enable them to understand their ability to make a difference near and far.