

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

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

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

Official School Name PS 281, The River School  
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 425 E 35th Street  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City New York State NY Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 10016-3704

County NEW YORK

Telephone (212) 251-6640 Fax (212) 251-6645

Web site/URL <https://ps281.org/> E-mail jorlean@schools.nyc.gov

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\* Mr. Kelly McGuire E-mail kmcguire@schools.nyc.gov  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name NYC Geographic District # 2 - Manhattan Tel. (212) 356-3915

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION**

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

1. All nominated public schools must meet the state's performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
2. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 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

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**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):
- 37 Elementary schools (includes K-8)  
12 Middle/Junior high schools  
0 High schools  
0 K-12 schools
- 49 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	63
K	83
1	68
2	70
3	63
4	56
5	55
6	0
7	0
8	0
9	0
10	0
11	0
12 or higher	0
Total Students	458

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

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 30 % Asian
  - 8 % Black or African American
  - 20 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 36 % 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: 18%

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

The River School has a transient population of students because it is situated near the United Nations and welcomes many families who are employed as diplomats. Given the nature of diplomat assignments in the United States, it is not uncommon for students to arrive or depart The River School at any time throughout the school year.

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

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2021 until the end of the 2021-2022 school year	58
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2021 until the end of the 2021-2022 school year	23
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	81
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2021	458
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.18
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	18

6. Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):  
Albanian, Arabic, Azerbaijani, Cantonese, Croatian, Chinese, Czech, Danish, French, German, Gujarati, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Kashmiri, Kazakh, Korean, Malayalam, Malaysian, Mandarin, Nepali, Portuguese, Polish, Russian Slovak, Spanish, Turkish, Vietnamese, Urdu

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 18 %  
84 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 18 %  
 Total number students who qualify: 83

8. Students receiving special education services with an IEP: 12 %  
Total number of students served 55

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>2</u> Orthopedic Impairment
<u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness	<u>12</u> Other Health Impaired
<u>0</u> Developmental Delay	<u>12</u> Specific Learning Disability
<u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance	<u>22</u> Speech or Language Impairment
<u>1</u> Hearing Impairment	<u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury
<u>0</u> Intellectual Disability	<u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness

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

10. Number of years the principal has been in the position at this school: 9

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	2
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	26
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	9
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	13
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	7

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 19:1

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	93%	96%	95%	95%	96%
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.

To inspire a love of learning in our students, not just about books and numbers, but also about the world around them. We inspire an appreciation of responsible citizenship and to understand and value the social fabric of humanity.

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

<https://ps281.org/?s=mission>

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

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The River School is a prekindergarten through fifth grade elementary school in Manhattan. Our school is in its tenth year and continues to expand our diverse population of students as we welcome migrant students through Project Open Arms. We are located in Midtown East, and draw from the Kips Bay, Murray Hill, and Tudor City neighborhoods. Due to our close proximity to the United Nations, where many of our families work, our school has an extremely diverse community made up of students from over thirty countries with many languages spoken. In addition to our large multi-lingual population, we also have students with special needs in our Integrated Co-Teaching classes. Our staff's commitment, expertise and open mindset are the foundation of student achievement. Our families play an essential role in partnering with us to promote children's positive development and academic performance.

The River School's rigorous curriculum of academics, physical education and the arts teaches students to understand and value the process of what it takes to achieve success. By creating a safe, nurturing environment that honors students' strengths, unique abilities and voices, we strive to support a productive, engaging community of learners. This work of nurturing the hearts and minds of students begins in the classroom. Daily routines and structures are embedded into the learning process which build the foundation of good habits. By providing clear models and practicing skills with the guidance and actionable feedback from teachers, students work toward applying skills and learning objectives independently. We challenge our students to take risks that are productive and suitable to where they are in the learning process. Scaffolds are gradually released as students begin to transfer their knowledge to new learning. We embrace making mistakes as an opportunity to grow as learners, as students learn not only from teachers but from each other. Partnering students homogeneously and heterogeneously allows students to share their ideas, support each other and to gain new perspectives that extend beyond their own thinking. We believe that every day is a new opportunity to learn, grow and extend upon students' background knowledge.

Students' academic and social-emotional success is rooted in attending school every day. At The River School, data is collected and analyzed regularly to closely monitor student performance and attendance. Our crisis and attendance team meets regularly to identify at-risk students. The principal, assistant principal, social worker, instructional coaches, special education coordinator and teachers collaborate regularly to assess students' needs and devise next steps to best support. We partner with families to identify specific ways to support their child at home. To support a culture for learning and growth, school leaders maintain close communication with office staff, kitchen staff, custodians, and school safety agents, ensuring all building operations run smoothly.

Students are held to high expectations through a schoolwide River Ready behavior system that provides teachers and students with a common language for what it looks like and sounds like to be an engaged, prepared and active learner. Our goal is for each child to embrace the education process with confidence, enthusiasm, resilience and respect for all. The River School provides students with the opportunity to enrich their strengths, citizenship and love of learning by creating leadership opportunities inside and outside of the classroom. These opportunities build self-confidence, accountability and responsibility. For example, inside the classroom our students serve as book club leaders, morning monitors, table captains, news reporters, writing workshop student models, and teaching assistants. Outside of the classroom, we utilize second grade attendance monitors to collect and analyze school data and support strong attendance initiatives. A small group of fifth grade students serve as a Kindness Patrol, working closely with the principal to model and reinforce prosocial behavior. Our fourth graders partner with students from our school's co-located Special Education program to build community and support inclusion. Upper grade students volunteer during breakfast to help supervise younger students, reinforcing positive behavior and instructing them on how to recycle.

We partner with local organizations to host enrichment programs and broaden students exposure to the world beyond the classroom. These include programs such as Ballet Tales, integrating literacy into movement, Art Farm, exploring interactions with live animals, LAUNCH coding and robotics, providing students with access to 21st century technology, and Inside Broadway, exposing students to culture through live theatre. Teachers and paraprofessionals share their expertise by leading before and after school



programs including yoga, dance, art club, creative writing, and reader's theater. To build community and language skills, we created a specialized after-school program for our English language learners called BRICK (Building Responsible, Independent and Caring Kids). Our school's Green Team meets weekly and focuses on sustainability through recycling and conservation projects. All programs include celebrations to showcase student learning for River School families.

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

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

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

To support our students in becoming lifelong learners, we strive to create a literacy rich community in which reading, writing, speaking, listening, and critical thinking are integrated into everyday life. Our literacy curriculum is multifaceted, providing our students with access to all reading, writing, and communication skills they will need to be successful throughout their college and career experiences.

As a partner of the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (TCRWP) we implement the units of study to meet our students' needs. We want our students to view themselves as readers and writers, regardless of their English proficiency level. To accomplish this goal, we immerse our students in literacy activities throughout the instructional day to promote a love for reading and writing. Our daily literacy instruction focuses on the essential components of phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, writing, speaking, and listening. Our kindergarten through fifth grade students participate in a daily literacy block which includes a mini-lesson with guided practice, independent practice, and a closing share or reflection to reinforce the lesson objective. Students are provided decodable and leveled texts, as well as high-interest books, to support their literacy development. Students access print and digital text, across a wide variety of genres, to expand their world of learning beyond the classroom walls. Our early childhood classes engage in daily phonics and phonic awareness instruction through Foundations and Heggerty, two research-based programs. To provide our students with a comprehensive literacy program, our upper grade teachers include vocabulary and language conventions in their daily instruction by utilizing Wordly Wise and Patterns of Power.

Student assessment and progress monitoring drive our daily instruction. Across classrooms, assessment practices reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding, performance tasks, rubrics, and student self-assessment and peer assessment. Students regularly receive guidance and actionable feedback about their strengths and growth areas through teacher-created feedback charts, rubrics, goal trackers and conferencing. In early childhood classrooms, feedback may be verbal or written simplistically with single words or pictures, and placed on desks in front of students. The clearest example of this widespread practice is the use of student-specific t-charts with columns labeled "I know I can..." and "I'm working on..." Through this purposeful conferencing practice, connected to their units of study and reading levels, teachers aim to recognize strengths, and other times, areas requiring more work. In the upper grades, teachers more commonly use rubrics and checklists to provide students with tailored feedback aligned with grade-level standards and learning objectives. Teachers frequently monitor learning through individual student conferences. Teachers use notes, recorded during this time, to provide targeted feedback, adjust learning goals and select students for small group instruction or extension activities during independent practice. Through ongoing formative and summative data such as pre and post-unit assessments, exit tickets, conference notes, small group work and progress report data, teachers regularly modify their instruction to meet the needs of their students.

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

Our mathematics curriculum is grounded in the belief that mathematics should be taught in a real-life, authentic context. Our goal is for all students to be equipped with the skills they need to use math in their daily lives, from prekindergarten through college and into their careers. As a foundation of our math instruction, we use the EngageNY curriculum. Each year teachers examine the standards, including any relevant updates. Teachers then plan supplemental materials to ensure a balance between number and fluency development, higher-order thinking, exploration, and real world application in their math lessons. Our classroom mathematics culture supports the belief that mistakes help us learn and enable mathematicians to see concepts from multiple perspectives. We encourage student questions and reinforce the notion that progress is more important than perfection.

Differentiation is a core part of our planning process. Math is typically taught in a station model, where each subgroup of students receives targeted instruction aligned to their needs. In addition to an explicit lesson, students participate in math games, partner work, and word problems that require critical thinking, all of which is created to meet and challenge the individual mathematician. Throughout lessons, constant and ongoing assessment is crucial to student support. Teachers use multiple means of assessment, including investigating both the process and product, to inform instruction and meet student learning needs. Assessment is embedded in our daily math instruction and includes pre and post-unit summative assessments, daily exit tickets, one-on-one student interviews, teacher observations, and student self-assessments.

To strengthen consistency and enhance math instructional practice, teachers participate in math professional development throughout the year. This consists of both school-created and off-site math professional learning sessions to support growth. The River School uses inter-visitations to examine and share best practices. These visits, both within and across grades, are strategically planned and regularly scheduled, allowing teachers to learn from the successful practices of their colleagues and refine their instructional knowledge and skills. This protocol allows teachers to modify their instruction to align with students' needs. In addition, at the end of every school year, teachers, coaches, and administrators spend time analyzing student work and reflecting on instructional successes and challenges, to refine curriculum for the next year.

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

Our science curriculum for kindergarten through grade 4 stems from Amplify Science, a program that supports inquiry based learning. Our science teacher aligns each lesson with the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) in order to enable students to think critically, analyze data from multiple sources, and design solutions to real world problems using concrete evidence. This year, our fifth grade is part of a pilot program aligned with New York University (NYU) entitled SAIL (Science and Integrated Language), a NGSS-aligned curriculum with enhanced support for multilingual learners. Within each science unit, from Amplify and SAIL, students take on the role of a scientist or engineer within a specific field in order to investigate a real-world problem. These problems provide relevant contexts that connect to everyday experiences and embed literacy, math, and social studies throughout, allowing students to see the connections across content areas.

All science units have specific crosscutting concepts, such as structure and function, that are taught across grade levels providing students with multiple opportunities to develop a deeper understanding of specific skills. Within a unit, students collaborate in partnerships and groups to analyze data, ask questions, and make connections. This allows students to see each other as peers and teachers, giving them multiple entry points for making abstract concepts accessible. Students also utilize investigations, digital resources and simulations to learn about topics on a national and global scale.

Following each unit, students are assessed through group investigations, the creation of 3D models, as well as oral and written responses. In early elementary classes, students draw and use emerging writing to show understanding. The teacher monitors learning by posing open-ended questions through discussion or written responses. Upper elementary students complete 3D models and evidenced-based arguments using rubrics that align to the NGSS standards.

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

Our school aims to develop responsible, productive, and active citizens who become independent thinkers and life-long learners. Our curriculum, Passport to Social Studies, ensures a comprehensive teaching approach that integrates both the Common Core Learning Standards and the New York State K-8 Social Studies Framework. Our students learn history, geography, economics, civics, citizenship, and government through inquiry. Our kindergarteners focus on themselves and others by learning about our school and surrounding communities. First-grade students learn about families now and then by studying how communities are important, how to be productive citizens and the economic needs of communities. Second-grade students continue studying communities, specifically New York City, by learning about their community's geographical and natural resources, how New York City has changed over time, and the

principles of democracy. In third grade, students learn about world geography and communities by learning why geography matters and how communities share cultural similarities and differences. Fourth graders study New York State and local history by learning about the Native Americans, colonial and revolutionary periods, freedom and the new nation, immigration, industrialization, and the westward movement. Fifth-grade students learn about the western hemisphere by studying how geography determines culture, European exploration, its effects, how fundamental forces and events shape nations, and how these nations meet the challenges of modern living.

Social Studies is taught through a variety of instructional practices. Teachers design instruction to include hands-on and real-life experiences. Primary resources are used to study multiple perspectives through inquiry and research. Students study artifacts to enhance content knowledge and attend field trips throughout New York City to bring learning to life. Technology is embedded throughout daily lessons with the use of our classroom iPads and Chromebooks. Within each unit, students are assessed through culminating classroom projects, presentations, and research reports using rubrics aligned with both the social studies and ELA standards.

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

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

Our comprehensive instructional program begins in prekindergarten by creating an environment where students feel safe, nurtured, valued, and supported. Prekindergarten instruction is aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and the New York City Prekindergarten Scope and Sequence. The primary method of instruction is through play-based learning centers, where students engage in activities promoting core content areas such as literacy, mathematics, social studies and science. Our teachers conduct daily read alouds and class discussions to promote socio-emotional and language skills. By embedding this content into daily instruction, we promote school readiness and a seamless transition into kindergarten.

Similar to our kindergarten classrooms, we support foundational reading and writing skills through the use of the Teachers College Readers and Writers Program (TCRWP) curriculum, as well as the Department of Education's prekindergarten units of study. Our prekindergarten students receive daily phonics, phonemic awareness, and phonological awareness instruction and teachers utilize our school's math curriculum to design engaging learning activities. In addition to core content areas, students receive weekly instruction in science, art, music and physical education. Our prekindergarten instructional program encompasses all areas of development and paves the way for success throughout our students' education.

**2. Other Curriculum Areas:**

**2a. Arts (visual and/or performing)**

At The River School, we believe that arts instruction is essential to student learning and provides an opportunity for creative thinking and expression outside of the core content areas. Given freedom and flexibility associated with visual arts, we often find our most vulnerable students excel in the arts and develop confidence. When given this opportunity to shine, we notice this transfer of confidence to other content areas. The visual arts program is geared toward teaching for artistic behavior. Students develop studio habits of mind, including experimenting with art materials, practicing techniques, visualizing their ideas, honing their observation skills, reflecting on their practice, and contextualizing their work within the global artistic community. Students develop skills in drawing, painting, collage, sculpture, ceramics, and printmaking. All students receive weekly visual arts instruction, provided by a full time teacher. The creative curricula is sequenced to build core skills and competencies through prekindergarten to fifth grade. The programs are aligned with Visual Arts national standards and New York City arts blueprint.

## **2b. Physical education/health/nutrition**

The Physical Education (PE) program at The River School aims to assist students in becoming competent and confident movers. With a curriculum that is vertically aligned yet fun, engaging, and educational, students have the opportunity to co-create the learning experience by offering input and ideas. The program emphasizes exploring the "why" behind physical activity to foster deeper connections with physical skills and healthy behaviors. During physical education class, students demonstrate knowledge and skills to achieve and maintain physical fitness, display personal and social behavior that respects self and others, and recognize the value of physical activity for wellness, enjoyment, challenge, and self-expression. All students receive weekly instruction, provided by a full-time certified physical education teacher. The curriculum is sequenced to build core skills and competencies through pre-kindergarten to fifth grade while also addressing the dynamics of power, privilege, identity, access, and inclusion in physical activity outcomes. The PE program is aligned with the New York State and SHAPE America National Physical Education Standards. At the end of the year, all students in kindergarten through fifth grade participate in an off-site field day to celebrate learning and growth.

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

## **2d. Technology/library/media**

The Digital Citizenship program at The River School supports students in grades three through five to develop essential skills for online safety and responsible digital behavior. Digital citizenship is a critical 21st century skill, and the Digital Citizenship program is crucial to ensuring students can learn, explore, and stay safe online inside and outside the school building. Our Digital Citizenship program aims to position students to be kind and respectful toward others online, protect themselves from online threats such as bullying and scams, get smart about sharing, think critically and evaluate digital content. The River School utilizes the Be Internet Awesome program, a comprehensive Google program, that provides age-appropriate and fun learning experiences built around five foundational units. The program includes engaging weekly digital citizenship lessons and utilizes resources such as Interland, a browser-based game that makes learning these skills interactive and fun. To encourage continued learning at home, we provide a family guide, parent tips and activities, and a YouTube guide. The Digital Citizenship program at The River School is committed to developing lifelong digital citizenship skills in its students, making them responsible and safe digital citizens.

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

The River School's music program is centered around core musical skills and developing a lifelong appreciation and understanding of music. The curriculum includes singing, learning instruments, analyzing and composing lyrics, and performing. Students sing a variety of repertoire and learn to play percussion instruments, Orff instruments, piano, recorder, ukulele, and guitar. Our students develop skills to read and compose music, move expressively and learn about classic musicians. In addition, our music curriculum integrates literacy, giving our students a space to read and write in a unique and creative way. Students are assessed on both content and performance criteria. Some examples of criteria include matching correct notes, singing voice, and echoing a rhythm. All students receive weekly instruction, provided by a full-time certified music teacher. The curriculum is sequenced to build core skills and competencies through pre-kindergarten to fifth grade while also addressing the various roles and means of creating and performing music. The music program is aligned with the New York State Learning Standards For Music and New York City's Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in music.

River Responsibility is a weekly instructional period that is unique to The River School. During this time, students in grades three through five engage in activities to reinforce or enrich their learning. At the start of each year, students are provided with clear criteria for what constitutes responsibility, such as all homework and classwork completion, exhibiting respect towards all members of the community, and being an engaged learner in all subjects. If a student has met this criteria throughout the week, they participate in an activity

focused on community service or leadership. Students can choose to read aloud to a lower grade classroom, assist past teachers or administration with responsibilities, or participate in a self-selected activity (puzzles, art, etc.). If students need time to make up classwork, reflect on behavior, or seek additional support from a teacher, they can use this time to do so. The River Responsibility period motivates students to take ownership of their learning and encourages our students to contribute to the larger school community.

### **3. Academic Supports**

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

The River School uses a variety of assessments to identify students who are struggling academically and socio-emotionally and provides timely, targeted interventions. Along with assessment, we use a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) to provide a range of interventions and supports at different levels of intensity. Through this system, the school meets the needs of all students, including those performing below grade level.

Our classroom teachers are experts in providing specialized, data-driven instruction. If a student is struggling to meet grade-level benchmarks, teachers begin by providing individualized support within the classroom. This usually includes differentiated instruction and targeted small-group support. If classroom interventions prove insufficient, teachers present students in need to our Pupil Personnel Team (PPT), who brainstorm strategies for supporting the student. This could include suggestions to the classroom teacher, or a recommendation that this student receives additional small-group instructional support. Bridge the Gap, a phonological awareness program, and SPIRE, an intensive reading support program, are used as literacy intervention programs with our vulnerable learners.

If our intervention data shows students require additional support, more formal assessments are done by our school-based support team, including our School Psychologist and Social Worker. These assessments include cognitive testing, classroom observations, and family history inventories. Based on this testing, students who are significantly below grade level may receive an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that outlines specific academic goals and interventions to support their learning. These plans are developed in collaboration with evaluation reports, parent and teacher feedback, and support staff recommendations and guidance.

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

Our teachers use differentiated instruction to provide challenging and engaging learning opportunities for students performing above grade level. Students are provided with more complex tasks, higher-level questioning, and/or opportunities for independent research and exploration. Often times, this instruction is tailored to each student's individual needs and learning styles.

Our literacy curriculum includes a wide range of rich, authentic texts that challenge and engage students at all levels. Advanced readers are exposed to more complex and sophisticated texts that are appropriate for their level. Our school also provides opportunities for students to engage in inquiry-based learning and independent reading, which allows advanced readers to explore their interests and pursue learning beyond the classroom. During Writing Workshop, our teachers help students develop advanced writing skills, such as complex sentence structures, precise word choice, and sophisticated organizational structures. In Math, we utilize programs such as Computer-based programs (IXL) and Exemplars to support students performing above grade level. Through IXL, our students engage in learning experiences that allow advanced learners to work at their own pace and level. Students can work on skills and concepts that are appropriate for their strengths, which helps them continue to challenge themselves academically. Exemplars provides performance tasks that engage students in thinking critically and applying their knowledge in new and complex ways. These tasks require students to demonstrate higher-order thinking skills, such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, which can be particularly beneficial for our advanced learners.

#### **3c. Students with disabilities:**

The River School is proud of our inclusive practices, which are in place to ensure that students with disabilities are fully included in all aspects of school life. Students can access the same curriculum and extracurricular activities as their peers. Our school has a system of co-teaching and collaboration that enables general and special education teachers to work together to meet the needs of students with disabilities. This includes shared planning, co-teaching in the classroom, and ongoing communication and collaboration.

In addition to Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT), students with IEPs may receive support from related service providers including speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, counseling, or Special Education Teacher Support Services (SETSS). All teachers collaborate closely with related service providers to ensure student success. We utilize a system of positive behavioral practices to address the needs of students with disabilities who require additional support in managing their behavior. This includes clear expectations and consequences, opportunities for positive reinforcement, and individualized behavior plans.

Through IEP goal progress monitoring, we collect regular data on students' progress toward their individualized goals. This data helps our teachers and other support staff identify areas where the student is making progress and where they may need additional support or instruction. Based on the data gathered through IEP goal progress monitoring, teachers and service providers adjust their instruction and interventions to best meet the student's individualized needs. This helps our team provide families with regular updates on their child's progress toward their goals in an effort to build a collaborative partnership with families.

### **3d. English Language Learners:**

At The River School, we believe that all teachers play a valuable role in supporting our English Language Learners (ELLs). The core instructional elements of our ELL instruction integrates speaking and listening, writing, and reading. Central to our approach is the value of cultural diversity and importance of relationship building with our students and families. Our ELL students make up almost twenty percent of our school's population, with an additional five percent being former ELLs. Our ELL families speak over 18 world languages and are from over 30 countries. In addition, the origin stories of our ELL families range from families seeking asylum to families who are serving a multi-year post for their home country with the United Nations. Using a strengths-based approach and integrating our students' home languages and culture into our instruction are essential and an asset to our broader curriculum.

Our English As a New Language (ENL) program is a comprehensive language development program that consists of content and standards-based instruction and incorporates teaching academic vocabulary, grammar, phonetics, and conversation skills. Our ENL program includes both a standalone and integrated model of instruction, which allows for tailored language instruction based on the students' proficiency levels, grade levels and diverse home languages. The standalone ENL class allows for ELLs to learn outside of their general classroom in a smaller group setting with instruction by a certified ENL teacher. ENL teachers incorporate practices of advanced literacy into their instruction, including using text sets on themes to ensure access for all students to literacy content, integrating academic vocabulary, and developing oral language and discussion skills that will translate to extensive writing. In the integrated ENL model, the ENL and classroom teacher collaborate closely to assess students' understanding of material and maximize opportunities to pre teach, review, and spiral instruction. Teachers utilize small group tasks, station or parallel teaching, and individual or small group conferences to support student learning. Ongoing efforts are made to differentiate instruction, tasks, and/or products to best meet the needs of ELLs.

In January 2023, our school welcomed over twenty new asylum-seeking students into our community as part of New York City's Project Open Arms initiative. To help these students adapt to a new environment and feel supported, our teachers made modifications to their instructional plans, quickly creating strategic scaffolds and supports. Our new migrant students utilized technology to access curriculum in their home language. Spanish-speaking students and staff served as learning partners and resources while our two ENL teachers revised their daily support plan to provide intensive English language support.

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





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

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

At The River School, we strive to educate the whole child by providing an inclusive and supportive environment where students can grow intellectually, emotionally, socially, and physically. We encourage our students to play a vital role in their education by expressing their thoughts, ideas, and suggestions and advocating for what they want and need. To promote a positive environment and motivate our students to be their best selves, we celebrate success everyday through school-created River-isms, distinctive alliterations named to describe several school practices and systems. This language is heard throughout our hallways, classrooms, neighborhoods, and homes. Every week, River Raves are distributed in each classroom to showcase student achievement in both academic and social-emotional areas. For many students, receiving a River Rave is the highlight of their week and you'll often find classrooms cheering loudly and congratulating recipients. We build classroom community by creating a special tradition for River Rave announcements each Friday.

To engage with the broader school community, our students and staff participate in River Rallies throughout the year. At these student-led pep rallies, classes perform, sing songs and celebrate accomplishments. Each year, our school celebrates Rivergram month in February, where students and teachers craft and share positive notes across all grade levels. All students and staff receive a kind note, creating an environment of care and support. Our upper grade students earn weekly River Responsibility time, visiting other classrooms to help younger students and support staff members.

Our school community values social-emotional learning and incorporates explicit instruction throughout the day to build a shared language and awareness around emotional intelligence. Through the use of the RULER program, restorative circles, and positive reinforcement, we provide students with the tools they need to be independent problem solvers and caring citizens. Classroom charters are collaboratively created at the beginning of the year to establish how students and teachers want to feel everyday and memorialize the actions to promote those feelings. In addition to utilizing RULER's mood meter in each classroom to promote language and vocabulary to describe feelings, we coach our students to use "I feel" messages to express their emotions with peers and adults. Our teachers engage students in read-alouds to address social-emotional skills and empower students to love themselves, express their feelings, and practice compassion and empathy.

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

At The River School, we believe parents and caregivers are a critical component in their child's education. We pride ourselves on creating a strong partnership with families to support student achievement and growth. This partnership begins with establishing frequent communication between home and school. In the beginning of each year, teachers facilitate a Curriculum Night for families to share grade level curriculum and learning expectations. Our teachers engage families in community-building activities and share resources to best support learning at home. In May, we host an evening for families to preview learning expectations for the next year and share summer resources and learning opportunities to prevent summer learning loss.

Our school team utilizes the online communication platform ParentSquare to provide families with regular updates about their child's academic and social-emotional progress. Every Tuesday afternoon, we offer designated Family Engagement time for parents and caregivers to connect with teachers and pose questions, share information or seek support. Teachers proactively schedule meetings with families to discuss student progress and share strategies for at-home learning. Families are frequently welcomed into the school building to participate in learning activities. We host Family Friday's and curriculum celebrations, where families are invited into their child's classroom to engage in hands-on activities in various content areas. In early childhood classrooms, you may often see parents as mystery readers, mystery writers and library volunteers. Each year, we host special events such as Career Week and International Week, when families are encouraged to visit our school to share about their cultures, customs, traditions and careers. To promote

student success, we offer parent workshops throughout the year. The content may differ depending upon the needs of the community which we gauge based on formal and informal feedback and surveys. Workshops may target subgroups to support learning for English learners or students with disabilities or support important transitions such as kindergarten readiness or the middle school admissions process.

Most importantly, to ensure our families know how their child is performing in school, teachers send home student work with concrete feedback each week. Student work aligns to a standard-based rubric, providing parents with specific next steps to support growth. We invite families to access teacher-created websites to support and enhance learning at home. Throughout each trimester, classwork is strategically selected and organized to create student portfolios. These portfolios are presented to families during formal parent-teacher conferences and the information is used to discuss learning strengths and areas of growth.

Our Parent Teacher Association (PTA) plays a vital role in the home to school partnership. The PTA partners with school leaders to host monthly meetings with families to share information and support school initiatives. Our students, families, and staff attend PTA sponsored events including the Halloween Dance, River Ride, and Spring Benefit. These functions support a strong school community by bringing families and staff together outside our instructional day.

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

The River School prioritizes teacher support and supervision to create a strong professional culture of learning and growth. School leaders utilize the Danielson Framework for Teaching to engage in multiple observation and feedback cycles. Observations are frequent and focus primarily on planning, questioning, engagement, and assessment to support instructional practice. To ensure teacher voices are heard and cultivate self-reflection practices to support professional growth, school leaders begin each observation feedback discussion by posing school-created reflection questions for the teacher to address. Our goal is for teachers to feel successful and supported through the observation cycle by providing specific, timely and actionable feedback, coupled with the tools and resources needed to best support students. Our school's instructional coaches partner with teachers between observation cycles to implement next steps and instructional goals. Additionally, teacher inter-visitations cycles are strategically coordinated based on observation data and led by instructional coaches to highlight and share effective practices. Teachers share findings and next steps with school leaders to purposefully create transparency and promote school-wide elevation of instructional practice.

In collaboration with grade team leaders, specialty teachers and instructional coaches, school leaders design targeted professional learning opportunities to support growth. Each week, teams engage in structured data or inquiry-based professional collaborations that promote the achievement of schoolwide goals. Professional development is facilitated by both school leaders and teachers to promote shared leadership and ownership of learning. Groupings may vary depending on the session focus to ensure professional development is relevant and purposeful to participants. For example, the upper elementary teacher team engages in professional development to support test preparation while the early childhood teacher team focuses on ways to support foundational reading skills. Aside from grade band and grade level sessions, teams work toward goals, analyze data, and monitor progress of subgroups and special populations. Participants collaborate on instructional strategies to serve students with disabilities and English language learners by utilizing the expertise of ENL teachers, special educators and related service providers. At the end of the school year, we administer a professional development survey to assess teacher needs. We use this feedback to craft a responsive professional development plan for the following year.

School leaders partner with external staff developers to support teacher growth with a goal of elevating schoolwide instructional practice. During these day-long visits staff developers work closely with teachers to observe instruction, provide feedback, model teaching, and provide additional support. Teachers apply skills learned in these sessions to their classroom practice. In addition to professional development in the building, teachers are frequently invited to attend off-site opportunities to support professional goals. In the beginning of the school year, school leaders post a calendar with offerings for staff. Participants are asked to document learning and proactively share these outcomes with their peers to promote professional growth and reflection.

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

School leadership is composed of the principal and assistant principal. Working in close partnership, school leaders promote the success of every child by maintaining a school culture and instructional program grounded in student-centered learning and staff professional growth. Leaders are guided by the foundational principles of communication, collaboration, and consistency. These principles support a shared vision of learning to help advance student achievement, high quality instruction and a strong home-school partnership.

As the school's population grew, the principal and assistant principal developed structures for distributive leadership to ensure that all stakeholders are represented in shared decision-making. School leaders established an instructional coach role to support teacher development, ensuring that all students receive a highly engaging, rigorous, and impactful learning experience. Each grade level has a team leader, in addition to a specialty lead, who collaborates with instructional coaches and school administration to support teacher practice both inside and outside of the classroom. To sustain a culture of collaboration, student achievement and high expectations, leaders often utilize staff expertise to facilitate activities such as mentoring, inter-visitations and professional development facilitation.

School leaders conduct frequent meetings with key stakeholders to support student achievement and ensure the school mission is being achieved. These team members include instructional coaches, English As a New Language (ENL) teachers, the social worker, psychologist, and Special Education Support Services provider. School leaders leverage this team's expertise and resources to make well-informed decisions to support student achievement. School leaders are frequently involved in staff, student and parent events such as parent-teacher conferences, attendance meetings, data team analysis sessions, and parent workshops.

School leaders consistently communicate high expectations for professionalism, instruction, and communication resulting in a positive school culture of mutual accountability. The principal and assistant principal communicate closely with grade team leaders to monitor learning, share best practices, and support professional growth. This collaboration supports school-wide consistency of instructional goals and priorities.

To promote a shared vision and mission for learning, leaders engage families in various school activities. Families are invited into the building for classroom events, workshops, volunteer opportunities and celebrations. Leaders build and sustain positive relationships with families by communicating regularly and promoting a strong home to school partnership. The School Leadership Team, composed of several parent representatives, meets monthly to review educational priorities, discuss schoolwide practice, and support the academic and social growth of all students.

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

The River School takes a holistic approach to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) by respecting the needs of our students, families, and staff. There are multiple constituents involved in our DEI work, and we employ various measures to ensure everyone is represented, participates and is held accountable to this important work. Our DEI planning team, composed of teachers and administrators, works together to plan the course of action across the year. Together, we develop strategies to support our students, staff, and families from diverse backgrounds. Members of our DEI planning team facilitate regular meetings to plan and discuss ways to increase equity and cultural awareness in the classroom and the school. We begin the year by building community and getting to know our staff both personally and professionally. In addition, we support our school team with the training, resources, and materials needed to ensure our classrooms are culturally inclusive.

As a result of this work, a team of passionate teachers was established to lead professional learning cycles in which teachers practice integrating DEI awareness into read-alouds, conflict resolution, play, collaborative conversations, and parent communication. Teachers apply social justice standards to literacy and daily activities throughout the school year. Additionally, the staff participated in a day-long training on Talking About Race through The Center for Racial Justice in Education (CRJE). The impact of this work is seen as

DEI grade team leads ensure a DEI lens is used when curriculum planning.

We believe that students must see themselves in their learning. In order to achieve this, we begin the year getting to know our students just like we get to know our staff. Classroom walls are filled with family photos that connect students to their own stories. Drawings and writing about students' families and cultural identities help students shape who they are today. This creates an environment where each individual classroom is unique based on the attributes of their individual students. Classroom libraries reflect literature that represents the many faces and cultures of our students. Vocabulary in the classroom is provided in multiple languages to honor students native languages and provide access to learning. Students see themselves not only in literature and on the classroom walls but in teachers' models and conversations throughout the day. Students also focus on their cultures through reading and writing projects. For example, third graders research animals indigenous to their countries and fourth graders add historical events from their home countries to the American Revolution timeline. Students partner with families and make presentations that celebrate their traditions and culture.

Building a culture of respect and mutual trust includes every family at The River School. We believe that engaging in diversity equity and inclusion initiatives makes the community stronger. Families are welcomed at the beginning of the year by both administration and classroom teachers through presentations, workshops, surveys and Coffee and Chats. In addition to ongoing curriculum celebrations, our PTA has established a DEI parent committee who partners with the school to align and engage in this important work through PTA sponsored events. Our Parent Coordinator serves as the point person for welcoming families and helping them navigate and become involved in the school. Communication with families is the key to all voices being heard. As a school this was a real challenge with our asylum seeking families. One way we bridged communication was to establish a WhatsApp thread until families have internet access. Additionally, we have partnered with our PTA and School Leadership Team (SLT) to develop school-wide activities and initiatives, creating a welcoming environment for families. The team is instrumental in the decision making process for the school. We recently collaborated on enhancing our recess by bringing aboard recess coaches who model and embed social emotional awareness into inclusive play.

We embrace this ongoing effort to create a culturally sensitive and responsive environment that will help our students, staff and families feel supported and a valued member of The River School community. We continue to work toward providing space and applying practical tools for generating productive dialogue that transcend assumptions about identity and race.

We strive to ensure that our students recognize, accept, and honor diversity in others. We celebrate our students' diversity throughout our daily instruction as our families represent many countries around the world. When designing our social studies instruction, we strive to ensure that all students feel seen and heard. It is essential that our instruction is culturally responsive and relevant. To honor our school diversity, we celebrate International Week each year with our entire school community. Students have the opportunity to celebrate their cultures and teach others about their heritage. Families visit our classrooms to share customs and traditions with their child's class. The week culminates with a school wide celebration, where families enjoy home cooked food and treats from a multitude of cultures.

## **PART VI - STRATEGY FOR EXCELLENCE**

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At the River School, engagement is at the heart of learning. Our school team strongly believes that academic and social-emotional achievement cannot happen without engaging students, staff, and families in a shared vision for learning and success. To promote engagement, The River School has established strong systems and structures. School leaders, working in close collaboration with teachers and families, communicate high expectations and an ongoing commitment to learning and growth.

In the classroom, our teachers utilize effective classroom practices that engage children, provide appropriate opportunities to challenge their thinking, and elevate their own interests and voices. Teachers collaborate with their colleagues to design and deliver high quality instruction that engages all learners, and provides them with a space to feel successful. Schoolwide instruction prioritizes multiple entry points and high-quality supports and extensions to address the needs of all students including ELLs and students with disabilities. Students are provided with differentiated tools and resources that provide access and investment into all subject areas. For example, our classroom libraries include a wide variety of text, addressing differing levels, interests, and genres, that our students can not only access, but be challenged by, when appropriate. During math lessons, our students are provided with tiered activities through which all learners work with the same important understandings and skills, but proceed with various levels of support, challenge and complexity. In classroom discussion, teachers ensure every child has a voice by providing opportunities for students to speak in their home language, pre teaching vocabulary, previewing questions, using visuals, and planning turn and talks through strategic partnerships. Through this work, our school team acknowledges the importance of every student and builds trusting relationships to support their academic and social-emotional development.

To promote engagement, The River School team works hard to create a strong, supportive, and nurturing school community for all learners to succeed. We engage students, staff, and families in a shared vision for learning by creating and utilizing a schoolwide River Ready language. This accountability system is constantly reinforced with students and families. In addition to the River Ready system, the school has established many River-isms to promote a strong culture and vision for learning. Whether a teacher is heard highlighting a River Role Model, a fifth-grade student is leading a Book Buddy program in River Responsibility, or the principal is recruiting Rivergram Representatives to lead a yearly initiative, this unique school-created language supports student learning and social-emotional growth.

The River School values family involvement and creates opportunities for families to participate in their child's learning. For example, our library is led by parent volunteers, our lower elementary grades host mystery readers and writers throughout the year, and we enlist parents to visit during our International and Career week celebrations. School leaders and staff partner with families to support student progress toward academic and personal behaviors through regular communication and events. Teachers communicate student progress to families through daily check-ins, weekly River Raves, and "Friday's Five" reports, which highlight learning expectations, celebrations, and updates. Given these frequent communication channels, coupled with the sharing of student portfolios, families are well informed to support their child's learning at home.