

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

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Mr. Michael Flanagan

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

Official School Name Darlington Elementary/Middle School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 11630 Center Hill Road

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

City Darlington

State WI

Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 53530-9764

County Lafayette County

Telephone (608) 776-4021

Fax (608) 776-3510

Web site/URL

<https://www.darlington.k12.wi.us/schools/elementary-middle/>

E-mail flanaganm@darlington.k12.wi.us

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

Date _____

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent* Mr. Cale Jackson E-mail jacksonc@darlington.k12.wi.us

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

District Name Darlington Community School District Tel. (608) 776-2006

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

Date _____

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board

President/Chairperson Mr. Bob Hermanson

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

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

Date _____

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

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

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

PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION

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

1. All nominated public schools must meet the state's performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
2. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2023 in order to meet all eligibility requirements. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
3. The school configuration must include one or more of grades K-12. Schools located on the same campus (physical location and mailing address) must apply as an entire school (i.e. K-8; 6-12; K-12 school). Two (or more) schools located on separate campuses, must apply individually even if they have the same principal. A single school located on multiple campuses with one principal must apply as an entire school.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2018 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for at least the three years prior to September 2022.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 or 2022.
6. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. If irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state, the U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's application and/or rescind a school's award.
7. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as "persistently dangerous" within the last two years.
8. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
9. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
10. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district, as a whole, has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution's equal protection clause.
11. The nominated school has, or is subject to, a nondiscrimination policy (provide either a link to the policy or submit a text of the policy), is committed to equal opportunity for all students and all staff consistent with applicable law and does not have any outstanding findings of unlawful discrimination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's nomination and/or rescind a school's award if unlawful discrimination is later discovered.

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

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

PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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

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

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 1 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 1 High schools
 - 1 K-12 schools
- 4 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	69
K	43
1	68
2	50
3	66
4	66
5	67
6	68
7	68
8	64
9	0
10	0
11	0
12 or higher	0
Total Students	629

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

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 0 % Asian
 - 0 % Black or African American
 - 38 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 62 % White
 - 0 % 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: 7%

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	21
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2021 until the end of the 2021-2022 school year	20
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	41
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2021	598
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.07
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	7

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

Spanish, Mandarin

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 29 %
180 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 46 %

Total number students who qualify: 287

8. Students receiving special education services with an IEP: 9 %
Total number of students served 57

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>12</u> Autism	<u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities
<u>0</u> Deafness	<u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment
<u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness	<u>8</u> Other Health Impaired
<u>6</u> Developmental Delay	<u>12</u> Specific Learning Disability
<u>1</u> Emotional Disturbance	<u>18</u> Speech or Language Impairment
<u>0</u> Hearing Impairment	<u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury
<u>0</u> Intellectual Disability	<u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness

9. Students receiving special education services with a 504: 2 %
Total number of students served: 12

10. Number of years the principal has been in the position at this school: 1

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

	Number of Staff
Administrators	3
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	28
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	14
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	20
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	3

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

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

Required Information	2021-2022	2020-2021	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018
Daily student attendance	93%	93%	100%	91%	92%
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.

Our mission at Darlington Elementary/Middle School is to celebrate every individual's uniqueness and to promote life-long learning.

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

<https://www.darlington.k12.wi.us/non-discrimination-policy.cfm>

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

Set in Lafayette County in southern Wisconsin, the community of Darlington represents a unique blend of proud tradition and social diversity. It is the site of the county seat—with a beautiful courthouse—as well as a fairgrounds, parks, walking trails, and festival areas that line the Pecatonica River, from which the community has garnered the nickname “The Pearl of the Pecatonica.” While the presence and success of small local businesses and family farms have diminished over the years, the roots of determination and work ethic associated with these vocational pursuits endure. At Darlington Elementary/Middle School (DEMS), the dedication and effort exhibited by our students and staff mirrors the overall character of our proud community.

Much of the pride and tradition that exists in Darlington results from the success of its extracurricular programs. Multiple athletic teams, including football, basketball, and cross country, have won Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association (WIAA) State Championships, and many of the parents in our district were athletes on those successful teams. Aside from athletics, Darlington is known throughout the area for its excellent musical, forensics, and theatrical performances; again, many parents in our district benefited from these endeavors. These accomplishments relate to another major contributor to Darlington’s proud tradition: members of the community often make it their permanent home. Graduates of our school system might venture off for educational or career opportunities, but a large number of them return so that their own children can have the same educational, athletic, musical, and theatrical opportunities that they themselves enjoyed.

As indicated by our student demographics, however, much has changed at DEMS in the past decade. In response to growing and changing labor demands—many of which exist in larger farming operations and cheese production facilities—the community has experienced an influx of native Spanish speakers who brought with them their customs and culture. This naturally resulted in the emergence of many English language learners (ELLs)—adults and students alike. Once word spread about the inclusivity newcomers encountered in our community and school system, this population continued to increase, as reflected in our student body. This rise in diversity has promoted tolerance and acceptance and necessitates an assets-based approach to instruction. Our staff has risen to the occasion under the guidance of our dedicated ELL teachers and teaching assistants. The number of staff in those positions has gradually increased to meet the needs of our students, and they have designed and delivered training to their colleagues to encourage best practices.

Along with other schools, DEMS has also seen changes in terms of unique educational and behavioral needs, both from students who receive special education services and those who do not have specific individualized educational plans. The Covid pandemic exacerbated those needs, and our school strives to support students in a variety of ways. Our special education teaching staff and teaching assistants collaborate around the ways to best support students in receipt of services, and our classroom teachers communicate with these specialists to ensure better student outcomes. Our Response to Intervention (RtI) system addresses our Tier 1 instructional and behavioral programs, our Tier 2 in- and out-of-classroom academic and behavioral interventions, and our Tier 3 intensive intervention efforts.

An integral part of our RtI system is our “What I Need” (WIN) time at each grade level: classroom instructors and other staff leverage this consistent portion of the daily schedule to provide differentiated practice and instruction to ensure growth for all students. Finally, as a Title I-funded school, our building benefits from the services of two devoted Title I teachers who provide direction, support and progress monitoring for students who receive targeted, research-based interventions. One of the two Title I-funded teachers also serves as our reading specialist—with oversight of gauging student reading levels in pursuit of building-wide literacy—and as our gifted and talented coordinator.

We have several mechanisms in place to perpetuate student achievement and well-being. Our Student Success Team (SST)—composed of two counselors, our special education director, our school psychologist, and our building principal—meet weekly to discuss academic and behavioral concerns, as conveyed to the team by staff members. Using that information, the team brainstorms the design of instructional modifications, behavior intervention plans (BIPs), and special education referrals. Our Positive Behavioral

Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Committee continuously uses data to celebrate student culture and to advance our character pillars of respect, ownership, safety, integrity, and excellence. Our Compass Team, which nurtures distributive leadership through a guiding coalition, meets regularly to discuss building initiatives and to address concerns brought to leaders by their grade-level or department constituents. Several of our staff members recently participated in and were certified through a Trauma, Illness, and Grief Consortium to develop a district-level plan for dealing with emergencies. Our ROSIE Bag program strives to provide for families struggling with food insecurity. The DEMS staff are relentless when it comes to helping our students.

In a small community such as Darlington, the school often serves as the lifeblood and backbone. With our multifaceted, responsive approach to serving our student population, we are proud at DEMS to represent the “Pearl of the Pecatonica” as a nominee for National Blue Ribbon School recognition.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

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

At each level of reading/English language arts instruction, teachers have spent time identifying essential standards, using the criteria of endurance, readiness, and leverage. They have begun the work of unpacking those essential standards into focused, student-friendly learning targets, for which they can then measure student learning using formative assessments. The data from these formative assessments allows for instructors to determine pacing of instruction for the group, as well as the students who need additional instruction and reassessment. While we still need to grow in these systems, we have begun the process.

Specifically, our students in four-year-old and five-year-old kindergarten (4K and 5K), focus on phonics instruction and phonemic awareness. Teachers monitor student progress in letter recognition and sight words. Beginning in first grade and continuing through fourth grade, teachers use the Wonders curriculum from McGraw Hill, which promotes balanced literacy. Within both the 4K and 5K classrooms, as well as the first through fourth grades, teachers use whole-group and small-group instruction to promote both universal access to content and skills and differentiated practice and instruction. Weekly vocabulary and comprehension assessments provide much of the formative assessments; however, teachers are continually gathering “street data” through their classroom observations and individual and small-group student conferencing.

In fifth and sixth grades, students have a ninety-minute reading/language block, teachers utilize texts and lessons that exist within the iReady program. iReady offers teachers a toolbox of reading and writing resources, which our reading/English language arts teachers utilize for instruction, alongside shared read-alouds and literature circles. Formative and summative performances of understanding are both iReady- and teacher-generated.

In seventh and eighth grades, the same ninety-minute block exists, but the curriculum is more teacher-generated. Selected narrative and informational texts from an anthology and whole-class books are explored through the lens of essential reading standards. Teachers also engage students in language instruction that is connected to writing tasks. Formative and summative assessments consist of items, responses, and rubrics that teachers have originated.

In light of our unique student demographics, teachers at all levels have made conscientious efforts to feature texts that are culturally responsive and representative of all people. We know how important it is that students read texts that validate their experiences and identities and provide positive examples by which they can shape their self-concept.

At all grades in our building, teachers gather diagnostic data and assign reading practice through iReady. In addition, reading levels are measured according to the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System. Teachers and specialists perform diagnostic assessments through iReady and Fountas and Pinnell in the fall, winter, and spring to gauge student growth and to provide another data point around which to determine the need for intervention or enrichment. They also use Fountas and Pinnell levels to match students with appropriate independent reading titles.

Overall, we aim to produce students who can read and consume information critically and can convey their own original ideas—both in speech and in writing—clearly and effectively. More importantly, we want to foster a love of reading in all children.

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

Mathematics instructors have begun the same essential standards examination as reading/English language arts teachers. They have started to unpack their essential standards and are continuing to devise ways to use

formative assessment data to impact instruction.

Another parallel to reading/English language arts is the use in grades kindergarten through eighth grade of iReady as a diagnostic and differentiated practice tool. In the same manner as iReady reading, iReady math provides growth data and a pathway toward individualized, focused application of skills.

Unlike reading/English language arts, however, there is more consistency across grade levels in terms of curriculum. Teachers in grades kindergarten through sixth use Math Expressions from Houghton Mifflin Harcourt as their core instructional resource. This curriculum emphasizes the development of number sense through exposure to multiple methods. In whole- and small-group settings, students engage in mathematical operations and problem solving and share their thinking with one another. As students grow in understanding and skill, tasks become more complex, but teachers make efforts toward differentiated supports to meet students' needs.

In seventh and eighth grades, the curriculum departs from Math Expressions and changes to Holt McDougal. To amplify the rigor of that series, teachers supplement various other materials they have discovered over the years. Emphasis is placed on the mathematical concepts and relationships that will prepare students for their high school coursework. Presently, seventh and eighth grade staff are researching curricula, with the plan to pilot this spring and to adopt a new curriculum next school year. They have collaborated with high school instructors throughout the process in order to identify readiness criteria and are looking to install a program with ample opportunities for students to use mathematics in real-world problem solving.

Using classroom and other screening data, a small number of students qualify to take Algebra I at Darlington High School in eighth grade. This allows for a deeper, more rigorous exploration of mathematics in those students' later high school years.

In the end, we hope that DEMS students walk away with the ability to use mathematics to seek solutions to the problems they encounter—both in school and in the world around them.

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

The degree to which science is explicitly taught at DEMS increases as students move through our building.

Instructors at all levels use Project Lead the Way (PLTW) to make connections across science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). This curriculum emphasizes problem solving and real-life application of ideas.

In kindergarten through second grade, many of the science concepts beyond PLTW are conveyed through the Wonders reading curriculum. Informational texts about scientific phenomena and narrative texts about scientific pioneers and breakthroughs compose the majority of the science instruction.

In third and fourth grades, science instruction gets more articulate and explicit, with time devoted throughout the week to PLTW and teacher-organized materials aligned with Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). In third grade, students learn about simple and complex machines, flight, coding, and some earth science. Fourth grade features an exploration of classification and the human body, as well as energy transfer and energy conversion.

In fifth through eighth grades, teachers use Savvas Realize as their curriculum. Fifth grade introduces the foundations for life, physical, earth, and space science. Subsequent grades delve deeper into particular domains, with sixth grade focusing on physical science, seventh grade on life science, and eighth grade on earth science. Each topic begins with an essential question that introduces the topic. The Savvas series then engages students in the 5E instructional model: engage, explore, explain, elaborate, and evaluate. Instructional materials blend digital learning with an interactive textbook to cover essential Next Generation Science Standards. In addition to more traditional assessments, students demonstrate their understanding through Quest activities. These project-based performances of understanding expose students to real-world problems around which student teams collaborate to find content-relevant solutions.

As students progress through the building, science instruction promotes literacy and academic vocabulary in order to help students connect to scientific concepts.

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

Social studies instruction at DEMS in many ways parallels science's curricular delivery in that its specificity and depth increase as students progress through the grades.

Kindergarten through second grades again rely on the Wonders reading curriculum and the texts, both informational and narrative, that exist within. Students learn about civilizations, society, government, and other topics through the reading and writing activities in which they participate.

In third grade, the time and focus devoted to social studies expands. For third-grade students, the instructional emphasis is primarily community-based. They learn about the history of Darlington and the surrounding area, as well as local government. When students transition to fourth grade, the scope of content widens to examine the history of Wisconsin and the systems of state and federal government. Field trips for fourth-grade students are often connected to social studies learning and include excursions to the Capitol building in Madison and to a mining museum in Platteville.

As students advance to fifth grade, the lens of discovery reaches even further to investigate the birth of the United States and the five different regions that make up the country. Sixth grade curriculum takes students outside the United States and its history to study world geography, early humans, and multiple ancient civilizations, such as Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Greece. In both grades, a high priority is placed on project-based learning and assessment, with frequent efforts to promote connections between learning and students' lives.

Upon entering seventh grade, students see the social studies focus change to civics. Attention is given to the functions of local, state, and federal government. Students also get an introduction to economic principles as they exist within the United States government. In eighth grade, the curriculum covers United States history from early Native Americans through the Civil War. Each unit begins with an essential question around which students engage in inquiry and active learning. Students work in collaborative small groups to discuss not only the content but also make connections and evaluations.

Assessment emphasizes literacy and the ability to convey ideas in speaking and writing.

More than anything, DEMS staff look to prepare their students for the social studies at the high school level and to look at the world around them in an informed manner.

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

While DEMS does not house high school grades, we offer multiple opportunities within the categories referenced above.

Our student council, as an avenue for student leadership, plans several activities for students in seventh and eighth grades. Elected officers and student council members organize school dances and concession stands for home athletic contests. They facilitate fundraisers to raise money for school needs and serve as ambassadors to our community during school events that are open to the public.

When it comes to community service, students at DEMS have various avenues. Seventh and eighth graders can take an elective titled "Youth Serving Youth." In this course, students engage in mentoring situations with students in younger grades. Another elective, titled "Service Learning," sends students out into the community to take part in service projects such as the local food pantry and playing bingo at an assisted living facility. The ROSIE bags referenced above as an effort to address food insecurity for qualifying families is another service project in which students take part.

In terms of career readiness, seventh and eighth grade students have ample opportunities. Our guidance counselor at that level arranges for monthly career speakers, and later in the year, those students participate in academic career planning through Xello. Students receiving special education services participate in annual post-secondary education planning.

This year, fifteen eighth grade students are taking part in Club Scrub in cooperation with the Memorial Hospital of Lafayette County. Participants go to the hospital weekly for nine weeks to shadow nurses, and the situation culminates with a hands-on activity.

All of these activities remind students of their potential to impact others positively and to make connections between their academics and their lives after high school.

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

The four-year-old kindergarten (4K) program at DEMS is community based and serves children in a literacy-rich environment. Children learn through play, in addition to small- and large-group instruction.

Not only does the 4K program focus on academic growth but also on social-emotional development and self-regulation. These premises are introduced and practiced throughout the school year so that students can participate successfully and best engage in their learning.

Much of the literacy work revolves around the Jolly Phonics curriculum, which is a fun and active way to advance letter and sound recognition.

The 4K program at DEMS consists of three and one-half hours each day from Monday through Thursday and features a morning and afternoon session. This shortened time frame is developmentally appropriate and results in increased school readiness before kindergarten.

Our teachers at DEMS meet monthly with staff at the local parochial school where the other community 4K sections operate. This effort promotes consistency and collaboration across sites.

Our 4K teachers strive for high levels of parental involvement and communication to create partnerships in support of children's development. They conduct family activity nights and send home newsletters and home resources to parents to extend from the activities completed at school.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

2a. Arts (visual and/or performing)

When it comes to visual arts, students participate in project-based instruction starting in first grade and continuing through eighth grade. Lessons center around the elements of art, the principles of design, and history of art. The curriculum focuses on creative thinking, problem solving, flexibility, self-exploration, and self-expression. Art also serves as a vehicle for cultural exploration. For first through fourth grades, students participate once weekly for thirty minutes; fifth- and sixth-grade students participate twice weekly for forty-five minutes; and seventh- and eighth-grade students participate every other day for one semester for forty-five minutes.

Vocal music exposes students to a spiral sequence of concepts that are assessed on a performance basis. Students learn about melody, harmony, rhythm, timbre, expression, and form from kindergarten to sixth grade. Each year, new concepts are layered onto the foundation of understanding. In seventh and eighth grades, students have the option to enroll in choir. Students in kindergarten through fourth grades meet for one hour each week; students in fifth and sixth grades meet for fifty minutes twice each week; and the seventh- and eighth-grade choir meets twice a week for fifty minutes.

Instrumental music focuses on establishing and then building upon a foundation of musical understanding. Through playing an instrument, students learn collaboration, creativity, self-discipline, and perseverance. Band begins in fifth grade, and fifth- and sixth-grade band students meet every other day for forty minutes. In seventh and eighth grades, the band students convene every day for 40 minutes. Each band student also has a small-group lesson for twenty minutes each week.

2b. Physical education/health/nutrition

Physical education is taught through a student's time at DEMS. Through the program, students learn basic and fundamental movement skills and patterns through games and activities. The goal is to create lifelong healthy activity habits. Kindergarten students have physical education twice each week for thirty minutes, while first- and second-grade students participate three times weekly for thirty minutes. In fifth and sixth grades, students have physical education twice each week for forty-five minutes. For seventh and eighth grades, students take part in a three-week physical education rotation which meets every other day for forty-five minutes during that rotation.

Seventh- and eighth-grade students take health on a rotation of one unit for three weeks, which alternates with physical education. In seventh grade, the four units cover overall physical, mental, and social health; body systems; alcohol and drugs; and human growth and development. In eighth grade, students learn about mental and emotional health; basic first-aid skills; alcohol and drugs; and human growth and development. The overall focus is multidimensional health and the ways that students can best nurture each dimension to achieve positive overall health.

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

Eighth-grade students can enroll in a Spanish elective for one quarter that meets daily for forty-five minutes. Instruction focuses on basic language acquisition through thematic introduction of expression. As often as possible, students are immersed in language through conversation, video, and song. Progress is assessed through student-captured recordings of verbal abilities and through listening tasks.

2d. Technology/library/media

Students in seventh and eighth grades participate in technical education, where they develop hands-on skills, critical thinking, and creativity. Instruction and assessment are project-based and focus on how technologies function in the real world. Emphasis is also placed on providing real-life solutions to the school and community through design and construction. The technical education area continues to expand in order to provide opportunities and to promote safety; some innovative equipment includes a laser engraver and a three-dimensional printer.

Our library/media center (LMC) supports the DEMS curriculum by promoting information literacy in multiple formats, including print and electronic media. The LMC staff is committed to assisting students, teachers, staff, and parents as they access, process, evaluate and communicate information. In grades kindergarten through sixth have weekly library classes during which they learn about being good digital citizens. The LMC staff also manages the 1:1 devices as well as WiFi hotspots so that students have ample access to instructional resources. They also promote literacy by exposing students to a wide variety of books that advance diversity and inclusion. Students participate in monthly reading challenges through a program titled Beanstack. Aside from print materials, the LMC offers to our students thousands of digital reading titles and audiobooks.

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

One of the more interesting curriculum programs that DEMS offers is the elective cycle for seventh- and eighth-grade students. Teachers at those grade levels design classes with the intent to share their passions with students as well as to broaden their horizons. Some of the electives include cooking classes, service learning, flight in space, drama troupe, and strategic games.

Seventh and eighth grades also feature two iconic student experiences. In seventh grade, students participate in an activity called Stores. In a truly student-led activity, teams of seventh-graders envision, design, and actuate a store, complete with products, interactive games, and food items. Students learn about business structure, economics, and collaboration. The student teams then conduct their school activity for the student body and then for the community; the money raised from the three student stores funds a grade-level field trip at the end of the year. In eighth grade, students participate in an outdoor education program at Wyalusing State Park, which borders the Mississippi River. While on this multi-day experience, high school students perform the role of camp counselors. The eighth-grade students take part in team-building activities and nature-based learning. Because these two undertakings have existed for decades, multiple generations of Darlington students have fond memories of them. They are two of the many traditions that make DEMS a special place.

3. Academic Supports

3a. Students performing below grade level:

For students performing below grade level, we continue to build our repertoire of interventions.

Our daily devoted WIN period provides classroom teachers and specialists a time frame during which to address academic needs. At the elementary levels (K-4), classroom teachers, Title I teachers, ELL staff, and classroom assistants work with small groups of students to provide differentiated practice. Formative classroom assessments, as well as iReady and Fountas and Pinnell diagnostics, provide the data used to form these flexible groupings. Our Title I staff also provides additional reading and math support throughout the rest of the school day.

For grades 5 through 8, teachers primarily utilize iReady as their intervention mechanism during those students' WIN period. Because iReady uses information from its diagnostic to create an individualized learning plan (My Path), teachers serve more as facilitators of students involved in that targeted practice. They offer encouragement and assistance and closely monitor student progress in that platform. Teachers at these levels have also used the data from iReady diagnostics and My Path activity to compose groupings to which they then administer leveled lessons in the iReady teacher toolbox.

As we look ahead to future school years, our leadership team is looking at ways to further intervene in more effective ways. One anticipated shift is toward more authentic and continual intervention around essential standards/learning targets and the formative assessment data that teachers gather in more frequent and consistent cycles of inquiry. Using flexible groupings within the classroom to meet identified needs will advance our efforts to respond to student learning. At the 5-8 level, we also intend to schedule WIN time in a way that frees up core instructors to prioritize the pulling of identified students for targeted reteaching and reassessment, in an effort to ensure essential learning.

3b. Students performing above grade level:

At DEMS, we recognize the necessity that we find ways to encourage growth for students who are performing above grade level.

As we look at essential standards and formative assessment data, we continue to look for ways to provide enrichment through the higher depth of knowledge activities and subsequent grade-level standard exposure. In small-group instruction, students whose data suggest enhanced mastery complete learning tasks that stretch their thinking and promote deeper understandings. During WIN times, flexible groups of students receive differentiated practice as well. We continually remind ourselves that the RtI process does not only apply to those students who exhibit difficulty.

Our teachers and LMC staff use the Fountas and Pinnell benchmarking that takes place throughout the year to match students with reading materials that will encourage growth. Teachers also recognize that writing provides avenues for students to demonstrate their capabilities.

Students at DEMS also have specific opportunities through our gifted and talented offerings. We conduct a yearly spelling bee, a mathematics competition (Math-24), and quiz bowl teams. Our fine arts festival in March showcases the talented artists and musicians at DEMS.

3c. Students with disabilities:

For students who meet criteria, DEMS provides special education services from early childhood through eighth grade. Students are provided individualized, direct instruction in their least restrictive environments.

Many, if not all, of our special education case managers are cross-categorically certified in order to work with our students who meet criteria under educational autism, blind/visual impairment, emotional/behavioral disability, intellectual disability, other health impairment, significant developmental delay, specific learning disability, and/or speech and/or language impairment. Our students' needs are also supported through two full-time speech/language pathologists; we furthermore contract from outside entities a vision teacher, orientation and mobility specialist, occupational therapist, and physical therapist.

Special education teachers and related service providers design and deliver developmentally appropriate academic (literacy and/or math) instruction, social/emotional learning, and life skills in the special education environment. The spectrum of direct instructional methods and formative and summative assessments include Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI), Sonday, Handwriting without Tears, Math Expressions, Jolly Phonics, modified general education curriculum, and—most frequently—teacher-created lessons, resources, and assessments. Our students with disabilities are further supported in the general education environment through effective collaboration.

With a holistic approach, general education and special education staff members work together to create, provide, and reinforce appropriate content in an inclusive setting.

3d. English Language Learners:

Our English language learners (ELLs) come to us from various countries in North and South America, such as Mexico, Honduras, Nicaragua, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela. Most of our ELLs speak Spanish almost exclusively in their homes.

Our instructors use ACCESS for ELLs as a diagnostic tool. This provides continual monitoring of proficiency levels in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. This data allows our staff to best meet students' needs and design supports to promote success.

For students at lower proficiency levels, instruction and content are often provided in a student's first language. Other times, students are pre-taught essential new vocabulary and key concepts in small groups to build background knowledge so that students are more likely to succeed with grade-level instruction. For students at higher proficiency levels, instructors and paraprofessionals push into classes to team with classroom teachers. In terms of instructional approaches, our staff is responsive to students' language capabilities.

Outside of instructional delivery, ELL staff intervenes to further increase student achievement. ELLs get additional practice with reading and writing during WIN time; in addition, supported study halls provide an opportunity for students to complete their classroom assignments successfully.

Knowing that they cannot move the bar for ELLs themselves, our ELL teachers share their expertise with colleagues to pollinate methods that lift up ELLs while benefitting all students. Specifically, they stress the importance of accessing background knowledge, using analogies and real-life connections, and incorporating visual aids. They demonstrate to staff techniques such as total physical response to bring in multiple intelligences. Most importantly, they reinforce that our students all benefit when we focus on equity instead of equality.

More than anything else, our staff has collectively had to embrace flexibility, as ELL students of various ages come to DEMS with a wide array of English language abilities.

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

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

Much of the positive culture we have created at DEMS results from focused efforts to engage and motivate students. We work in a system that values and cultivates the whole student in a variety of ways.

Every morning, the building principal conducts the school announcements. These consist of students at various grade levels leading the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance, the observance of student birthdays, a “secret” about a staff member, and some sort of culminating message. This last portion of the school announcements comprises anything from a whole-school celebration, a shout-out to a particular student or group of students, or an “absolutely clear” about a school expectation. Staff often use these announcements as talking points in their classrooms to perpetuate the ideas within.

Our PBIS structure features many avenues for celebration. Staff give students ROSIE Bucks when they see those students demonstrating one or more of our five expected character traits: respect, ownership, safety, integrity, and excellence. At the K-4 level, students redeem ROSIE Bucks as purchases from a ROSIE Cart, which is filled with desired items, or to obtain a privilege, such as lunch in the classroom with a group of friends. In fifth and sixth grades, teachers organize periodic ROSIE parties, where students can spend ROSIE Bucks on special items, food, and/or drinks. Seventh and eighth grade students can use ROSIE Bucks to earn extra permissions, like homework passes.

Aside from ROSIE Bucks, our elementary guidance counselor—who serves as our PBIS facilitator—orchestrates Recognized Redbirds celebrations each month. At the K-4 level, this entails an assembly at which staff encourage students to energize the successes that have taken place in recent weeks and to set goals for the month ahead. Also, students who have been nominated by their teachers for ROSIE behavior receive certificates in front of the assembled student body. Those recognized K-4 students also get their photographs taken with ROSIE Redbird, our school mascot. For our 5-8 students, the elementary guidance counselor creates a video featuring all of the nominated students from those grades. Homeroom teachers show students the video on a designated day, and later the building principal and elementary guidance counselor distribute certificates and capture photographs of those Recognized Redbirds.

One of our fourth-grade teachers is also very instrumental in promoting kindness in our school. Recently, she organized a Kindness Week. Each day, students and staff wore a different designated color to symbolize an aspect of kindness (e.g., green for gratitude). Students also committed to acts of kindness, such as placing post-it notes featuring encouragements and affirmations. Activities like these remind students and staff alike of their potential to build up one another.

Every single day, adults at DEMS find subtle ways to engage with learners. In doing so, they actuate our building mission, which is “to celebrate every individual’s uniqueness and to promote life-long learning.”

2. Engaging Families and Community:

We at DEMS recognize the importance of and potential in partnerships with families and the Darlington community. These associations enhance the impact that we intend to make on our youth.

One event that serves to build this type of relationship is our annual Family Fun Night. One of our Title I teachers takes the lead on coordinating this event, which brings students in grades K-6 and their families into our building for a variety of activities. The University of Wisconsin-Platteville sends practicum students and staff from their math department to engage students in math activities. A representative from the public library also runs a station. The Lafayette County Dairy Promotion Committee donates milk for the event; the Optimist Club of Darlington donates water. The event also features door prizes, and every child who registers chooses a new book to take home. It is certainly an impactful evening.

Each month, the First National Bank in Darlington recognizes a Student of the Month at the K-4 and 5-8

levels. These recipients are nominated by teachers in honor of their academic excellence and receive a monetary award from the First National Bank.

As noted earlier, our Service Learning elective for seventh and eighth grades looks for opportunities to serve the community. They look to bring cheer to residents at a local assisted living facility and volunteer at the community food pantry. Another reiteration of an earlier mentioned program is the ROSIE Bag effort, in which various staff come together to purchase and distribute food to families in need.

During early release time on Friday afternoons that allows for professional development activities, DEMS runs an afterschool program titled “Redbird Time.” This service acknowledges the difficulty families might have arranging for childcare during those afternoons.

Community groups and agencies also engage with DEMS to promote student health. Our local Lions Club conducts annual vision screenings. Our school also participates in Wisconsin Seal-A-Smile, which is a collaborative effort between the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, Delta Dental of Wisconsin, and the Children’s Health Alliance of Wisconsin to improve the dental health of children in our state.

Our district’s Facebook page and school website—along with our local newspaper The Republican Journal—do a great job informing the community of the wonderful things going on at DEMS and encouraging family and community engagement. Without a doubt, the Darlington community cares about and supports our students and staff.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

At DEMS, our members imagine a school in which “staff and students will genuinely model positive energy in order to support and build up one another.” Our quest to create an environment in which teachers feel valued and supported hinges on this vision.

To achieve this vision, we have collectively committed to the following:

We will stay solution-focused. Solution-focused means thinking creatively; focusing on the positive; and not blaming students, parents or guardians, things outside our control, or EACH OTHER!

We will respect one another’s time and ideas. Respect means being punctual and prepared, as well as being open-minded.

We will communicate honestly and empathetically with our students, their parents or guardians, and each other. This level of communication involves speaking openly and truthfully and listening to understand others’ perspectives.

This vision and these commitments hang in every room in our school and provide a “true north” for our interactions with one another. When necessary, we reset ourselves and each other to them.

With this vision in mind, staff continue to reach for new levels of collaboration. Common planning time and frequent team meetings encourage a professional learning community in which the members learn from each other. Doing so necessitates vulnerability and grace. We must be open to one another’s ideas and constantly observant of the small wins that take place every single day.

Our school calendar affords a two-hour early release every Friday. Teachers use this time to further their instructional planning, to examine student data, and to perpetuate curricular initiatives. Grade level and department teams abide by their own set of collective commitments to ensure that time is utilized effectively and share their takeaways with building and district leadership.

All the while, teachers visibly support one another. The district’s mentor-mentee arrangement pairs experienced teachers with new staff members and provides a monthly checklist of mentorship activities. Mentors and mentees are encouraged to get into one another’s classrooms for observations and feedback

cycles. As a part of our PBIS program, DEMS celebrates a Staff Member of the Week throughout the school year. Each week, staff submit nominations of their co-workers, based on ROSIE behaviors. Honorees get spotlighted during morning announcements with a self-selected tribute song, receive a certificate, and enjoy a reserved parking spot. Most importantly, staff members rally around one another when in need. If a staff member experiences misfortune or requires assistance, colleagues answer the call.

4. School Leadership:

Success in a school like DEMS—with such a span of developmental levels and degree of unique learning needs—necessitates distributive leadership. Our philosophy is that leadership must be shared and have accordingly put systems in place to advance that approach.

As referenced earlier, we have a guiding coalition that we call our Compass Team. Comprised of representation from various grade levels and departments, the Compass Team meets every two weeks to convey topics of interest and to brainstorm solutions. Staff members are encouraged to consult their Compass Team representatives so that their voices can be heard.

Distributive leadership exists as well in the various teams at DEMS. Our school psychologist leads the Student Success Team and our RtI meetings at the kindergarten through fourth grade and the fifth through eighth grade levels. Our elementary guidance counselor leads our PBIS committee. Our middle school guidance counselor directs our testing program, our summer school programming, and our professional development offerings. Our Title I director/reading specialist paves the way for curricular choices and instructional approaches, and our ELL teachers pollinate best practices when working with their students—and all learners.

Our special education director guides the teachers and support staff to most effectively serve student needs. In grade-level and departmental teams, individuals step up to organize and facilitate collaborative efforts. Throughout the building, staff members advance the school's mission and vision by finding solutions that improve student outcomes and bring out the best in one another.

While the building principal plays a role in overseeing the various aspects of the organization as a whole, it would be nearly impossible to anticipate the needs of the staff and students without the contributions of all of these teacher leaders. For that reason, the principal does his best to exhibit servant leadership and to do what he can to influence beliefs and to model the energy and culture that he desires. He works closely with district leadership and building leadership to impact student learning.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

With our increasingly diverse population, we have had to become and remain culturally responsive in our approach.

For our students experiencing poverty, we have multiple supports in place. Our ROSIE Bags program strives to ensure that hunger is not an obstacle to student success. We also have clothing and school supplies to provide to students whose parents do not provide them.

We support our ELLs in many ways as well. We provide Spanish translations of all materials that go home, and we have ELL staff available at school events, such as open house activities and parent-teacher conferences. We have signage in the school and communication on social media that efforts to alleviate language barriers. We message to our students the importance of respecting everyone and celebrating diversity.

We keep our staff abreast of equity consideration as well. Our ELL staff provides professional development about best practices and do so through the lens of helping all learners make connections. Our TIG team educate their colleagues on the impact of trauma on students and staff in order to promote sensitivity and understanding.

In the end, we know that our differences have the power to bring us even closer together and that what might look like obstacles to some are actually opportunities in disguise.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR EXCELLENCE

Of all the practices that promote excellence at DEMS, the most instrumental to our school's success is the staff's collaboration in order to hold students to high standards. The collective teacher efficacy that this creates and its impact on learning is the most impactful characteristic that separates our school from many others.

Teachers meet regularly to discuss their students and their instruction. When they do so, their intent is to find solutions. They consult one another when facing challenges, and they offer assistance when they believe it will advance the quest for better results. Staff of all sorts—from administrators to teachers to counselors to support staff to custodians to kitchen staff—demonstrate that they do not view students in our building as “my” students or “his” students or “her” students or “their” students. Instead, the adults at DEMS understand that the young people in our building are OUR students and that we have a responsibility to reach all of them.

A natural byproduct of this philosophy is that very little wasted time occurs in our classrooms. Because student learning is so highly valued, staff members maximize the opportunities they have to cultivate student growth. They look for ways to engage students, and when those students struggle—academically or behaviorally—they are determined to find ways to reach them.

This is especially important with our students receiving special education services or ELL support. Because our staff takes ownership of all students and works together to facilitate learning, these students find themselves lifted up by a team that truly cares about and believes in them.

There are a lot of areas in which we at DEMS could improve, but collectively holding all students to high standards is something upon which we can hang our hats. It is the one practice that most perpetuates our success.