

Jefferson West Elementary's Blue Ribbon School Story

School Overview

Introduction

The Jefferson West USD 340 School District was born in 1970 through the unification of the Meriden and Ozawkie school districts, two small but proud communities nestled within the 68 square miles of rural and suburban landscapes that define the district. Today, Jefferson West serves approximately 830 students from kindergarten through 12th grade, all of whom embody a rich legacy forged in resilience, pride, and commitment to education. The district's school colors—a striking combination of black, white, and red—symbolize this unique history, drawing from the black and white of the Meriden Tigers and the red accent representing the Ozawkie Coyotes.

The history of Jefferson West is deeply intertwined with the development of Lake Perry in the mid-1960s. When the Army Corps of Engineers constructed the lake, the original town of Ozawkie was displaced, and the community resettled within newly established boundaries. This transformative period also set the stage for the merging of the two school districts. While early years saw some tensions as the towns adjusted to their shared identity, time has strengthened the sense of unity, with Tiger Pride emerging as the common thread that binds the community.

Jefferson West Elementary School (JWES) embodies this rich heritage, embracing students from family farms, lakeside developments, and small-town Main Streets. JWES is more than a school; it is a foundation for academic achievement, character development, and a thriving community spirit.

What makes JWES exceptional is not a single program, initiative, or decision. There is no magic formula—only a steadfast dedication to doing what is best for students. The school's success is built on the hard work of teachers, engaged families, devoted volunteers, and a community that takes an active role in education. Every decision at JWES is made with students at the center. Rather than simply asking, "What do we think?" the school community asks, "What do we know to be true?" This data-driven approach ensures that instruction and programs are responsive to students' needs, continuously evolving to foster success.

Like many schools, JWES has faced challenges—budget cuts, staffing reductions, and the unprecedented learning disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, through adversity, the school has emerged stronger, embracing change with creativity and resilience. The pandemic, in particular, showcased the power of collaboration as the entire district came together to support students. That same innovative, problem-solving spirit remains central to the school's philosophy today.

The Jefferson West School Board plays a crucial role in shaping the district's future. This year, the board took an inclusive approach to district planning, inviting input from the District Leadership Teams (DLT), site councils, business owners, and local stakeholders. Through a series of six special board meetings, community members engaged in meaningful discussions to establish a clear vision for Jefferson West. The process began with a fundamental question: "Who is a Jefferson West graduate?" From this foundation, four key focus areas were identified—facilities, student success, hiring and retaining quality staff, and community and family

engagement. The elementary school plays a vital role in this vision, serving as the launchpad for student growth and achievement.

Supporting students at all levels is a priority at JWES. The school has partnered with the Kansas Technical Assistance System Network (TASN) to implement the Kansas Multi-Tier System of Support (MTSS), ensuring a structured approach to reading, math, and social-emotional learning. This tiered system helps not only struggling students but also those excelling beyond grade level, providing personalized support for all learners. The social-emotional aspect of MTSS has been particularly impactful, fostering a positive school climate and promoting student well-being.

Curriculum development is another area of focused investment. Working in teams at both the building and district levels, along with a dedicated curriculum director, the school follows a rigorous, research-based adoption cycle. Each subject area undergoes a systematic review, with reading being the most recent update, followed by an upcoming math adoption. These efforts ensure that students receive high-quality instructional resources that align with best practices and state standards.

Beyond academics, JWES believes in a well-rounded educational experience that nurtures the whole child. Special education services, counseling resources, and targeted interventions work in harmony with general education to support student success. At the same time, the school recognizes the importance of joy in learning. Celebrations, school spirit days, and extracurricular activities are integral to the JWES experience. Long-standing traditions like The Country Store—a beloved positive behavior reinforcement program—continue to thrive, alongside events such as reading nights, health fairs, and field days. The community's unwavering support for these initiatives reflects the deep-rooted connections between the school and its people.

One of the most unique aspects of JWES is the close-knit, dedicated staff. The term "Tiger Family" is more than just a phrase—it is a lived reality. Many faculty members are Jefferson West alumni who have returned to give back to the community that shaped them (including this writer). Others have chosen to make Jeff West their lifelong home, with some staff members boasting 20-plus years of service. This continuity fosters a rich culture of mentorship, tradition, and shared purpose, enhancing both student experiences and community ties.

Creativity is another hallmark of JWES, particularly within its Specials Team (P.E., Music, Art, Computers, and Library). Each year, these educators collaborate to design and implement a cross-curricular cultural study, immersing students in the art, music, dance, literature, customs, and geography of a different culture. These studies culminate in a vibrant school-wide assembly showcasing student learning. When exploring Chinese culture, for instance, kindergartners performed a fan dance, first graders demonstrated Chinese drumming, and older students presented research and dramatic interpretations of traditional stories, including a dragon dance. The school gym was transformed into a sea of red and yellow, adorned with student-created artwork. The One Book One Neighborhood initiative tied into this theme, with the selected novel, *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*, enriching students' understanding. Other cultural studies have included Native American heritage, Ukrainian traditions, and Mexican celebrations.

Jefferson West Elementary is a small school with a big heart, where energy and enthusiasm flow from administration to staff, students, and families. It is a place where history and progress intersect, where challenges are met with determination, and where every child is valued. The people of Jefferson West—past, present, and future—are what make Jeff West truly the BEST.

Curriculum and Instruction

Jefferson West Elementary School's approach to curriculum, instruction, and assessment focuses on creating a well-rounded, engaging learning environment that supports the academic, social, and emotional growth of all levels and types of learners. Our curriculum is aligned to the Kansas state standards, ensuring students develop foundational skills in literacy, math, science, and social studies. Additionally, subjects like art, music, physical education, and computers are integrated to ensure students have a comprehensive learning experience.

Teachers use a variety of instructional strategies, including explicit, direct instruction, guided practice, collaborative learning, and hands-on activities. Small-group and individualized instruction addresses different learning styles and abilities. To encourage critical thinking, problem-solving and creativity, we imbed inquiry and project-based learning approaches into our instruction as well.

At JWES, we use both formative and summative assessments to track and evaluate student progress and guide instruction. To provide our students with immediate feedback and support, we use a variety of formative assessments including exit tickets, think-pair-share, teacher observations, low-stakes quizzes, and self-assessments. To evaluate students' mastery of standards and learning objectives we have end of unit tests, projects, and performance-based assessments. We also utilize data from state assessments (KAP), as well as our skill-based screener, FastBridge. Our decisions are data-driven to ensure students at every level make continuous growth.

We use technology to enhance teaching and learning through interactive tools, digital resources, and adaptive learning platforms. Each classroom has a Newline Board, students are 1:1 iPads, and online educational programs provide engaging, personalized learning experiences to students. We have found great value in online assessments that offer collaborative tools and instant feedback. This data helps drive learning decisions and where we need to improve. Technology influences our professional development.

We have found our strong curriculum frameworks, high-impact instructional practices, meaningful assessments, and technology fosters an engaging and supportive learning environment that is setting our students up for future success.

English-Language Arts

Following the adoption of the MTSS tiered model, our staff observed a decline in reading scores. Implementing this model required additional instructional time for tiered components, and when combined with the impact of COVID, student reading performance was negatively affected. In response, our staff engaged in a reflective process to determine how best to meet student needs.

To strengthen reading instruction, the entire staff underwent comprehensive training in LETRS (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling). Through this training, we identified the need to enhance

student support in phonemic awareness, phonics instruction, and comprehension skills. LETRS provided educators with research-based best practices for teaching reading and writing.

As part of our commitment to evidence-based instruction, the textbook selection committee adopted the Amplify Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) curriculum, which aligns with Kansas ELA Common Core Standards and is grounded in the Science of Reading. CKLA provides explicit and systematic instruction for all students in kindergarten through fourth grade. The curriculum's Knowledge component strengthens comprehension by engaging students in nonfiction topics, broadening their understanding of key concepts. Additionally, explicit instruction in writing and grammar is integrated into daily lessons through the Skills and Knowledge strands. By adopting CKLA, Jeff West ensures that students receive high-quality instructional materials.

To further support diverse learners, our staff also participated in professional development focused on best practices for students with dyslexia. The combination of LETRS training, CKLA adoption, and dyslexia-focused training has created a strong, research-based approach to literacy instruction, equipping students with the skills necessary for reading success.

To maximize learning opportunities, we implemented a master schedule across the school. All students receive 120 minutes of core literacy instruction, supplemented by 35 minutes of tiered support. Tiered instruction provides both remediation and enrichment based on student needs. See elsewhere in the document for the specifics.

Monitoring each student's progress is essential to ensuring they develop and strengthen their reading skills effectively. Teaching staff regularly assess and adjust instruction to meet individual student needs. Three times per year, all students take the FastBridge benchmark assessment. This provides a baseline and tracks student growth throughout the year. Based on these results, teachers collaborate with Title I support to place students in flexible tiered intervention or enrichment groups, ensuring targeted instruction. Students who score below benchmark levels participate in reading intervention groups and are progress-monitored twice a month.

Additionally, the CKLA program includes summative assessments at the end of each Skills unit. Teachers use this data to evaluate student progress in core reading skills and adjust instruction accordingly to support continued growth.

Our school also utilizes the IXL (I Excel) computer program, which offers a comprehensive approach to learning. We focus specifically on math and language arts, with skill plans aligned to our curriculum. Students can practice at their own pace, while teachers track progress and tailor support based on individual needs.

Another tool we use to monitor reading growth is the STAR assessment. This standardized test provides detailed insights into each student's reading level and highlights specific areas for intervention. It ensures students are reading at an appropriate level and sets them up for success.

Finally, third and fourth graders participate in annual state assessments, which evaluate their mastery of Kansas Common Core Standards. These assessments not only gauge individual achievement but also allow us to compare our students' performance to those in surrounding districts across the state.

Collaboration among grade-level teachers and support staff is central to our instructional model. Staff members utilize monthly late-start meetings to analyze student data, reflect on instructional effectiveness, and adjust teaching strategies as needed.

Through ongoing professional development, data-driven decision-making, and a commitment to evidence-based instruction, Jeff West continues to enhance literacy education, equipping students with the skills they need to become successful readers.

Math

Jefferson West Elementary adopted the Go Math series in 2012, transitioning to Into Math in 2019 due to its alignment with Kansas State Mathematical Standards. Into Math outlines each specific standard for each lesson.

Teachers introduce lessons by first communicating with students the skills they are learning each day, the expectations of participation, and how they will demonstrate their learning after the lesson. These specific skills and expectations connect to the anchor charts or posted objectives that help students understand learning goals. Teachers lead whole-class instruction by incorporating visual aids, real-world applications, and manipulatives. Some examples of manipulatives include base ten blocks for place value and fraction bars for equivalent fractions, as well as 10 frames and hundreds charts. Manipulatives help make abstract ideas more concrete. Students then engage in small group activities, discuss concepts, solve problems, and reinforce learning. Playing interactive games also gives students the opportunity to use math vocabulary, practice skills, and strategize. Each grade level receives 80 minutes of core math instruction, including 10 minutes of math fluency practice and 30 minutes of tiered intervention.

Teachers closely monitor student understanding through formative assessments, including teacher observations, checking student assignments, and noting student self-assessments of their learning. Based on these formative assessments, students who need additional help, work with an adult in a small group for extra practice and extended learning.

Students are also assessed using summative assessments. They take the Into Math beginning-of-the-year pretest and module tests at the end of each unit. District-wide, teachers screen students three times a year using Fastbridge to track growth and bi-monthly progress monitoring for students receiving tier 2/3 intervention. Data from the state Interims and State Math Assessments, for students in third and fourth grade, along with the Fastbridge data and classroom performance, allow teachers to identify students at risk, students in need of intervention, or students in need of additional challenge. Teachers collaborate during Late Start meetings to place students in tier groups and determine when movement within those groups is needed. State assessments, classroom performance, and intervention data help us identify students who need extra support or advanced challenges. Our teachers collaborate during Late Start meetings to adjust tier placements and ensure every student gets the right level of support.

Technology plays a key role in math instruction, offering engaging tools like Reflex for students who need additional practice learning computational facts, Xtra Math and Prodigy for skill reinforcement, and IXL for differentiated learning. Into Math also provides an interactive online platform that students can access for extra practice. All these technology sites can be utilized by students at school or at home.

Science

Our district utilizes Mystery Science, a curriculum aligned with Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). Students actively engage in solving scientific mysteries through clues, guided discussions, sequential exploration, and hands-on experiments, fostering critical thinking skills. Learning is assessed through teacher observations, written assessments, and project-based investigations. Our goal is to cultivate curiosity and encourage students to observe and question the world around them.

With the adoption of the MTSS curricular model, Jefferson West adjusted its daily schedule to extend language arts and math instruction, incorporating dedicated tier time for both subjects. As a result, the time allocated for social studies and science instruction was reduced. To compensate for this reduction, we sought ways to integrate science into other subject areas. We were excited to find that with the adoption of our new CKLA reading series, science was incorporated into the study of expository texts.

Students have the opportunity to explore topics such as the human body by reading about its systems and then tracing their bodies with chalk on the playground, labeling the parts they have studied. While learning about astronomy, students interact with models in the classroom and name the planets in the solar system. When studying rocks and fossils, students collect and display their rock and fossil samples, examining them closely before sorting them into sedimentary, igneous, and metamorphic categories.

Social Studies

Elementary students engage with social studies through the HMH Into Social Studies curriculum, which emphasizes inquiry-based learning. This program encourages students to think critically and ask meaningful questions as they explore key concepts in history, geography, government, and economics. Lessons are delivered using engaging student magazines and interactive digital resources, creating an immersive experience that supports diverse learning styles. All content is carefully aligned with the Common Core State Standards, ensuring students build a strong foundation in social studies.

In addition to the HMH program, students further develop their understanding through the Knowledge Domain component of the CKLA curriculum. This content-rich program introduces a wide variety of social studies topics and builds upon prior knowledge from year to year. As students progress, they expand their comprehension, academic vocabulary, and ability to connect historical and cultural concepts to their reading instruction. This integration helps students make meaningful connections between different subject areas, enhancing their overall learning experience.

A highlight of our fourth-grade social studies program is the annual state research project, which offers a hands-on, interdisciplinary approach to learning. Each student selects a U.S. state to research in depth, focusing on its history, geography, landforms, natural resources, famous landmarks, and notable residents. Students synthesize their findings by writing a persuasive piece designed to encourage others to visit their chosen state. To visually represent their research, they create a state float decorated with key facts and symbols. Students then present their projects to classmates, teachers, parents, and community members during a special event. Younger students also participate by touring the state floats, asking questions, and learning from the presentations. This engaging project strengthens research, writing, creativity, and public speaking skills, while making social studies both exciting and memorable.

Preschool

At this time we do not offer a 3 year and 4 year old preschool. However, starting in 2025-26 we will offer an inclusive/collaborative at risk preschool. We have worked with community, staff, and families to develop a program that will align with the Kansas Department of Education early childhood standards. We strive to not only serve those at risk, but any child in our district. This is brand new and literally under construction.

Other Curriculum Areas

At Jefferson West, all students from Kindergarten through 4th grade participate in Music, Computers/Library, Physical Education (P.E.), and Art as part of a rotating two-day schedule. These classes offer a well-rounded educational experience, enriching both academic learning and personal growth.

Fine Arts

Research consistently demonstrates that early exposure to the arts enhances cognitive development and boosts academic achievement. Music, in particular, plays a crucial role in a comprehensive education. Beyond its cognitive benefits, music offers students an emotional outlet, fosters creativity, and builds communication skills. Through collaborative musical experiences, students develop teamwork and discipline. At Jefferson West, students engage in a variety of musical activities, including singing, reading music notation, playing Orff instruments and keyboards, moving to music, aural training, and even composition. By the conclusion of 4th grade, students possess the foundational musical skills necessary for participation in band, choir, or simply enjoying a lifetime of musical appreciation.

Each year, every grade level showcases their musical talents in a special program for their families. These programs include songs, choreography, speaking parts for each child, instrumental performances, and opportunities for solos. Community support is evident, with robust attendance at these events. Jefferson West also celebrates the achievements of its young musicians, with students participating in the Kansas All-State Elementary Choir for the past seven consecutive years.

Art class encourages students to express themselves creatively while learning various artistic styles, materials, tools, and techniques. Lessons incorporate literary resources that foster cultural awareness and serve as inspiration for student projects. This nurturing environment allows students to grow in their artistic journey, building confidence and preparing them for future success. The benefits of art education extend far beyond the classroom. Problem-solving abilities, critical thinking, hand-eye coordination, and self-expression are cultivated through art, empowering students in both their academic pursuits and personal lives.

P.E.

Physical Education is a fundamental component of students' well-being. P.E. classes provide an opportunity to engage in regular physical activity while learning about the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Students develop essential movement skills, practice teamwork, and cultivate good sportsmanship. Field Day is a particularly anticipated event, where students spend a fun-filled day at the football stadium participating in various physical challenges. Parents and high school volunteers contribute to the success of Field Day, ensuring a joyful experience for all.

Computers/Media

In Computers, students develop vital technological skills, including typing, desktop navigation, introductory coding, and internet safety. Additionally, computer lessons support and enrich learning in other subjects. A collaborative effort between computer and library classes enhances the student experience, especially during events like the Hour of Code, which introduces students to coding through engaging, cross-curricular activities.

The library serves a dual purpose, providing both a structured class and access to a diverse collection of books. Students attend a weekly library class that focuses on developing literacy skills, proper book care, and the exploration of various genres. The library's collection emphasizes inclusion, diversity, and confidence-building for readers of all levels. Daily book checkouts offer students ample opportunities to foster a love of reading. Furthermore, the library supports the school's language arts curriculum through the careful selection of materials aligned with academic standards. Events like One Book One Neighborhood encourage community-wide reading experiences, culminating in author visits that inspire students and deepen their connection to literature.

Engagement

The elementary school works in other ways to engage students and families. We have a monthly attendance challenge to see which grade has the highest average attendance. The winner of each month gets ice cream!! This also encourages students and families to stay home if they are ill so as to not get others sick. We also host high school students coming to the elementary to help in the rooms, read with students, share at an assembly, or just be a friend. The principal wants the little tigers to WANT to grow up and be a big tiger and come back to do the same. The big Tigers have helped on the garden project and the new butterfly weigh stations. Being in a rural community, we still have farm life in our community. A local farmer along with the high school Future Farmers of America (FFA) hosts a Day at the Farm for 3rd graders. This is a long standing tradition and we attend each year.

As for the community, we also partner with local businesses and churches. They provided food and services for the benefit of the students. As for our churches, our kindergarten sings to the Gray Wolves retired club at the Methodist church. Another church provides child care for certain parent teacher events. This is crucial to get the best parent attendance we can.

Through these diverse and enriching experiences, Jefferson West students gain valuable knowledge, skills, and memories that will last a lifetime, fostering a well-rounded and inclusive educational journey.

Academic Supports

Jefferson West Elementary has adopted the Technical Assistance System Network (TASN) model of Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) to deliver targeted academic interventions in math and reading. All K-4 staff participate, beginning the school year with Fastbridge benchmark assessments. Once scores are available, the Title 1 teacher collaborates with grade-level teams to analyze the data and determine each student's reading and math tier placement.

Students Performing Below Level

Students performing below grade level are placed in Tier 2 or Tier 3 groups. In these groups, students set individualized goals and are monitored weekly using the Fastbridge learning system. Tier 3 students—those scoring at or below the 30th percentile—receive 30-35 minutes of focused instruction with a specialized team of Title 1 teachers and paraprofessionals. Intensive reading groups utilize the SPIRE (Specialized Program Individualizing Reading Excellence) model, emphasizing phonemic awareness and phonics. Placement tests at the beginning of the year ensure that students are assigned to the appropriate SPIRE level, with data from Fastbridge, STAR assessments, and teacher observations driving instructional adjustments.

These groupings are flexible: as students make progress in math or reading, they can move to lower tiers (Tier 2 or Tier 1) to better reflect their current needs. Progress is reexamined at each Fastbridge benchmark during the winter and spring, ensuring that interventions remain aligned with student growth.

Math interventions follow a similar data-driven approach, although the daily schedule is structured differently. Without a dedicated math interventionist, the entire staff collaborates to support math learning. The day begins with a collective math tier session, and subsequently, 5-6 staff members at each grade level deliver differentiated instruction across Tiers 1, 2, and 3.

Overall, the TASN model not only supports targeted academic interventions but also promotes ongoing professional development, collaborative planning, and strong community engagement, ensuring every student receives instruction tailored to their evolving academic needs.

Students performing above grade level

Jefferson West Elementary is dedicated to fostering academic growth for above-level students through targeted instruction and enrichment activities. The school tailors its approach based on grade level, ensuring that students receive the necessary challenges to enhance their skills.

In the lower elementary grades (K-2), the focus is on strengthening students' reading and math fluency. Teachers work to accelerate foundational skills, ensuring that students not only master basic concepts but also develop speed and accuracy in these essential subjects. As students progress into upper elementary (3rd-4th grade), the emphasis shifts toward comprehension and critical thinking in both reading and math. They engage in more complex problem-solving and deeper analysis of texts to further develop their academic abilities.

During grade-level tier times, students participate in Tier 1 groups led by grade-level teachers. These groups focus on book studies, project-based learning, and puzzle activities designed to reinforce knowledge and encourage higher-order thinking. This structured time allows students to apply what they have learned and build upon their existing skills in an engaging and meaningful way.

Additionally, high-achieving students take on leadership roles by buddy reading with younger or struggling peers. This not only reinforces their own reading fluency but also helps to support the development of their classmates, fostering a collaborative learning environment. Some students read with kindergarten and first-grade students, serving as role models and mentors.

To further personalize learning, Jefferson West Elementary has adopted IXL. By connecting students' FastBridge data to the platform, teachers can assign individualized lessons that align with each student's ability level. This approach ensures that advanced learners continue to be challenged, even if the standard curriculum does not yet cover the material they are ready to explore. Through these initiatives, the school remains committed to academic excellence and student growth.

Students with Disabilities

At Jefferson West Elementary, supporting students with disabilities is achieved through a comprehensive, student-centered approach that creates an inclusive learning environment. The process begins with individualized education plans (IEPs) developed by our Student Teacher Assistance Team—which includes special educators, school psychologists, families, and general education teachers—to identify each student's strengths, needs, and goals. With clear objectives, educators can implement targeted accommodations, modifications, and interventions to ensure effective curriculum access.

Our inclusive classrooms promote a culture of empathy, acceptance, and collaboration that benefits all learners. Teachers use differentiated instruction, small-group activities, and hands-on learning experiences to address diverse needs. Strategies such as visual aids, clear instructions, and assistive technologies (e.g., speech-to-text software and communication devices) further enhance learning for students with disabilities. Additionally, flexible seating and quiet areas are provided to support focused work and reduce sensory overload.

Ongoing professional development is essential for educators to stay current on special education best practices. Regular progress monitoring and formative assessments allow for timely instructional adjustments based on individual student growth and challenges.

Strong partnerships with families further reinforce our support system. Open communication channels help educators understand each student's unique experiences, leading to more coordinated support at school and at home. Moreover, fostering peer support and collaborative activities enhances social interactions, builds confidence, and develops essential life skills.

Through tailored instruction, inclusive practices, and continuous collaboration among educators, families, and specialists, Jefferson West Elementary empowers students with disabilities to achieve academic, social, and emotional success, preparing them for lifelong learning and positive contributions to their communities.

Multilingual Learners/English Learners

Over the past three years, Jefferson West Elementary has experienced a modest increase in English language learners, with two students now identified as needing additional language support. In response, the school board acted swiftly to introduce an ELL teacher, a position designed not only to serve the elementary students at JWES but also to extend support to other district students. This dedicated ELL teacher plans individualized lessons for each student during a daily 30-minute instructional block, ensuring tailored instruction that meets

each learner's specific needs. In addition to these one-on-one sessions, the teacher also supports students in reading and math within Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention groups whenever additional help is needed.

Recognizing the importance of providing a robust curriculum to foster language development, JWES has recently adopted the National Geographic "Our World" ESOL program for its ELL students. This innovative curriculum is structured as a seven-level English series, making it suitable for a wide range of learners—from young children to high school students. Being part of the National Geographic family, the series features stunning photography, captivating videos, and engaging stories that draw students into the learning process and encourage active use of English.

The curriculum is designed to go beyond basic language instruction by integrating cross-curricular topics that challenge students to think critically and expand their understanding of the world. It provides ample opportunities for collaborative projects, which not only reinforce language skills but also build teamwork and communication abilities. Additionally, the program includes targeted critical thinking exercises and visual literacy activities, further enriching the learning experience and supporting the development of well-rounded, analytical thinkers.

In essence, the recent initiatives at Jefferson West Elementary—both in staffing and curriculum—highlight the school's commitment to creating a supportive and engaging environment for all learners. By combining individualized instruction with a dynamic, multimedia curriculum, JWES is not only enhancing English proficiency but also preparing its students to navigate an increasingly interconnected world through thoughtful, context-driven learning experiences.

School Culture and Climate

Engaging and Supporting Students

As we walk through a typical day of engaging and supporting students at Jefferson West Elementary, we believe the care and compassion of our students, parents, faculty, staff and community make “Jeff West the Best!” As our students arrive in the morning, they are greeted by name by either the principal or counselor. Students have social time in the gym until the first bell. A different grade level of students is invited to “Walk and Talk” on the playground before school each day. At the bell, there are morning announcements by the principal, during which students’ birthdays are announced, words of wisdom are offered, and a 3rd or 4th grade student leads the Pledge of Allegiance. Students complete their morning chores in their classrooms, and then the whole school engages in Math Tier time, which enables students to be in smaller groups and maximizes their learning. Reading Tier is done later in the day, again in smaller groups determined by regular progress monitoring.

Specials Time is one hour daily, during which students rotate through four Specials – two one day and two the next. Students experience fine arts daily, with Music one day and Art the next. P.E. alternates with Computers or Library to round out the students’ Specials time.

Social-emotional well-being is a priority, with initiatives such as the Lunch Bunch for social skills development and regular counselor-led lessons using the Character Strong Curriculum. Programs like Tigers and Cubs pair elementary students with high school mentors for additional guidance.

At the end of each quarter, student success is celebrated in several ways. Students who have earned Tiger Tickets for meeting our B.E.S.T. Expectations (**B**e Responsible, **E**veryone Safe, **S**how Respect, **T**ry) get to visit

the Country Store to spend them on a variety of prizes. We have a monthly Celebration Assembly to recognize student achievement, complete with a Spirit contest – be sure to bring your earplugs!

Community involvement is integral, with volunteers, donations, and mentoring programs like Teammates enhancing student support. Extracurricular activities such as Her Hike, sports teams, music, theater events, and the Missoula Children's Theater provide further engagement opportunities. Teachers actively participate by attending students' performances and sporting events to reinforce connection and encouragement.

Jefferson West Elementary demonstrates a strong commitment to academic success, emotional support, and community involvement, creating a nurturing environment where students can thrive.

Engaging Families and Communities

Jefferson West Elementary School (JWES) fosters strong bonds with families and the community through cherished traditions, collaborative partnerships, and targeted mentoring programs. The school is known for its longstanding annual events that actively engage both students and community members. For instance, the annual Halloween Parade has been a Meriden tradition for over 70 years, with students proudly marching down the main street, drawing crowds from all around to celebrate the school's young talent. Equally significant is the Veterans Day assembly, where students invite active or retired military family members to join them. During the assembly, children introduce their guests and honor them with presentations that include letters, handmade poppies, and other crafts. Each grade level contributes with creative performances—ranging from poems and stories to songs—culminating in a school-wide medley of each military branch's theme song.

Family Read Night, held in the winter, further exemplifies the school's commitment to community and learning. This festive evening offers families an opportunity to bond over reading while enjoying hot chocolate, cookies, and a variety of engaging activities. Highlights include a flashlight-guided book walk around the playground, an interactive scavenger hunt, and even a hayrack ride. These activities not only cultivate a love for reading among students but also strengthen the vital connection between the school, families, and the broader community.

In addition to these events, JWES partners with local businesses and organizations to enhance the lives of students and their families. The Tigers Closet provides free essential items such as clothing, coats, hygiene supplies, and shoes to those in need. During the Christmas season, Woolly Farms collects wish lists from the school's three campuses and distributes wrapped gifts, brightening the holidays for over 80 students. Gambino's Pizza of Meriden supports the school by offering monthly reading awards in the form of mini pizzas for students who reach their reading goals and by donating pizzas for the Kids of Character recognition program. Moreover, a partnership with Mammoth has led to the installation of two new all-weather playgrounds, creating a community hub that is enjoyed by children and local patrons alike throughout the year.

Mentoring is also a key component of JWES's community engagement. Tigers and Cubs pair at-risk elementary students with high school mentors who provide weekly social-emotional support, while the Teammates program connects community adults with students from fourth grade through high school to foster academic, social, and life skills. Through these diverse programs and initiatives, JWES cultivates a nurturing, community-centered

environment that celebrates rich traditions, promotes academic achievement, and encourages personal growth among its students.

Creating Professional Culture:

At JWES, we prioritize creating an environment where teachers feel valued, supported, and empowered to grow both professionally and personally. We believe that when educators feel appreciated and encouraged, they are more engaged, motivated, and effective in the classroom.

Professional development is an integral part of our school's commitment to creating a culture of continuous learning. Teachers are encouraged to seek out professional growth opportunities that are relevant to their interests, passions, and goals. Our district also hosts in-house training led by experts in education. These PD events allow staff the opportunity to explore new instructional strategies and classroom management techniques, as well as provide collaboration time for curriculum improvements and alignment.

We believe each of our teachers brings his or her own valuable insight and expertise to the JWES team; therefore, we empower our staff to take on leadership roles within the school and district. Teachers are invited to serve on committees, lead professional learning communities, and serve as mentors for new educators. For those who have goals to move into administrative or instructional leadership positions, we provide pathways to leadership training and career advancement.

We strive to foster and maintain a culture of appreciation and recognition by celebrating our teachers' achievements. Our teachers vote for a Kansas Teacher Of the Year candidate to represent our school and district. Teachers can earn "Atta Tigers" (positive recognition) that goes into a drawing for various prizes. Each week, teachers and staff can find their names in the "Shout-out" section of the staff weekly bulletin. Other ways teachers feel appreciated and valued is through community involvement during Teacher Appreciation Week with special treats, lunches, food truck visits, and gift cards.

In addition to professional growth and recognition, we also prioritize teachers' well-being. Our district has a wellness committee with building representatives at the elementary school. Our morale committee fosters a positive and supportive work environment. We are like a family. If classes or extra duty time needs covered we all step up to help one another out.

School Leadership

The leadership at JWES is defined by a commitment to excellence, collaboration, and continuous growth. Rooted in a philosophy that values both academic achievement and personal development, JWES leaders foster an environment where students, educators, and staff thrive. They embrace a student-centered approach, ensuring that every decision aligns with the mission of nurturing well-rounded individuals equipped with the knowledge and skills needed for success.

JWES leadership implements policies that emphasize inclusivity, innovation, and accountability. By setting clear expectations and maintaining open lines of communication, they cultivate a culture of trust and mutual respect. Their policies encourage professional development among teachers, support diverse learning needs, and

promote community engagement. Additionally, leaders at JWES are proactive in addressing challenges, adapting to evolving educational trends, and implementing best practices that enhance student outcomes.

A key component of JWES leadership is its comprehensive programs designed to enrich both students and faculty. Through mentorship initiatives, leadership training, and extracurricular opportunities, they ensure that learning extends beyond the classroom. Programs supporting STEM education, arts integration, and social-emotional learning further reinforce the school's dedication to holistic student growth. By continuously evaluating and refining these programs, JWES leaders create a dynamic and forward-thinking educational environment.

Strong relationships are at the heart of JWES leadership. Administrators, educators, parents, and students work collaboratively to build a supportive school community. Open dialogue, active listening, and shared decision-making characterize interactions between leadership and stakeholders. By fostering meaningful partnerships with families and the broader community, JWES leaders strengthen the foundation for student success and school advancement.

Through their vision, policies, programs, and relationships, JWES leaders exemplify dedication to educational excellence and community building. Their unwavering focus on empowering students and staff ensures that JWES remains a place of inspiration, innovation, and achievement.

Strategy for Excellence

A driving force behind the success of Jefferson West Elementary School (JWES) is its strong sense of community. This commitment is demonstrated in two key ways: engagement with community stakeholders and fostering a supportive internal culture among staff and students.

First, JWES actively engages with families and local businesses, creating a welcoming and inclusive environment. The school embraces an “open doors” philosophy, encouraging families to visit and participate in their children’s education. Events such as holiday parties, reading nights, music programs, art shows, and book fairs to provide meaningful opportunities for families to connect with the school. Clear and consistent communication ensures that parents are well-informed about both academic and extracurricular activities. Additionally, administrators maintain a visible and approachable presence at events, reinforcing their commitment to an open and supportive environment. The school also prioritizes flexibility, helping parents schedule necessary appointments while ensuring students remain engaged in productive learning.

Local businesses play a crucial role in supporting JWES. They contribute by volunteering, providing essential supplies, and sponsoring initiatives that enhance both student learning and staff well-being. From technical and mechanical support that ensures a safe school environment to contributions in district planning, businesses actively invest in the school’s success. They also support staff appreciation efforts, such as Pizza Fridays, and provide economic resources that benefit students. The Booster Club, with backing from local businesses, goes beyond athletics, offering financial support for various educational and developmental initiatives across all grade levels. These partnerships foster a sense of shared responsibility and investment in the school’s future.

Secondly, JWES cultivates a strong internal community, where staff members feel valued and supported. The district offers initiatives such as leave payback, tuition reimbursement, and a 403(b) retirement plan to encourage professional growth and stability. Beyond these benefits, the school nurtures a culture where

colleagues uplift one another, creating an environment that feels like family. Administrators and leadership teams prioritize not only professional development but also the personal well-being of staff. This culture of care and support extends beyond the workplace, as many JWES alumni return to the community to raise their families and contribute to the school's ongoing success.

By fostering deep connections between families, businesses, and staff, JWES exemplifies the power of a unified community. With collective efforts dedicated to student success, staff support, and community engagement, Jefferson West Elementary thrives as a place where excellence is driven by collaboration and commitment.

Final Acceptance for NBRS

Jefferson West Elementary School – School Summary (2025)

Jefferson West Elementary School, located in the heart of Meriden, Kansas, serves approximately 300 students in grades K through 4. As part of Jefferson West USD 340, our school is committed to creating a nurturing, inclusive environment where every child can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. Our staff of highly qualified, dedicated educators collaborates closely with families and the community to support the growth and success of each student.

Our vision—**Empower all students to think critically, build resilience, and reach their full potential** is reflected in our emphasis on personalized instruction, innovative teaching practices, and a strong foundation in core academic areas. We prioritize early literacy and numeracy, utilizing evidence-based interventions and

enrichment strategies to meet diverse student needs. Technology integration and hands-on learning experiences ensure that our students are prepared for the demands of a rapidly changing world.

Jefferson West Elementary takes pride in its Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) framework, which fosters a respectful, responsible, and safe school culture. Students are celebrated for their achievements and positive contributions to the school community. In addition to academics, we offer a variety of extracurricular activities and community events that help build strong relationships and enhance student engagement.

Through a shared commitment to excellence, Jefferson West Elementary continues to demonstrate outstanding student achievement and a deep dedication to lifelong learning. We are honored to be recognized as a 2025 National Blue Ribbon School and celebrate the hard work and heart of our entire school community.