U.S. Department of Education
2017 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

Name of Principal <u>Ms. Kathy Carpenter</u>
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name <u>Riverwatch Middle School</u>
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address <u>610 James Burgess Road</u>
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City <u>Suwanee</u>   State <u>GA</u>   Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) <u>30024-1135</u>

County <u>Forsyth County</u>

Telephone <u>(678) 455-7311</u>   Fax <u>(678) 455-7316</u>

Web site/URL<u>http://www.forsyth.k12.ga.us/riverwatchms</u>   E-mail   <u>kcarpenter@forsyth.k12.ga.us</u>

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*<u>Dr. Jeff Bearden</u>   E-mail <u>jbearden@forsyth.k12.ga.us</u>
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name <u>Forsyth County School District</u>   Tel.   <u>(770) 887-2461</u>
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 <u>Mrs. Kristin Morrissey</u>
(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, write N/A in the space.

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. The school configuration includes one or more of grades K-12. (Schools on the same campus with one principal, even a K-12 school, must apply as an entire school.)

2. 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 and all subgroups, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.

3. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2017 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.

4. If the school includes grades 7 or higher, the school must have foreign language as a part of its curriculum.

5. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2011 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.

6. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, or 2016.

7. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's application and/or rescind a school's award if irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state.

8. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as "persistently dangerous" within the last two years.

9. 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.

10. 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.

11. 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.

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.

PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Data should be provided for the most recent school year (2016-2017) unless otherwise stated.

DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district   21 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
    (per district designation):   10 Middle/Junior high schools
                                           7 High schools
                                           0 K-12 schools

                                           38 TOTAL

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located:

    [ ] Urban or large central city
    [ ] Suburban with characteristics typical of an urban area
    [X] Suburban
    [ ] Small city or town in a rural area
    [ ] Rural

3. Number of students as of October 1, 2016 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	0	0	0
1	0	0	0
2	0	0	0
3	0	0	0
4	0	0	0
5	0	0	0
6	222	215	437
7	232	222	454
8	244	226	470
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	698	663	1361

4. Racial/ethnic composition of   0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
    the school: 45 % Asian
        4 % Black or African American
        5 % Hispanic or Latino
        0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
        43 % White
        3 % 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 2015 – 2016 school year: 4%

    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 *to* the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	33
(2) Number of students who transferred *from* the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	20
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	53
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2015	1340
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.040
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	4

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 1 %
        8 Total number ELL

    Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):
    Cantonese, Spanish, Telugu, Korean, and Portuguese

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 5 %
    Total number students who qualify: 70

8. Students receiving special education services: 5 %
        66 Total number of students served

    Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional conditions. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

13 Autism	0 Orthopedic Impairment
1 Deafness	22 Other Health Impaired
0 Deaf-Blindness	28 Specific Learning Disability
2 Emotional Disturbance	0 Speech or Language Impairment
0 Hearing Impairment	0 Traumatic Brain Injury
0 Mental Retardation	0 Visual Impairment Including Blindness
0 Multiple Disabilities	0 Developmentally Delayed

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: <u>10</u>

10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	Number of Staff
Administrators	4
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects	51
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	19
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a licensed professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	6
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	6

11. 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 __27:1__

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

Required Information	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012
Daily student attendance	97%	97%	97%	96%	97%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

13. **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 2016.

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%

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.
Yes <u> </u>   No <u>X</u>

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

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

Riverwatch's mission is to encourage all students to reach their maximum potential through high quality instruction, 21st century skills focus, and nurturing social/emotional well-being.

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

PART III – SUMMARY

Riverwatch Middle was established in the fall of 2004 and is located in the southeast corner of Forsyth County, Georgia. The school opened serving 700 students, who were almost entirely from affluent, Caucasian families. The original demographic breakdown was 96% Caucasian families with 4% split between Hispanic and African American. The original staff of Riverwatch was comprised of 57 teachers, 3 administrators and 17 classified staff. During the first years of the school opening, the school mascot was selected, the Golden Panther.

As the years progressed, RMS experienced many changes. During the recession, the school experienced no growth for only 1 school year, 2010-2011. Since 2011, there has been a significant level of growth and the addition of many new subdivisions is on the rise. The demographics of RMS have significantly changed. Currently, our Asian/India population is 52%, while the Caucasian enrollment is 46%. Both Hispanic and African-American populations have remained steady at approximately 1 or 2%. The current staff serving the Riverwatch population is 72 teachers, 4 administrators, and 19 classified staff.

In an effort to better support our changing student population, RMS revised our mission and beliefs statements in 2012. All have been created by the School Leadership Team, comprised of teachers, and approved by the school's Local School Council, comprised of parents and business leaders. The most recent revision was completed when the school was in the midst of examining its culture. Each year the mission and beliefs are revisited at the beginning of the year, and the statements are introduced to all new staff as well as to parents at Curriculum Nights. Last summer, the School Leadership Team included a review of the Forsyth County Learner Profile in conjunction with our annual review of our mission and beliefs to ensure proper school/system alignment. The motto of Riverwatch is Together we LEAD – Learn, Exceed, Achieve, and Dream. The Riverwatch Mission is is to encourage all students to reach their maximum potential by providing high quality instruction, focusing on 21st century skills, nurturing healthy relationships and community ties, and fostering well-rounded, life-long learners. Finally Riverwatch has three belief statements. Riverwatch believes a happy environment is one in which positive communication between all stakeholders is a priority so that everyone feels that their work is acknowledged and their time is valued. Riverwatch believes a healthy environment is one in which common goals among all stakeholders are met using a support system, understanding the purpose of work, and nurturing self and others. Riverwatch believes a hardy environment is one in which our resiliency allows us to overcome challenges, is a product of the support from others, and helps us to maintain balance and flexibility.

Riverwatch embodies these statements by offering varied levels of classes and including a significant amount of student/parent input to class placements. To support students with their efforts, the school has a supportive relearn/recovery policy that affords students the opportunity to improve test grades when a student does not pass on the first attempt. Riverwatch additionally has student recognition events to highlight and celebrate those students who model aspects of our mission and beliefs. The 2 awards that students strive to receive are the Panther Spotlight and the Golden Deed luncheon. Riverwatch does not simply create mission and belief statements, we work to live these statements in our everyday work.

In the last 3 years, Riverwatch has been named one of the top 50 schools in the United States by bestschools.org. This organization analyzed the school based upon our NAEP scores, state scores, programs, and overall student experience. Additionally, Riverwatch consistently has very high achievement on state measures. Last year, the school's CCRPI rating was 4th in the state of Georgia. Riverwatch also offers many extracurricular opportunities for students. This past year, our competition cheerleading team won first in the state. Our middle school band was awarded a National Blue Ribbon Band recognition by the National Band Association. This award was only given to 2 middle schools in the nation. Our school's drama program was awarded the best ensemble award at i-Theatrics Junior Theatre Festival. The RMS Future Business Leaders of America Club was recently recognized as the second largest chapter in Georgia, and one of our members even placed first in the state for Business Computation. Riverwatch strives to offer students a variety of quality experiences for all of our students in athletics, fine arts, and clubs. The ones listed are just a few examples of the great experiences we offer for our students.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

Riverwatch Middle School's core curriculum is aligned to the Georgia Standards of Excellence (GSE) for Language Arts and Mathematics and the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) for Science and Social Studies. Curriculum is designed to provide rigorous and relevant content to meet the needs of 21st century learners. We focus on appropriately challenging all learners by developing critical thinking, communication, and problem solving skills. Riverwatch challenges students to think and perform at high levels, focusing on Webb's depth of knowledge questioning and writing across all content areas.

The Language Arts program integrates speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary, and grammar skills in a spiraling curriculum across all three grades. Students read a variety of genres utilizing text dependent questions to improve both comprehension and critical thinking. Novel studies are incorporated to develop reading stamina while providing a format for long-term assignments that extend student thinking. All grade levels participate in a vertically aligned writing framework designed to help students prepare for the Georgia Milestone Assessment (GMA). Teachers utilize the DBQ (Document Based Questioning) writing process to guide students in analyzing and reflecting on texts. Most grammar and vocabulary skills are taught in context of reading and writing lessons, but some standalone instruction is provided, especially in vocabulary building. Students utilize technology to reinforce skills and display learning. Advanced courses allow students to access critical thinking and creative assignments that meet the academic needs of the gifted learner, focusing on open-ended tasks.

In mathematics, 6th grade students develop understanding of ratio and rate, fractions, negative numbers, using expressions and equations, statistical thinking, and geometric figures. In 7th grade, students focus on proportional relationships, operations with rational numbers, linear equations, area, surface area, and volume, and drawing inferences about populations based on samples. 8th grade students focus on expressions and equations, solving linear equations and systems of linear equations, using functions to describe quantitative relationships, analyzing, figures using distance, angle, similarity, and congruence, and understanding and applying the Pythagorean Theorem. Some students take an accelerated pathway that leads to high school credit in the 8th grade. All grades use common assessments to drive instruction that include constructed responses to support the school writing initiative with a focus on use of content-specific vocabulary. This data allows teachers to plan instruction to improve student achievement. Performance tasks and higher level questions link to real world situations. The increased rigor and engagement that results from these lessons helps build math formulation for students as they embark on higher level curriculum.

The science curriculum focuses on utilizing technology and experimentation to support student learning through hands-on, student-centered, and inquiry based instruction. In 6th grade, students study Earth science, which provides an overview of astronomy, geology, hydrology, and meteorology. Seventh grade students learn necessary skills to transition from elementary life science standards to high school biology standards. Major concepts include cells, DNA and heredity, human anatomy and physiology, and the ecology of plants and animals. In 8th grade, students study motion and forces, energy transformation, electricity and magnetism, matter, and atomic theory. The course encompasses standards from 8th grade and high school physical science, preparing students to take the End of Course assessment for high school physical science credit. Throughout all three grade levels, the scientific method is infused to support rigorous problem based learning and literacy writing skills.

The social studies curriculum acquaints students with the world and state in which they live. The sixth and seventh grade curriculum is divided into a two-year World Area Studies course. In 6th grade, students study Europe, North and South America, and Australia. In 7th grade, students study Africa and Asia. With this vertical alignment, students understand the interconnectedness of geography, culture, government, and economics. The 8th grade curriculum shifts from a worldview to a local understanding in Georgia Studies. Courses utilize project based learning to encourage student involvement through civic engagement as members of a global society and active participants in their own communities. Curricular implementation of DBQ challenges students to make inferences from prior knowledge in the analysis of primary and secondary

sources while making literary connections with multiple historical documents. Teachers integrate technology in assessments, research, and project based learning.

Students are challenged to master and apply key academic skills necessary for future college and career success. Curriculum is designed to instill academic perseverance through relevant experiences that develop higher order thinking skills. Project based learning teaches students to work collaboratively and apply knowledge and skills to real world situations. A school wide writing initiative teaches students to communicate responsibly and effectively. Teachers facilitate a twenty-first century learning environment through various technology platforms in an effort to enhance application of knowledge, educational collaboration, critical thinking skills, and student engagement.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Riverwatch Middle School provides a variety of enriching non-core classes to address the needs and interests of the whole child. These class offerings range from exploring technology to physical education.

Students in all grades have an opportunity to pursue reading and writing across the curriculum or to study a foreign language. The enrichment course focuses on cross-curricular connections with a particular emphasis on project-based learning. Over the course of the school year, 6th and 7th grade students delve more deeply into topics taught in language arts, science and social studies by engaging in additional reading, writing, and research. Students in 8th grade, have the opportunity to study a foreign language. The foreign language program consists of cultural studies of Hispanic societies and their customs. Besides developing cultural awareness, this course engages students in novice level conversation and comprehension. Students in Spanish I earn a level one world language high school credit.

Riverwatch also offers a variety of elective courses which cater to the interests of our student population. These courses include health and physical education, fine arts, broadcast journalism, and career and technical education. To begin, the physical education program is designed to develop healthy fitness practices, confidence, and a positive attitude toward physical activity. Students are instructed in a variety of activities including cardiovascular fitness, strength training, skills and knowledge of group games, and team building. In addition to PE, students participate in health classes, focusing on the health triangle: mental, physical, and emotional health. Topics covered in class include the dangers of alcohol, drugs, and tobacco, proper nutrition and sex education. 75% of the student population takes part in the PE and health programs.

Students interested in fine arts have the opportunity to explore band, chorus, and art. The band and chorus programs at Riverwatch provide a comprehensive musical education to over 800 participating students. Our band and chorus programs have both received Superior ratings at Georgia Music Educator Association-sponsored events. The Riverwatch Band Program is the 2016 recipient of the National Blue Ribbon Program of Excellence Award presented by the National Band Association. Chorus students participate in the annual Junior Thespian Festival (JTF), a national musical theater festival. Students interested in art gain an understanding of the visual arts world through studio practices, art criticism, art history, and art production. Using the elements of art and the principles of design, students will solve problems visually in two dimensional (2-D) and/or three dimensional (3-D) forms.

Broadcast journalism is another elective offered at Riverwatch Middle School. In this class, students study news broadcast and video production. The students research and write scripts for video productions such as documentaries and self-created tutorials of various camera functions and techniques. Eighth grade students use their skills to produce the RMS Panther News program which is broadcasted daily to the student body. The students also provide a live-stream of RMS sports, band and chorus concerts as well as other school activities. In addition to broadcast journalism, a yearbook class is offered to a select group of eighth grade students. The RMS yearbook is created and produced entirely by the yearbook staff.

Finally, students interested in business and technology have a unique opportunity to pursue those interests at Riverwatch. The Business and Computer Science (BCS) class introduces students to the principles of computer science, basic keyboarding skills, internet safety and usage, and computer applications with an emphasis on project-based instruction. Approximately 500 students are enrolled in BCS throughout the

year. For 8th grade students, BCS is offered as a semester course with approximately 130 students each year. In addition, the Engineering and Technology course introduces students to the engineering design process while looking at technological impacts on society through practical application and hands-on activities with an emphasis on exposure to engineering and technology careers, work ethic, and leadership skills.

Our commitment at Riverwatch is to educate the whole child through exposure to a variety of concepts and skills, and the wide range of non-core subjects offered here meet the needs of our students' interests, abilities and aptitudes.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

Through intensive curriculum and instructional strategies, we isolate and identify students' skills and needs, as well as interventions required using metacognitive knowledge to problem-solve, reason, communicate, and make connections. Critical analysis of yielded assessment data informs instruction and enhances student outcomes via engagement and individual accountability.

Using the data from the Georgia Milestones, students are placed within leveled classrooms. The instructors specialize in teaching to the readiness of each learner. These classes include Small Group, Collaborative, Co-Teaching, On-Level, and Advanced content. In addition, those in Beginning or Developing (or Lexile below 1000) categories, and without Individual Education Plans, are placed in an additional Literacy course, receiving direct, small-group instruction. Conversely, students scoring Proficient or Distinguished are placed in Enrichment, a course enhancing cross-curricular research and writing, addressing individual creativity and choice through common core literacy standards. Advanced content courses are also offered for high achieving students within each content area for the purpose of enrichment and acceleration. Each pathway acknowledges appropriate Depth of Knowledge levels to stimulate mastery.

Within all of these frameworks, assessment is integral to instruction and essential to the learning process. Diagnostic measures, such as pre-tests and self-assessments, identify current knowledge and capabilities. Formative assessments such as tickets out the door, quizzes, teacher: student conferencing, and peer review are administered systemically. This assessment for learning, an ongoing process, provides specific student feedback, drives future instruction, and yields insight into improving teacher practices.

Teachers regularly collaborate, delve into formative data, and set learning targets. The result is developmentally appropriate instruction where students acquire, process, and demonstrate knowledge in different ways. Advanced learner content may be accelerated or offered at varied levels of depth and complexity. Whereas on-level students' instruction may be based on learning styles or area of need. Co-Taught students work in small groups with content adjusted in a variety of ways, including lower Lexile or audio versions of text. All students benefit from blended learning, which has the power to create relevant and rigorous learning opportunities. Students' remediation is differentiated through modalities including scaffolding and teacher modeling. End of unit summative assessments such as exams, essays, projects, or portfolios take place after the learning is completed and provide feedback of the learning process. Based on this data, students consistently not meeting learning objectives are referred for consideration of further support.

With varied intervention programs such as Gifted, Special Education, English Language Learners, and the Response to Intervention (RTI), instructional practices continuously improve and meet the diverse needs of our population. This principle is illustrated in the RTI process, where teachers are encouraged to ask for resources or intervention strategies to reach struggling learners. Progress monitoring tools are also used to measure growth in weakest areas. Monitoring takes place one time per month and is usually administered by the literacy teachers or the Graduation Coach. Students also participate in weekly help sessions where they work on additional remediation skills in math, reading comprehension, or overall study skills.

Additionally, administrators, counselors, and support staff meet monthly to review RTI students' progress, and to identify students who are not yet in RTI but in need attention. Before each meeting, our Graduation Coach analyzes the grades of the students failing any content courses. With this information, the

administration and support staff look at the trends with individual students. These discussions often lead to enlightening conversations regarding teaching practices, quantity and quality of work, and both formative and summative assessments within each content. Providing an intentional focus by the administration, counselors and support staff ensures we meet the needs of all of our stakeholders.

For students served under IEPs, Special Education teachers and paraprofessionals are anchored within each grade-level to strengthen all teams. This inclusive co-teaching model provides differentiated instruction and services for students with disabilities in the mainstream content area classes. We also have a team of Special Education teachers who specialize in their content areas and provide small-group services with individualized programming for those learners who have more intensive needs.

A well-rounded assortment of instructional techniques, interventions, assessments, and programs create our student-centered learning environment. This allows student self-advocacy to increase, resulting in the pursuit of continuous educational and personal growth. In our quest to promote individual responsibility, the high expectations for student learning, reinforced by support, is a powerful recipe for all students to succeed.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

In order to fulfill the challenge of a positive school culture, with academics already a strength, Riverwatch established a guiding philosophy for our climate that enhances a successful environment: H3 - Happy, Healthy, and Hardy.

A Happy environment is one in which positive communication between all stakeholders is a priority so that everyone feels their work is acknowledged and their time is valued. We provide plenty of opportunities for students to become involved in school spirit, including a range of sports, clubs, and field trips. Teachers become as involved as the students by supporting, sponsoring, and collaborating with students. These efforts allow students and teachers to develop strong and lasting relationships.

A Healthy environment is one in which common goals among all stakeholders are met using a support system, understanding the purpose of work, and nurturing self and others. Teachers and administrators uplift the students' emotional challenges that they face in our high-performing school. Based on school survey data, we acknowledged a need to better equip students with the ability to manage stress by introducing Tim Elmore's character education program: Habitudes. Our hope is that as students become more aware of themselves and who they are, they will develop into leaders both in and out of the classroom as they take on the responsibilities of young adults.

A Hardy environment is one in which our resiliency allows us to overcome challenges, is a product of the support from others, and helps us to maintain balance and flexibility. We strive to achieve a Hardy atmosphere through supporting students academically in order to meet the vision of our school motto: Together we LEAD-Learn, Exceed, Achieve, and Dream. Our teachers are highly trained experts in their classroom and they hold regular help sessions that meet outside of class to help students achieve their best so that they can be successful as life-long learners. We also encourage teachers to recognize students and other teachers within our spotlight awards, which distinguish those who stand out among their peers for being steadfast and spirited as they attain personal goals.

Riverwatch Middle School's culture and climate aligns well with the overall goal of Forsyth County Schools to maintain the high level of success it expects of teachers and students. Riverwatch's H3 philosophy is a well thought out values-based system as a means to foster relationships and create a community within the walls of a school building.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Riverwatch Middle School engages all members of the community in our school. There are 2 major community groups that support RMS in all school endeavors. The first in our Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA), and the second is our Local School Council (LSC). Both groups offer feedback for our school improvement plans.

The Riverwatch PTSA is made up of nearly 800 families and is led by an executive board of 11 parents. PTSA saw the need for a character education program through school survey data. PTSA raised money for this program to be implemented during this school year and provided a grant to have teachers trained on the implementation of this program. Every year PTSA provides RMS with over $30,000 in curriculum grants and resources. Their work shows community support of our school and the belief we all share in providing students with a high quality education experience.

The Riverwatch LSC is a community group made up of 4 parents, 2 teachers, 1 business partner, and the principal. This group reviews all school data: state test scores, survey data, climate data, and community concerns. From a yearly review of this information, the LSC provides input and direction for meeting the needs of our families. One example of their valuable input was in regards to our changing demographics. The Riverwatch LSC was instrumental in helping us become a "No Place for Hate" school, a designation

given to schools by the Anti-Defamation League. The Riverwatch LSC wanted to bring together a community that was becoming fragmented by actively engaging in an improvement effort.

Parents are encouraged to attend informational meetings and school activities held throughout the year. Riverwatch offers Panther Camp for rising sixth graders, parent information nights for parents of sixth and seventh grade students, curriculum nights, and meetings addressing current topics and concerns. Every year, parents are provided test score information and school improvement goals at our Curriculum Nights. These informational meetings are attended by approximately 75% of our families. To reach all of our families, all program information is posted on our school website. Parents are provided ongoing, on-demand feedback about student grades through our online student information system, Parent Portal. Parents are also given access to instructional materials on a daily basis through our online learning platform, itsLearning. It is a steadfast belief of Riverwatch that engaging parents and community is a key element to our success.

3. Professional Development:

Each school year, the Riverwatch Professional Development Plan is devised to support goals outlined by our School Improvement Plan. These goals are set based on a variety of data points, including standardized test scores, CCRPI ratings, Student Health Surveys, and Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES) ratings. From this data, teachers and administrators develop a CCRPI Goal, Academic/Instructional Goal, and Climate Goal. These objectives then serve as the guiding principles behind our professional development plan for the year.

This year, Georgia Milestones data indicated a need for greater focus on writing instruction across explanatory & argumentative genres. Thus, a portion of our professional development plan was devoted to training Enrichment and Social Studies teachers in Data-Based-Questioning, in order to better support writing across the curriculum. Similarly, data from our Student Health Survey showed that students were struggling with connecting with adults at school, anxiety, and peer relations. Therefore, another aspect of our plan included the research of character education programs and, ultimately, staff training on a program called Habitudes, a youth leadership curriculum designed to equip adolescents to effectively navigate life's challenges and opportunities. From our TKES ratings data, we concluded that our staff needed further professional development on the standards of Assessment Strategies and Assessment Uses, so both workshops and targeted observation feedback have been dedicated to that endeavor.

These targeted efforts, based on data from a variety of sources, have impacted teacher practices, student writing performance, and student character development. Administrators have observed an increase in assessment types, effective use of assessment data, and better alignment between formative and summative assessments as a result of the workshops and feedback related to assessment strategies and uses. Stakeholders have reported that the addition of Habitudes has provided an effective means of connecting with students on a personal level and discussing the social & emotional issues they face as adolescents. We are excited to see results from the 2017 Student Health Survey and compare findings to our 2016 data. Finally, the efforts we have made to promote writing across the curriculum have yielded positive preliminary results. We will compare Georgia Milestones scores when we receive them in May, but after administering a Mock Milestones Reading and Evidenced-Based Writing Assessment, scores show that the additional exposure to writing across curriculum has improved students' abilities to effectively compose claims, support those claims with textual evidence, and organize their thoughts in logical and coherent formats.

4. School Leadership:

Riverwatch's governance and leadership has developed operational policies that place student learning, interests, and overall well-being at the forefront of each decision. Staff allotment decisions, professional development opportunities, community involvement, and day-to-day operations are all formulated using the guiding question, "Is this best for our students?". As a result of the work of our governing body, Riverwatch has a positive school culture with strong student performance and engaged stakeholders.

The structure of our School Leadership Team (SLT) is such that every group has equal representation, in order to ensure our decision-making takes all viewpoints into consideration. Each grade level (6-8) and our Connections/P.E. department have two representatives (from a range of content areas) on the team. Counselors, instructional coaches, and administrators round out the team, which meets twice a month for different purposes. One meeting is devoted to discussing the nuts-and-bolts of daily operations and monthly events. The other is dedicated to the leadership development of the team members and "big picture" planning for the school in relation to improvement, culture, and mission & beliefs. The team utilizes the services of an outside consultant for leadership development, which demonstrates their commitment to growing as leaders in order to steer the organization as effectively as possible. Additionally, the team takes a retreat each summer to build unity and set cohesive school improvement goals for the upcoming year.

The impact of our School Leadership Team on student learning is evident in our test scores and success against our school improvement goals from year to year. During the summer retreat each July, SLT uses a variety of data sources to devise an improvement plan for the upcoming school year. The team then presents the goals outlined in the School Improvement Plan to the staff at large during pre-planning and leads each content-area group in constructing "if/then" statements to support goals. For instance, one of the goals set for the 2016-17 year is to decrease the percentage of students in the Beginning Learner category by 1% and increase the combined percentage in Proficient & Distinguished by 5% on the ELA Georgia Milestones. Seventeen "if/then" statements were created from groups across the building in support of this goal, ranging from our fine arts & health teachers to our social studies and Spanish teachers. SLT's leadership produces whole-staff buy-in and support of our school improvement efforts; this unified approach ensures unequivocal impact on student learning.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Riverwatch prides itself on continually reflecting on our work in order to increase student performance. We consistently research strategies and tools to improve academic success, which remains primordial in our day-to-day collaborative planning.

In 2008, 30% of our population of Gifted and Talented students scored in the Exceeds range on the CRCT, which stood out as an area in great need of improvement. Since the CRCT was a minimal competency, statewide test, we felt the need to increase student success by implementing a targeted approach to meet student needs. Norman Webb's Depth of Knowledge (DOK) levels was the strategy our teachers used to increase student complexity of thinking and rigor of instruction and assessment questions. Initially, teachers looked at existing assessments and analyzed each question according to Webb's scale. Any question that was a DOK 1 was rewritten to a Level 2 or 3. This approach encouraged teachers to look at each standard and better align their assessment items to the rigor of the standards. This approach also forced teachers to look at their instruction and not just teach word-definition relationships but focus higher level thinking, such as citing evidence, investigating, critiquing and synthesizing information. This work continued for the 2008-2010 school years.

In 2010, our gifted and talented population scored 100% in the Exceeds range due to this targeted approach. With the advent of the Milestone assessment and CCRPI (College and Career Ready Performance Index), our focus has grown to include the Special Ed population. For the 2014/2015 and 2015/2016 school years, Riverwatch realized that we needed to improve the performance of our students with disabilities. A structural area that needed enhancement was our commitment to the inclusion of our special education population in mainstream courses, in order to increase exposure to the higher-level questioning outlined by Webb. On the CCRPI, RMS was losing 3.2 points because we were not meeting the needs of this group of students. Because IEPs needed to be changed and teacher philosophies needed to be addressed, it took us two school years to make these needed shifts. Riverwatch has evolved in how we meet the needs of special education students; thus, RMS saw a 3.8-point increase on our overall CCRPI score in 2016.

Through the continued work on DOK levels with all students, we have created a targeted approach with common language for a continuous process of increasing student achievement.