

**U.S. Department of Education**  
**2016 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 Dr. Michael J. Raj

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

Official School Name Cedar Hill Elementary School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 46 Pine Brook Road

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

City Towaco State NJ Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 07082-1426

County Morris County

Telephone (973) 331-7100 Fax (973) 331-3430

Web site/URL http://www.montville.net E-mail michael.raj@montville.net

Twitter Handle \_\_\_\_\_ Facebook Page \_\_\_\_\_ Google+ \_\_\_\_\_

YouTube/URL \_\_\_\_\_ Blog \_\_\_\_\_ Other Social Media Link \_\_\_\_\_

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\*Dr. Rene Rovtar E-mail rene.rovtar@montville.net

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

District Name Montville Township Tel. (973) 331-7100

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 Dr. Matthew Kayne

(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. The public school has met their state's accountability requirements (i.e., avoided sanctions) in participation, performance in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics, and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate) using the most recent accountability results available for the year prior to nomination.
3. To meet final eligibility, a public school must meet the state's accountability requirements (i.e., avoided sanctions) in participation, performance in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics, and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate) for the year in which they are nominated (2015-2016) and be certified by the state representative. 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 2010 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: 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, or 2015.
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 or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
9. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
10. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution's equal protection clause.
11. 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 (2015-2016) unless otherwise stated.

### DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 5 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 1 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 7 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
  - Suburban
  - Small city or town in a rural area
  - Rural
3. Number of students as of October 1, 2015 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	20	16	36
1	36	22	58
2	31	31	62
3	22	14	36
4	26	38	64
5	37	38	75
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	172	159	331

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 15 % Asian
  - 1 % Black or African American
  - 7 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 3 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 73 % White
  - 1 % 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 2014 – 2015 school year: 3%

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

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2014 until the end of the 2014-2015 school year	5
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2014 until the end of the 2014-2015 school year	5
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	10
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2014	335
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.030
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	3

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

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

Chinese, Spanish, Nepali, Telugu, Malayam, Tamil, Russian, Turkish, Polish, Korean, Hindi, Gujarati, Urdu

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 2%  
Total number students who qualify: 8

8. Students receiving special education services: 19%  
61 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.

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

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 10
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers	18
Resource teachers/specialists e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	18
Paraprofessionals	13
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	4

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 18:1
12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

<b>Required Information</b>	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012	2010-2011
Daily student attendance	97%	96%	96%	96%	96%
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 2015.

<b>Post-Secondary Status</b>	
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  No

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.

Cedar Hill provides students a program fostering academic, social-emotional growth, and character development. Each child develops skills necessary to appreciate and respect our diverse world.

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

---

Cedar Hill Elementary School, located in the Towaco section of Montville Township, a diverse socio-economic community. In 2013, Money Magazine named Montville as the thirteenth best place to live in New Jersey with specific emphasis on the high-ranking school system. Cedar Hill educates approximately 400 kindergarten through fifth grade students.

For over fifty years, our school has had a history of academic excellence. Our strong mission solidifies the commitments of the principal, teachers, parents, and stakeholders to provide all students with a program fostering academic, social and emotional growth, and character development. Special emphasis is placed upon guiding children to develop a sense of independence, responsibility, and respect for individual differences. Our goal is to provide an atmosphere whereby each student develops the skills necessary to appreciate and respect our ever-changing, diverse world. Throughout the year, our students participate in a variety of activities reinforcing our “Connect with Respect” theme, which is respect for self, others, property, and community.

The development of a strong academic and social-emotional foundation is the core of the teaching philosophy at Cedar Hill. Students achieve educational milestones as they master age and grade level appropriate skills in a nurturing and enriching environment. With a balanced literacy approach, teachers encourage critical thinking skills through differentiated instruction to meet the varied needs of our learners. Cooperative learning and interdisciplinary connections allow students to move along the learning continuum. Technological resources, available in all of our classrooms, enrich lessons and enhance student learning. Based on our belief that assessment drives instruction, Cedar Hill teachers utilize formative and summative evaluations. With an appreciation of theory and practice, teachers place students at the center of the learning process and believe that a child’s foundational years should begin with delight, continue in discovery, and end in knowledge.

To further support the curriculum and our school’s initiatives, students participate in programs such as Student Council, Safety Patrol, Math 24, and “Tools for Schools”, an extracurricular club to increase awareness of environmental issues. Our visual arts program provides opportunities for exhibitions of student artwork in the school as well as the community. Our music education program features choral and instrumental performances. Our physical education and health curriculum fosters physical fitness in support of a healthy lifestyle. Research- and data-driven media and technology programs allow students to experience ever-changing technology with an understanding of how it impacts their lives as students. To encourage literacy beyond school hours, the Little Free Library promotes reading and book sharing among students, neighbors, and friends. This free book exchange is located outside the building within our Friendship Garden.

A valuable asset to our school community is the Cedar Hill Home and School Association (HSA). Parent volunteers fundraise to support cultural arts and school-wide enrichment programs and provide teaching staff with materials and equipment to enrich student learning. The HSA supports our literacy program by organizing an annual book fair, donating books to classroom libraries, and participating in the monthly Parents As Reading Partners program. Each year the association awards a “Beacon of Light” college scholarship to a deserving Cedar Hill alumnus. Their efforts positively affect the school climate thus inspiring school spirit and pride in Cedar Hill.

Our students learn the importance of contributing to the community through the examples set by their parents and teachers. Student Council members organize activities such as holiday food drives, clothing and toy collections, and relief for disaster victims. In addition, students recognize the importance of honoring local senior citizens by including them in active roles during school events such as our annual Veterans Day assembly. Student Council’s involvement in the community is appreciated beyond the halls of Cedar Hill.

A strong bond among the administration, faculty, support staff, and parents makes Cedar Hill a model of educational excellence. Our passionate professionals aim to empower students to demonstrate high achievement, enjoy learning new concepts and skills in all curricular areas, contribute to the community, and

acquire skills for success. Teamwork between faculty and students shape a love of learning. With high expectations and a common vision, Cedar Hill attains uncommon results.

## PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

---

### 1. Core Curriculum:

Cedar Hill School uses an interdisciplinary approach to make English Language Arts (ELA) come alive. Balanced literacy is the foundation of our ELA curriculum. Multisensory phonics programs such as Foundations, Words Their Way, Just Words, and Wilson Reading are the core of phonics instruction and remediation. Lucy Calkins Writing Units of Study and Framing Your Thoughts are the basis of differentiated writing workshops. Reading literature and informational texts take place through mini-lessons, guided reading, small-group strategy instruction, and close reading. Students learn strategies to align with 21st century skills such as creativity and communication. For example, after exploring fairy tales through genre study and identifying story elements, first grade students host a “Fairy Tale Ball” where students dress in costumes and present character monologues to their peers, teachers, and parents. Each year, second grade students host a “Living Wax Museum”. Students use research skills, develop a character study, and create an oral presentation for the school community. Intermediate students combine technology, reading, and writing for a cross-curricular approach to ELA. For example, as part of fifth grade reading instruction, book clubs use Chromebooks and Google Apps for Education to share ideas about themes, characters, craft, and structure by creating and sharing electronic reading responses with their peers and teachers.

Our students are given the time and tools necessary to develop a strong sense of mathematical concepts and skills. The interactive, technology rich enVisionMATH program, aligned with Common Core State Standards (CCSS), prepares students to become active problem solvers and mathematical thinkers. Assessments such as i-Ready allow teachers to differentiate math instruction based on specific student needs. Various math-related activities challenge students to utilize problem solving strategies, while also making mathematical concepts real and meaningful. The Math 24 Club presents math through game play, encouraging knowledge of math facts. Students compete in the “Paper Airplane Challenge”, whereby they create airplanes to negotiate gravity and air resistance to travel the furthest distance possible and then, measure and convert the distances into yards, feet, and inches. The “Chicken Project” explores the topics of ratio and percentile through analyzing the growth of various types of eggs. Students use Chromebooks to graph, analyze, and communicate their data. The “Dessert Challenge” allows students to strategize, prepare, and market food items to sell to staff, peers, and parents after which they decide how they will donate the proceeds.

The science program at Cedar Hill provides our students with unique interactive experiences in support of the anticipated Next Generation Science Standards. The “Rocket Club” provides students the opportunity to learn about the aerodynamics of rockets and their propulsion systems. Each student assembles a rocket based on skill level, which is then launched at the end of the four-week session. Another hands-on opportunity for students is the “Butterfly Project.” Each student receives a live caterpillar, places it into its living habitat, and makes a prediction about chrysalis and hatch dates. The students study the anatomy of the caterpillar and butterfly. In combination with the scientific method and Tier 3 content vocabulary, students record observations of butterfly life cycle in traditional as well as digital journals. A life size tent is set up in the classroom for students to enter and observe their butterflies more closely. Cedar Hill hosts an annual “Junk Jamboree” to support Earth Day. Kindergarten through fifth grade students create games out of recycled materials. Each grade has the opportunity to play the games for a nickel and the donations are used to support environmental causes.

Our social studies curriculum focuses on teaching students to understand the world around them while appreciating what it means to be an American citizen. Curriculum lessons target responsibilities as a member of the school and community, world cultures, New Jersey history and citizenship, and the effects of a multicultural world on the past and present United States. Annually, fifth grade students participate in “Colonial Day,” a day in which students, teachers, and parents dress in traditional clothing and explore the food, tools, and culture of our American ancestors through re-enactment and hands on activities. An “International Lunch” is held to experience the food and traditions of the various nationalities of our students. To enhance the importance of being a New Jersey citizen, Montville native, Joseph Pennachio, visits the fourth grade classes yearly to present information about his role as a New Jersey State Senator.

Engaging the students in a group discussion, the Senator offers a tangible understanding of the abstract concepts of our government.

## 2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Visual arts and music education classes meet weekly for forty-minutes for all grade levels. Kindergarten and first grades receive a supplemental art class, while instrumental instruction is offered to fourth and fifth grade students.

The art curriculum focuses on the elements of art, principles of design, and problem-solving strategies through the creative process. The curriculum emphasizes and enhances creativity, acceptance, and positive self-esteem through individual and group accomplishments. Our art teacher supports community-based initiatives such as Red Ribbon Week, Drug Awareness Council, and Arbor Day. Student work is proudly displayed at our Board of Education Offices.

Interdisciplinary music units of study reinforce skills, knowledge, and multicultural awareness. All students learn to sing and dramatize cross-curricular stories, prepare for concerts, and participate in school wide events such as the Veterans Day celebration and “Holidays and Traditions Day.”

The physical education program supports the physical, intellectual, and social-emotional development of students. Through active participation in movement and sport, students develop an appreciation for personal fitness and the social skills vital to becoming a healthy, productive member of the school community. Cedar Hill exceeds the 150 minutes of weekly physical education required by the State of New Jersey through a combination of daily structured thirty-minute recess activities and at least weekly, forty-minute physical education classes.

Health education extends beyond traditional approaches to include real-life, practical skills. Our school nurse teaches fourth and fifth grade students the Heimlich maneuver. Students use adult, child, and infant-sized mannequins meeting the American Heart Association standards. “Choking Charlie” has a foreign object lodged in its throat and students are taught how to properly administer the lifesaving technique. A student saved her sibling’s life and credited our school nurse for teaching her the Heimlich maneuver.

Through a combination of classroom teacher-led mini-lessons and weekly forty-minute Rosetta Stone sessions, teachers and students gain an appreciation of other languages and cultures. An annual “Holidays and Traditions Day,” supported by parent volunteers, celebrates the diverse cultures within the school community. For example, a former student shared her personal customs by teaching the students about the holiday of Eid while dressed in traditional Muslim clothing.

At Cedar Hill we believe that tolerance and understanding of other cultures begins at home. Our “Diversity Committee” presents different religious holidays and cultural information through visual display cases, related literature, and class discussions enabling all students to feel represented in their school environment. Parents provide and prepare the displays including materials and artifacts with detailed captions.

The Media Center is equipped with the literature and technological tools necessary to enhance student learning. In addition to fostering a love of reading, our media curriculum hones research skills by teaching students how to access, evaluate, and ethically use information sources for a specific purpose. Kindergarten through fifth grade students attend forty-minute weekly media classes. Cross-curricular lessons aligning with American Association of School Librarians Standards and CCSS are geared toward the 21st century learner. Students access Chromebooks, iPads, and a centralized library database in order to create, edit, and share documents. Fifth grade cooperative learning teams conduct Google WebQuests to prepare and present video newscasts aligned to interdisciplinary curriculum.

Technology is used to enhance and support instruction while promoting skills necessary for success in our global society. Our Wi-Fi configured building allows universal access to 180 Chromebooks, 40 iPads, and 95 desktop computers between classrooms, technology lab, and the media center. All classrooms are equipped with SMARTBOARD technology. Throughout our school, SMARTBOARDS and Hapara are used

for interactive Lucy Calkins writing lessons, Skype for local and global communication, iPads for math enrichment, and personal e-readers for independent reading. Upper elementary students receive forty-minute weekly keyboarding or Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) classes.

Cedar Hill offers unique opportunities to support the curriculum and develop well-rounded, 21st century learners. Our weekly “Knitting Club,” led by teachers and senior citizen volunteers use the fiber arts to allow students to break from high-stress activities. Students improve upon fine-motor dexterity while using math skills for patterning and increasing attention and focusing abilities. In addition, students donate knitting projects to The Homeless Bus, a community-based organization providing staples to the needy in New York City.

TREP\$ is an award-winning entrepreneurship education program offered as after school enrichment to fourth and fifth grade students. The program is run by the Home and School Association (HSA) to provide children with opportunities to conceptualize, develop, build, advertise, and market their own businesses. Students attend five interactive workshop sessions that teach how to create and manage a business in a marketplace setting. Students learn that passion, determination, and hard work have many rewards.

### 3. Instructional Methods and Interventions:

Using the domains of the Danielson Evaluation Model, teachers utilize explicit instruction and continuously develop, revisit, and revise unit and lesson plans through formative and summative assessments. Teachers apply Webb’s Depth of Knowledge Levels across the curriculum to guarantee higher-level, critical-thinking skills in each lesson.

Using high-interest subject matter, scaffolded instruction provides guided practice that leads to mastery of content as well as the thinking skills used to achieve it. When multisensory math lessons are delivered, students self-assess understanding, and choose to work independently or with varying levels of support from either the general education or the special education teacher.

Through the tiered instructional process, whole group science and social studies lessons utilize grade-level texts. Below-level text is provided as follow-up instruction for Tier 2 or Tier 3 students, while above-level text is provided to advanced readers to expand upon concepts taught.

Teachers design experiential learning opportunities congruent to students’ learning styles and capabilities. Students engage in collaborative, problem-based learning across the curriculum while learning problem solving, thinking skills, and content. Second grade students work in teams to design and modify catapults to increase trajectory, while learning to write a lab report during writing workshop. Kindergarten students participate in cooperative learning groups to explore penguins’ natural insulation by dipping their hands into ice water with and without a Crisco barrier.

The classroom settings at Cedar Hill include general education, in-class resource special education, and pull-out resource special education. The Response to Intervention (RTI) approach is implemented when a student is struggling. Students experiencing significant difficulties in reading and/or math may be eligible for Basic Skills Instruction (BSI), an academic support program which takes place in the general education classroom. The Intervention and Referral Services (I&RS) team meets to develop Specific Measurable Attainable Realistic Timely (SMART) Goals when a student’s needs exceed BSI remediation.

Should SMART Goals prove less than effective, students will be referred to the Child Study Team (CST) and evaluated for special education services. If identified, academic instruction takes place in the least restrictive environment. Related services such as counseling, social skills, speech/language, occupational, and/or physical therapies are provided as needed. English Language Learners (ELLs) receive supplemental instruction from ELL certified teachers to support mastery of the English language.

Teachers utilize various technological approaches to reach all students. Many of our teacher webpages are equipped with teacher-created video lessons, access to online textbooks, and links to educational websites to support home learning. Translation apps on iPads are used to assist communication with ELL students.

Multimodal language apps support Speech or Language Impaired students. Typing or speech-to-text dictation on iPads, Chromebooks, or other word processing devices is offered to students with fine-motor difficulties.

#### 4. Assessment for Instruction and Learning and Sharing Assessment Results:

At Cedar Hill School, from kindergarten registration to fifth grade promotion, students are assessed to ensure instruction is appropriate and progress is consistent with expectations. Kindergarten teachers use The Developmental Skills Checklist (DSC) to assess incoming kindergarten students' reading and math readiness and skills. Students' reading progress (kindergarten – fifth grade) is regularly assessed Fall, Winter, and Spring using a variety of assessments appropriate to the students' grade levels: Fox in the Box; Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA); Rigby READS; Rigby Literacy by Design Benchmarks; i-Ready Diagnostic Reading Assessments; Foundations Test Trackers and Probes (phonics); Word Identification and Spelling Test (WIST); and District Benchmark Assessments (ELA, math, science, and social studies). Students' math readiness and achievement are regularly assessed and tracked using Fox Adds Up; enVision Math Assessments (Placement, Topic, and End of Year Assessments); and i-Ready Diagnostic Math Assessments. Third, fourth, and fifth graders' reading, writing, and math progress was previously assessed using New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJASK). In 2015, our District began using the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). Fourth grade students will continue to utilize the NJASK to assess science.

Together with our reading specialist, kindergarten through fifth grade teachers analyze formal and informal assessment results to determine individual students' strengths and weaknesses. Using color-coded spreadsheets, multiple measures are cross-examined to help identify high-achieving and struggling students in need of academic support.

Progress conferences with our reading specialist take place in the context of grade-level meetings, meetings with individual classroom teachers, and I&RS meetings. Additionally, the reading specialist may consult with the principal, BSI committee, school counselor, school psychologist, Learning Disabilities Teacher-Consultant, district behaviorist, school nurse, speech/language, occupational, and physical therapists. Other specialists at Cedar Hill are consulted to determine student strengths and weaknesses in specialty classes such as physical education, music, or art. RTI protocols determine if implementation of interventions such as SMART Goals are effective. Careful monitoring efforts maintain our high, overall academic performance.

## **PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS**

---

### 1. School Climate/Culture:

The purpose of education at Cedar Hill is to facilitate the development of the whole child. The school staff recognizes individual differences among pupils and encourages their achievement and progress in foundational skills and the ability to think independently, creatively, and critically. Students are given the tools to develop self-respect, compassion, and empathy. Our school staff helps pupils understand and believe in our democratic society in which individuals treat others fairly while developing skills for successful futures.

In November 2015, through a partnership with the Youth Empowerment Association (YEA) and United Way, the school community participated in an anonymous online School Culture and Climate Survey. Cedar Hill students report feeling safe and able to identify a variety of staff members whom they trust and can seek assistance from when needed. Teachers report feeling valued and supported. Personal events such as marriages, births, and birthdays are recognized and celebrated. The principal fosters a collegial atmosphere by promoting and encouraging an environment based on the premise of trust. The Climate and Culture Committee, consisting of students, teachers, administrators, and community members, meets regularly to encourage open communication, promoting a positive school environment. Additionally, Cedar Hill offers co-curricular opportunities for student participation such as the Character Education Committee, “Diversity Committee,” and “Tools for Schools.” One of the programs the school counselor facilitates is “Mentor Mondays,” a program in which fourth grade students help kindergarten students develop social and emotional skills through game play, role modeling scenarios, and group discussion.

Cedar Hill is extremely proud of our partnership with The Seeing Eye (TSE). TSE, located in Morristown, New Jersey, is the oldest guide dog training and breeding facility in the country for the visually impaired. We are fortunate to have been an integral part of their Puppy Raising Program for 17 years. Our principal and school nurse, both certified puppy raisers, educate and expose our students to the regular training and expectations of a service dog. At the start of the day the puppy is greeted by students and staff in the hallway. The puppy is immersed in classrooms and follows the daily school schedule.

### 2. Engaging Families and Community:

Cedar Hill staff understands that a school of excellence maintains a strong home-school connection. In today’s technologically advanced world, Cedar Hill parents and teachers are able to communicate via e-mail, district and school websites, with individual teacher pages, and Remind, a teacher-parent instant messaging app. The school community regards open communication as paramount to student success.

One of Cedar Hill’s strengths is the ability to work closely with our parent population to make our school a better learning environment for students. Our HSA has supported our teaching staff through various grants, bringing resources innovative lessons into our classrooms. This support has been a catalyst for Cedar Hill’s continued academic excellence.

In support of a local family, our fifth grade students initiated Operation Candy, an incentive program supporting the Kindness for Christopher Movement. After tragically losing his life, Christopher’s mother founded this movement to encourage random acts of kindness. The students created greeting cards to accompany 190 pounds of donated Halloween Candy. They partnered with local Girl Scouts to ship the candy to troops overseas in Christopher’s name. Simultaneously, the Student Council organized the collection of approximately one-hundred pajama bottoms that were donated in his memory to a children’s hospital in the area.

Our Student Council works toward the betterment of Cedar Hill and the community. Over the past several years, Student Council has worked closely with Jaycees Angels Organization to provide underprivileged children with a gift for the holiday season. They organized a school wide fundraiser and collected over three thousand dollars in support of Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), through the Ice Bucket

Challenge (<https://vimeo.com/111234509>). Instead of merely pouring buckets of ice water over their teachers' heads, they enlisted the assistance of the local Towaco Volunteer Fire Department to soak them using fire hoses! It was a rewarding day that rallied the school and community for a great cause. Our Student Council has distinguished itself time and again as a shining star, not only at Cedar Hill, but in the surrounding community as well.

### 3. Professional Development:

Cedar Hill staff experience various kinds of professional development. The principal, elementary supervisor, and other district administrators lead after-school faculty meetings which focus on specific topics for instances differentiated instruction, our Standards-based report card, and RTI.

The Cedar Hill School Improvement Panel (ScIP), comprised of the principal, arts supervisor, reading specialist, and volunteer general and special education teachers plan for building-based professional development days. In January 2014, the President of the New Jersey Association for Gifted Children, spoke regarding the needs of gifted and talented students and modeled differentiated instructional approaches.

The principal and reading specialist meet with general and special education teachers at grade level meetings to discuss CCSS, instructional programs and approaches, assessment results (NJASK, PARCC, Fox LA and Math, i-Ready), and optimal grouping of students for instruction. At these meetings, our reading specialist shares assessment spreadsheets with grade level teachers resulting in group data analysis and discussion. Afterward, the reading specialist meets individually with BSI, general, and special education teachers to determine the differentiated instruction and support warranted for individual, small, and large groups of students. In addition, our reading specialist models lessons for teachers in order to demonstrate literacy approaches and new programs. Joint planning, sharing lesson plans, resources, assessments, and reflections take place as part of modeled lessons.

Our District provides professional day opportunities for teachers to attend workshops, conferences, and visit other classrooms both in and out-of-district. Ongoing training in the explicit and direct delivery of the Foundations program provides teachers with the most current instructional strategies. In addition, district teachers are required to take online training courses such as Reading Disabilities/Dyslexia-NJ to help them better understand the needs of struggling readers.

Cedar Hill continues to search for worthwhile, relevant professional development opportunities to benefit our school community. Teachers often register for webinars to learn more about CCSS, fluency, and reading strategies. The reading specialist, school counselor, CST case manager, special education teachers, speech/language, occupational, and physical therapists, physical education teacher, school nurse, and arts teachers, meet with district colleagues within their specialties. In addition, the district technology coach meets with teachers to help them implement new technologies. At faculty and grade level meetings, teachers and specialists disseminate new information about research, philosophies, interventions, laws, and practices.

### 4. School Leadership:

By having trust and faith in all of the stakeholders and a shared common vision of school improvement, it is only then that the school can truly succeed. According to Spillane (2005), Distributive Leadership embodies the ideology that one person (the principal) does not and cannot alone lead the building to great achievements. It is, however, the philosophy that the various stakeholders within the building and community, working in harmony and utilizing their collective talents, move a school from the ordinary to the extraordinary.

At Cedar Hill, we incorporate the Distributive Leadership philosophy by capitalizing on the talents of the teachers, staff, students, and parents. For instance, the principal has weekly meetings with student leaders from the Student Council and Character Education Committee. During these meetings, students exercise their voice. Agendas are created, challenges discussed, and with principal approval, members report back

to the student body.

The ScIP meets weekly to discuss educational trends, best practices, and suggestions for our monthly professional development. Our reading specialist is a key component of this committee since she serves as the “teacher for teachers,” providing additional resources or modeling lessons in the classroom for teachers. Faculty members serve as grade level leaders, after school program coordinators, and club liaisons. Teachers have opportunities for both formal and informal collaborations with paraprofessionals. The administrative assistants ensure school procedures and policies are followed to maintain an efficient building. The school nurse supports the health and well-being of all. Our custodial staff maintains a safe, clean, and welcoming environment while participating in student-run environmental activities.

Parent participation within the school greatly contributes to our success. The HSA is very supportive of our school’s mission to enhance the academic, social, and emotional development of all students. The HSA Executive Board encourages volunteerism by creating a warm and inviting school appearance. Murals, outdoor gardens, and seasonal displays are hallmarks of their commitment. Additionally, the HSA conducts fundraisers to support cultural arts assemblies and grant requests for academic resources, such as the purchase of iPads, and supplementing classroom libraries.

## Part VI – INDICATORS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS

---

The Cedar Hill award-winning Character Education Program is the foundation of our success. Based on our experience and research (Elias, 2011), addressing the social and emotional needs of students increases academic performance. Cedar Hill School is a New Jersey State School of Character for the 2015-2016 school year, an honor which has been bestowed on us for the next three years. “Connect with Respect” is a school-wide program encompassing the entire community which fosters a strong social-emotional component and connection, distinguishing Cedar Hill as an exceptional school. Our school counselor provides lessons which support the four pillars upon which the Character Education program is based: respect for self, others, property, and community. Social skills and friendship groups meet in the “Kindness Kafe” or the “Friendship Garden” to nurture respectful relationships. Cedar Hill students are engaged throughout the school year in beneficial projects to assist in the development of the whole child. Character Education Committee students create a vision for the school year, adopt service projects for the school-wide community, and determine fundraising strategies. They market, promote, and manage projects until fruition.

Through “Connect with Respect,” walls are figuratively torn down and classrooms are extended not only throughout our community, but the world. One example of our passion and desire to help those less fortunate is our adoption of a Ghanaian student. Using technology, our students have developed a relationship with him sharing video messages, Skype interactions, photographs, and cultural artifacts. In order to further develop empathy and awareness, students are educated on the value of giving. To that end, the Character Education Program raised over thirteen thousand dollars for charitable causes and the support of family members with medical challenges including a staff member’s daughter and a teacher’s nephew.

Our Veterans Day program brings the entire community together to honor those who have served and are currently serving. This program is a meaningful way for our students to learn about United States history. Veterans speak with each grade level to share their experiences. The entire school comes together for a culminating assembly to honor the veterans, many of whom are relatives. Over four hundred students and staff walk out of the auditorium in silence while a veteran plays Taps on a bugle, resulting in a truly remarkable experience that leaves a lasting impression on veterans, students, and teachers.

Our “Connect with Respect” Character Education program provides Cedar Hill students with a strong foundation for present and future successes.