

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 (per district designation):
- 8 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 3 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 3 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools

14 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, 2016 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	22	17	39
1	25	15	40
2	22	14	36
3	18	11	29
4	15	19	34
5	19	12	31
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
Total Students	121	88	209

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 1 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 0 % Asian
 - 1 % Black or African American
 - 5 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 92 % 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 2015 – 2016 school year: 14%

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

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	14
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	15
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	29
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2015	211
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.137
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	14

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 2 %
4 Total number ELL

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

Spanish

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 50 %
Total number students who qualify: 103
8. Students receiving special education services: 19 %
40 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
- 0 Emotional Disturbance
- 0 Hearing Impairment
- 0 Mental Retardation
- 0 Multiple Disabilities
- 0 Orthopedic Impairment
- 2 Other Health Impaired
- 22 Specific Learning Disability
- 11 Speech or Language Impairment
- 1 Traumatic Brain Injury
- 0 Visual Impairment Including Blindness
- 3 Developmentally Delayed

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 5
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	1
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects	12
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	8
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a licensed professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	4
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	1

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 17:1
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	96%	97%	97%	96%	97%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

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 No

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award. 2011

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

Growing together as a community of learners, every day in every way. Passionate about learning; positive influence; boldly challenging one another; exceeding expectations; problem solving.

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

Riverbend Elementary School is a part of the Haywood County Schools located in the Southern Appalachian Mountains of Western North Carolina. Riverbend is named for the bend in the Pigeon River located near the school. We serve the largely underdeveloped, rural, farming communities of Crabtree, Iron Duff, and Fines Creek. This area is one of the most beautiful, desirable areas in the county. The school, built in 1998, was established as a consolidation of two schools, bringing several communities together.

As stakeholders, we are united in our vision: Growing together as a community of learners, every day in every way. Our beliefs have worked well and transcended time. We believe in providing stimulating experiences for all children to reach their fullest potential within a positive, secure environment. We also believe a successful school is a community of learners who contribute positively to each other, the community, and the world. In addition, a prosperous school is one which encourages involvement, fosters communication, and welcomes support from students, teachers, parents, and the community.

Our student population of 209 students consists of 92% White, 5% Hispanic, 1% Black and less than 1% of American Indian and mixed races. Nearly 20% receive special education services. Many students are from second and third generation families who attended the former community schools of Fines Creek and Crabtree. When there is a student-led event, one can be assured that attendees will include many parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. These families are deeply rooted in the Appalachian culture. They are hardworking and independent. With fifty percent of the students being economically disadvantaged, generational poverty is faced every day. We prove year after year that socio-economic status does not determine a child's academic success.

We believe academic success is determined by our growth mindset. When visiting a classroom, one will see engaged teachers and happy students learning through high interest activities in all subjects. There is a clear message documented through stakeholder surveys that student learning is "The Most Important Thing" and that everyone is "Growing together as a community of learners, every day in every way."

From the moment the doors open, students start the day with the Pacing Panthers Walking Club. Before the bell rings, the children are walking, pumping oxygen and getting all cylinders revved up for a rigorous day of engaged learning.

Students participate in rich instruction which is entrenched in best practice, anchored in the district's frameworks, and based on the philosophy that kids need to read a lot! The students love math and reading books. They get excited about science and reading books. They adore social studies and reading books! Extended learning activities are also provided through clubs such as Page Turners and Girls on the Run. The school is the pride of the community and a place where children feel at home. They are supported when they make mistakes, encouraged to try again, and guided to become lifelong learners.

A key strategy is hiring extremely effective teachers. The leadership team at Riverbend is intentional in hiring the most outstanding teachers. Starting with the interview process, candidates understand they are competing to join a winning team. This was extremely important in June of 2015 when Riverbend had an unprecedented turnover rate of 30%, losing highly experienced, National Board Certified teachers to retirement and out-of-district transfers. In light of this huge challenge, we worked tirelessly to hire the best and the brightest. One of the principal's strengths is her ability to discern applicants with the "it" factor. With her intuitive skills, and a strong interview team, five new teachers were hired. The result was even higher levels of success and performance.

Because a high value is placed on teacher leadership, these new teachers were able to "piggy-back" on the expertise of the remnant core. They collaborated and grew as learners. Within months, the playing field leveled and these teachers were no longer "new," but fully integrated into the Riverbend culture. This culture embraces the challenges of learning and sees beyond initial failures. We continue to grow regardless of change, difficulty or obstacles.

We were fortunate to be a 2011 recipient of the National Blue Ribbon Schools award. Our principal is completing her fifth year and feels honored to be leading a Blue Ribbon School. She knew coming in that she must carry the torch of high performance. Her passion for rigorous, focused instruction and her ability to communicate high expectations has been a blessing.

In the fall of 2014, Riverbend was recognized as a National Title I Distinguished School nominee for “Highest Student Performance,” and has been North Carolina’s top performing K-5 Title I School for three consecutive years. Riverbend is the only A+ elementary school in the school system and is thrilled that this current National Blue Ribbon nomination will help perpetuate its legacy of excellence.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

Riverbend’s long standing success is testimony to a deep understanding of the core curriculum. Haywood County elementary schools operate under well-defined curriculum frameworks. Riverbend implements the frameworks with great fidelity because best practices produce student success.

We follow the North Carolina Standard Course of Study in reading and math and the Essential Standards in science and social studies. Our top priority is aligning standards-based teaching to the unique learning needs of each student. Our strength is the ability to delineate the importance of each standard and target what matters most for each student.

For English language arts, Riverbend functions within a balanced literacy framework. Collaboratively, we often revisit each component to ensure a strong program. We work at balancing read aloud, shared reading, guided reading, and independent reading based on the needs of our students. Comprehension strategies to engage and foster thinking are explicitly taught and ubiquitous.

How our balanced literacy approach works is an on-going conversation. Through messy and sometimes painful reflection, we refine our practice. For example, after conducting running records, the classroom teachers, lead teacher, and principal analyze each assessment and discuss each child. The goal is to determine whether the next teaching steps should focus on decoding, fluency, or comprehension. It is this act of putting a face with each data point, and honing in on instruction, that benefits students the most.

Also serving us well is our commitment to increase the volume of student reading and writing. Our desire to establish a love of reading has led us down the path of implementing strong and productive reading and writing workshops. Better readers read a lot, and writing fluency is one of the highest indicators of deep understanding. Writing is an opportunity for students to think critically, synthesize their thinking, and communicate what they know. When we decided to make reading and writing fluency a focus, our overall proficiency took a leap from 89% to 92%.

Riverbend approaches mathematics from a conceptual point of view. Our teaching is grounded in developing mathematical ideas and foundational understanding of numbers. We focus on the “why” of math situations and the ability to transfer this understanding. Procedural fluency and problem solving with accuracy is stressed, too. We utilize Investigations math because of its excellent conceptual approach and student friendly activities. We take a balanced approach through direct teaching, shared experiences, guided math groups, and independent work opportunities.

Although rural, Riverbend is progressive. We believe our students are future Nobel Prize winners, scientists, and engineers. We are cultivating a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) culture. We have created a STEM rubric, implemented monthly STEM activities, and have hosted science fairs. In addition, we utilize STEMScopes which is a one-stop digital learning platform that provides resources, videos, computer games, and hands-on activities. Our students love participating in scientific inquiry as they investigate and explore in this rich environment. These powerful learning opportunities equip our students with the 21st Century skills needed to be college and career ready.

Students develop social studies knowledge through integration. Teachers select non-fiction texts, picture books, newspapers, and periodicals around a central theme to build background knowledge on topics such as, “how human activity has and continues to shape the United States.” Units are developed and coordinated through our media specialist. She facilitates the expansion of activities by including art and music teachers. She recommends technology tools that best support learning. Students make connections to the world around them and broaden their knowledge base as they learn content through reader’s theater, living museums, guest speakers, role playing, quality literature, field trips and multi-media projects.

Civic learning and engagement foster opportunities for student involvement beyond the school day.

Students can participate in a variety of clubs including Page Turners, Coding Club, Battle of the Books, gardening, and Girls on the Run. Participation in these activities gives our children a sense of self-efficacy and a feeling they are part of something meaningful. These activities provide students the opportunity to work with peers and community partners to provide an environment that encourages creative expression. We believe these robust and relevant learning experiences perpetuate our vision of, “Growing together as a community of learners, every day in every way.”

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Our passion to grow together as a community of learners drives everything we do. This passion permeates the learning opportunities beyond the core provided in art, music, physical education, and media. All classes, kindergarten through fifth grade, receive visual arts instruction every other week. During this time, students are instructed in the Elements and Design Principles of Art. Students are introduced to numerous historical and multicultural events and concepts. Creative and critical thinking skills as well as effective problem solving and communication skills are also emphasized.

English language arts and mathematics are integrated naturally and purposefully into the curriculum. This is accomplished largely through the use of overlapping vocabulary. Shape, form, pattern, symmetry, balance, emphasis, perspective and value are a small sampling of the terms and concepts that are embedded in the visual art instruction while simultaneously fortifying knowledge in other core content areas.

Music education helps support essential skills and knowledge in many ways. We have part-time teachers in primary and upper grades who meet with students on a weekly basis. Reading and comprehension skills are used daily as students read music lyrics, information about composers, and the history behind each selection they sing. Math skills are reinforced through reading rhythms, looking for patterns, connecting meter in music regarding how beats are broken into groups of twos, threes, or fours as in multiplication, and fractions when determining note value durations. Our students are constantly reminded of the connection between music, other arts, and other areas of study as we learn about the history of the music, the culture it comes from, and its purpose in each society.

Most students at Riverbend would consider physical education one of their favorite learning experiences. Students are taught by a certified physical education instructor two days a week. Students meet standards in physical education through creative activities, games, and dance. Motor skills, health related fitness, and sportsmanship are major areas of instruction. Cooperation and positive interaction with peers is of utmost importance. Students feel safe, happy, and supported by their peers and instructor when participating in class. There are high expectations for positive interactions and participation throughout all grade levels. Our students are successful meeting and/or exceeding those expectations.

Riverbend’s media mission is to support the school curriculum by collaborating with staff to create a vibrant learning environment with equitable access to meet the diverse needs of all learners. We strive to empower students to become effective and critical users of information, lifelong readers, skilled researchers, problem solvers, and ethical users of information. Our media program uses a flexible schedule for grades 2-5 and a fixed schedule for grades K-1. Our full time media coordinator teaches classes for all grade levels every other week and uses a flexible schedule for additional learning activities.

The media coordinator utilizes the NC Information and Technology Essential Standards to teach research and 21st Century skills. Students explore new and inventive ways to conduct research, to create and to present the knowledge they acquire, and to use various technology tools.

Major grants have propelled Riverbend to lead the district in the amount and utilization of technology. Each classroom is equipped with iPads, desktop computers, lap top computers, and Chromebooks. Eight of twelve classrooms have Smartboards. Teachers and students also have access to two computer labs. These labs are open daily and teachers sign up for times on an online flexible calendar. Most primary classrooms visit the computer lab weekly. Intermediate classes visit the computer labs at least twice a week. Lab time is taught by the classroom teacher and is often an extension of previous learning. Technology tools, such as Google Hangouts, Skype, and Google Classroom, are utilized to foster a global and cultural understanding of the

world in which we live.

Our media center is the hub of creativity and invention as our students develop the 21st Century skills needed to be globally competitive. This learning environment fosters a fearless and experiential atmosphere where children realize their success and failures perpetuate our goal of growing together as a community of learners.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

District frameworks and the workshop model are our cornerstone instructional methods. During a literacy block of at least 120 minutes, read aloud, shared, guided, and independent reading are taught. Read aloud introduces students to constructing meaning from text. Teachers assume responsibility and navigation of the text. Shared reading supports students as they read texts that would otherwise be too difficult. Small group guided reading helps children practice integrating the comprehension strategies taught during shared reading. Independent reading is the last step in the gradual release where students practice reading by themselves. Leveling the ebb and flow of each component is key to our balanced literacy approach.

Implementing Lucy Calkins' Reading Workshop was an important contributor to academic success. By adding mini-lessons and conferencing, we amped up independent reading time and developed a love of reading throughout the school.

Our students grew when we shifted to developing fluent writers. When we realized that writing fluency is one of the highest indicators of understanding, we intentionally sought to get better at writing. We discovered that writing provides students with an avenue to think critically, synthesize, and communicate what they know. We made this shift through making writing a main course rather than a side item. Through the Lucy Calkins workshop model, deliberate teaching of constructed response, and intentional work on inter-rater reliability, we catapulted our literacy program forward.

With a pressing desire to grow, we worked to define conceptual math. We studied Teaching Student Centered Mathematics by Van de Walle and Accessible Mathematics by Leinwand. Teachers use inquiry based tasks, hands-on manipulatives, investigations, multiple representations, and in-depth number talks. Deep number sense and strong mathematical thinking have developed as a result.

Students are part of a multi-tiered system of support. Tier 1 is differentiated through flexible groups at the students' instructional level. Students below grade level proceed to Tier 2, which is provided by Title I teachers. The majority of our Title I budget is spent to secure part-time teachers for Tier 2. The single most important determining factor in student achievement is excellent teaching. Therefore, we reduce the student/teacher ratio by hiring experienced and accomplished support personnel. These teachers work with struggling learners in the classroom to make the most of instructional time.

If students do not make necessary progress in Tier 2, they are added to the CARE (Children At Risk Educationally) team process. After interventions and assessment, students may proceed to Tier 3, where specialized instruction is provided by Special Education teachers.

High performing students are identified as well. They are evaluated for the Academically Intellectually Gifted program. Whether they place in this program or not, their instructional needs are met through classroom differentiation.

The undercurrent of urgency to identify student needs and to strategically intervene is an unsung strength of our staff. To identify needs, data is analyzed. Sources include mClass assessments, state and local benchmarks, and formative classroom measures. One example of data analysis is the dissection of running records into fluency rate, accuracy rate, and oral and written comprehension. This is done to rearrange guided reading groups and create learning targets. A data wall is maintained to keep this conversation on-going and of highest priority.

The power and culture of a highly qualified staff committed to high expectations and high performance

cannot be overstated. Our Grade Level Proficient ranges from 28 to 40 points above the state average in reading and math. Most notably, our Economically Disadvantaged Student subgroup performed 33 points higher than the state average in reading and 34 points higher than the state average in math. The performance levels of this subgroup compared to our general population is negligible. We do not let poverty determine the academic success of our students.

Voices from Riverbend say it all. “I think that maintaining our excellence is in fact not maintaining at all. It is a constant mindset that we share to find better researched based practices and strategies to teach our students. We do not maintain. We improve on our practices through reflective conversations and research. This accelerates our achievement and is the heart of our high performance!” In essence, we are, “Growing together as a community of learners, every day in every way.”

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

Walking into Riverbend, one realizes we take learning seriously. Visitors encounter a quiet hum of activity, calm hallways, and engaged students. We ensure our school is a place where students feel empowered to try without fear and to achieve without glory. Hard work is expected and success is the result.

Engagement is achieved through a variety of rigorous learning activities which require reading, thinking, collaborating and exploring. STEM projects often litter the floors and shelves as hands-on, fun learning opportunities that students frequently enjoy.

We motivate students and honor their hard work. For example, each nine weeks, students who have not been absent, tardy or checked out receive the Principal's Perfect Attendance award. We also select "Spotlight Readers." Each month a classroom picks a reader who has made reading progress. These students are honored by having their picture and a write-up posted on a bulletin board as well as recognition during morning announcements. Excellent writing decorates our hallways, and classrooms regularly celebrate student victories.

We provide students with a positive environment that focuses on educating the whole child. We know every face and every name. Each grade level team meets weekly to examine data. We connect each piece of data with a face. Students who are performing above or below grade level are targeted to receive supplemental instruction. Progress is monitored, and further steps are taken when needed. Due to these steps, we are able to ensure all of our students are given the academic support they need in order to grow.

Students are supported socially and emotionally through our Social Thinking curriculum. Students are taught how to listen with their whole body, respond within the group, and identify expected and unexpected behaviors. These strategies help children approach conflict with tools of resolution, thus creating a positive school atmosphere.

Riverbend's culture creates an environment where teachers are valued and supported. Through planning days, duty free luncheons, and weekly common planning periods, we cultivate our family-like atmosphere. Administration is approachable and engages in "critical analysis without blame" in order to provide teachers and students the support they need. At Riverbend we take our mission to heart. We are committed to our five goals to be passionate about reading and learning, to be a positive influence on others, to boldly challenge ourselves and one another, to exceed expectations and to be problem solvers. We do this every day in every way.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

The importance of family-school partnerships is undeniable. As a rural community, the family-school partnership is imperative. Riverbend conducts curricular parent events each year. Topics vary based upon parent suggestions or surveys, teacher recommendations and the needs of students. We offer a Reading and Technology Expo, Science Fairs, math nights, and reading nights. At these events, families participate in enrichment activities together. At a recent reading night, families enjoyed time spent reading together, a musical Book Walk, and a Reader's Theater performed by faculty members. Families left with their own new book and strategies for engaging young readers. The evening meal was included to promote family attendance. We average about one-half of our school population at these curricular events.

Parents serve on our School Improvement Team and Parent Advisory Council. Parents also participate in district-led advisory meetings which provide material on current curricular practices and research. Riverbend is fortunate to have a very active parent volunteer program. The parent volunteer program is unsurpassed in its ability to work together to raise money to benefit students. Over the last five years, volunteers have raised over \$50,000 for classroom books, iPads, Chromebooks, a STEM Lab, and a playground shade structure.

Our staff ensures all families have regular access to clear, concise information about their children's school and classroom. We utilize a rapid notification system to call, text and email parents with information. We also take advantage of our school's website, Twitter, and Facebook to publish important messages related to school activities or news. Many classrooms send home weekly newsletters to keep families abreast of school activities. Teachers often use notebooks or agendas for regular communication between home and school, where they share concerns and positive notes.

The community is involved with Riverbend through a grandparents' lunch, gardening, grade level orientations, Meet the Teacher, parent curriculum nights, music programs, writing celebrations, DARE, fire safety, and summer reading programs. Additionally, we have the support of a community church and Evergreen Paper who donate hundreds of dollars and hours to meet the needs of our children.

We capitalize on the support our community provides and continue to build on and improve these relationships. Through these relationships our parents are included in our mission of, "Growing together as a community of learners, every day in every way."

3. Professional Development:

Our staff keeps up-to-date on current issues and trends through professional reading and participation in meetings, professional development, and conferences. Professional learning communities provide opportunities to share expertise. Our district provides professional development throughout the year including: Reading and Writing Workshop, Guided Reading, LLI, Comprehension Toolkit, STEMScopes, Investigations, and DMI.

We do not depend on district-level professional development. Rather, we create our own detailed professional development plan. This year's plan evolved into "Riverbend University" (RU). RU is an opportunity for staff to facilitate training in cutting edge educational areas. Some of the teacher facilitated professional development included Technology Smack Downs, Curriculum Conversations, and book studies.

During Technology Smack Downs, teachers share techniques for utilizing devices (iPads, Chromebooks, Smartboards) efficiently and effectively. Across-grade curriculum conversations promote best practice, similar language, and synergy. Book studies included Who's Doing the Work by Burkins and Yaris, Notice & Note by Beers and Probst, Number Talks by Parrish, Accessible Math by Leinwand, and Social Thinking, by Winner.

We sent our staff to trainings, such as the NCTM Math Conference and Lucy Calkins Reading Workshop Conference. These opportunities allowed teachers to be trained in a variety of strategies which they shared with peers.

Many teachers participated in over 50 hours of professional development in Reading Workshop. This included a collaborative book study, grade level conversations, peer observations, vertically aligned dialogues, and on-site consultation with an expert. The implementation of this training resulted in more cohesive and dynamic instruction that supports independent reading. This transition directly impacted student achievement as shown by increased EOG reading proficiency levels from 61% to 85%.

In math, we implemented a coaching model in which master teachers provide support to colleagues. This includes one-on-one mentoring, modeled lessons, team teaching, and small-group faculty book studies. This impacted learning by creating more confident teachers, focused on developing conceptual understanding and procedural fluency, resulting in math proficiency, increasing from 72% to 89%.

A correlation between professional development and achievement is reflected in consistently increasing student performance. When asked how professional development impacted her teaching, one teacher responded, "Teachers continually reflect on their practices and consider alternate ways of instructing and supporting students. We are always open to new methods and carefully consider the ideas of others for the

advancement of our students. We really are committed to growing together as a community of learners, every day in every way.”

4. School Leadership:

Great leadership is the key to success for any school and Riverbend is no exception. Leadership at Riverbend is team based and team driven. We believe a team is not just a group of people working together but a group that trusts one another. The valued School Improvement Team, lead teacher and principal align fully with the vision, mission, and beliefs of the school.

The role of principal is that of team player, curriculum/instructional leader, and teacher coach. Her heart is to grow the instructional excellence of Riverbend’s staff. Working hand-in-hand with the lead teacher, the School Improvement Team, and teacher leaders in the school, the goal is to grow and develop the best and most competent instructional force possible for the benefit of our students. Our principal directs school resources to support learning and purchases whatever materials are necessary for teachers to feel well equipped and confident in their jobs. The principal provides latitude for teachers to grow and develop their own teaching styles as long as student growth is evident.

Through School Improvement meetings, staff meetings, data meetings, and common planning, teachers are open and honest about their practice and collaborate with each other. Debates, professional academic discourse, critical analysis without blame, and passionate conversations are the norm for Riverbend. One teacher says, “Riverbend teachers are unique in that they fearlessly initiate practices that positively impact student learning.” The principal inspires the staff to be fearless, creative, and open to change in any area if the change improves what we do. This mindset of continuous improvement is valued and encouraged.

The principal provides teachers with opportunities to visit other classrooms. This spurs new teachers to piggyback off more experienced teachers and grow at an exponential rate. Needed support from the lead teacher or county coaches is provided as well to ensure that Riverbend students get the best teachers in the state.

The staff as a whole strives to be positive, enthusiastic, and attuned to our stakeholders. All are intentionally accessible to parents, students, and community members, allowing us to connect and show we care. We view ourselves as a family and relate to each other with transparency and honesty. Providing this nurturing learning environment in which students are successful is our ultimate goal as a leadership team as we grow together as a community of learners, every day in every way.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Our school vision, mission, and beliefs are foundational to the strategies we employ to achieve academic success. Our core beliefs drive everything we do. We believe in providing stimulating experiences for all children to reach their fullest potential within a positive, secure environment. We believe a successful school is a community of learners who contribute positively to the school, the community, and the world. We believe a prosperous school is one that encourages involvement, fosters communication, and welcomes support from students, teachers, parents, and the community. Each day we strive to be passionate about reading and learning, to be a positive influence on others, to boldly challenge ourselves and one another, to exceed expectations, and to be problem solvers.

With this being said, from the moment new kindergarteners enter our door to the moment they transition to middle school they are a part of the Riverbend family. Like the movie Avatar, “we see” our children. We see their hearts, their souls, their fears, their emotions, and we accept them for who they are and where they are academically and emotionally. With a deep knowledge of each student, and strong instructional methods, we push, pull, and support each one until success is attained. We have high expectations of achievement for everyone, but these high expectations don’t necessarily mean the same thing for everybody. It means students are expected to do the best they can, whether that be school work, how they behave in the hallway or talking to people with respect. Hard work and a good attitude are just as important as test scores.

Riverbend’s key academic strategy is hiring and growing the most talented school personnel we can find. In addition to recruiting the brightest and hardest working teachers, we utilize Title I funding to hire as many highly qualified retired and experienced teachers we can. We do this in order to reduce our adult to student ratio so that each student can be given as much intense, personal, and one-on-one attention as possible. So with each child’s unique life and learning needs being truly known, recognized and valued, all of these educational experts put forth their best, each and every day, to draw the most out of each student. With this attitude that we are all growing as a community of learners, every day in every way, no mountain is too high for us.