

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 [X] Charter [] Magnet [] Choice

Name of Principal Mrs. Jessica Ann Cuneo

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

Official School Name Metrolina Regional Scholars Academy

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 5225 Seventy Seven Center Drive

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

City Charlotte State NC Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 28217-0708

County Mecklenburg

Telephone (704) 503-1112 Fax (704) 503-1183

Web site/URL http://www.scholarsacademy.org E-mail director@scholarsacademy.org

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*Mrs. Jessica Cuneo E-mail director@scholarsacademy.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Metrolina Regional Scholars Academy School District Tel. (704) 503-1112

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

Date _____

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board
President/Chairperson Mr. Lee Keel
(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 (per district designation):
- 1 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 0 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 0 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 1 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	21	15	36
1	16	20	36
2	26	14	40
3	24	20	44
4	25	19	44
5	30	14	44
6	18	26	44
7	16	28	44
8	21	22	43
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	197	178	375

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 55 % Asian
 - 2 % Black or African American
 - 4 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 36 % 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: 1%

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	2
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	1
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	3
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2015	367
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.008
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	1

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

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 1 %
Total number students who qualify: 2

8. Students receiving special education services: 4 %
15 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.

- 0 Autism
- 0 Deafness
- 0 Deaf-Blindness
- 0 Emotional Disturbance
- 0 Hearing Impairment
- 0 Mental Retardation
- 0 Multiple Disabilities
- 0 Orthopedic Impairment
- 1 Other Health Impaired
- 1 Specific Learning Disability
- 13 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: 2
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	2
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects	19
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	11
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a licensed professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	5
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	3

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 20:1
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%	95%	97%	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 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 X 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.

To provide a differentiated and challenging learning environment that supports the distinctive intellectual, social, and emotional needs of highly gifted children and enables them to form meaningful relationships with their intellectual peers.

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

Metrolina Regional Scholars Academy is a tuition-free K-8 public charter school for residents of the state of North Carolina. Any child who meets the admission criteria of Scholars is qualified for admission. Scholars Academy does not limit admission to students based on disability, race, creed, gender identity, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, or ancestry. To qualify for admission to Scholars Academy, a student must be 1) highly intellectually gifted, as objectively determined by Scholars Academy, and 2) qualified under the laws of North Carolina for admission to a public school, which includes satisfaction of the North Carolina residency requirement.

PART III – SUMMARY

Metrolina Regional Scholars Academy opened its doors in September of 2000 as a non-discriminatory, public charter school. The mission is “Metrolina Regional Scholars Academy provides a differentiated and challenging learning environment that supports the distinctive intellectual, social, and emotional needs of highly gifted children and enables them to form meaningful relationships with their intellectual peers.” The major initiative behind the implementation of Scholars Academy was the focus on research supporting highly gifted children as “at risk” of falling through the cracks in traditional educational settings. Our school focuses on ways to prevent these children from falling through the cracks, prevent under-achievement, and guide them towards their potential intellectually, academically, socially and emotionally.

K – 8. The student body is culturally diverse with many first generation Americans representing over 30 countries and all social-economic backgrounds. Parents and extended family members are very involved with the education of their children. The school has a nearly 100% volunteer participation rate, sharing time, talents and treasures. The diversity in our student cultures provides us with opportunities to practice global learning and connections as a natural part of our curriculum getting first hand perspectives from children who represent all parts of the globe. A challenge we have had with our student population is recruiting and serving highly gifted children from the African American and Hispanic populations. These populations are underrepresented in gifted programs across the United States, including ours. In response to this challenge, we have created an active diversity committee to identify ways we can recruit students from these backgrounds as well as support underrepresented gifted children’s needs in our local community.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

Our curricular vision is an ideal that integrates the concepts, processes, and products of each discipline. All of our content areas and enrichment classes integrate civic learning into their programs intentionally throughout the year. Students at all grade levels study citizenship and their role in our community, the United States, and globally. Civic learning is experienced through field trips, including Washington D.C., Veteran’s Day Event, visual arts and music class, novel studies, Night of the Notables, Grandparent’s Day, service learning projects that are Charlotte community based and Democratic experiences in North Carolina.

Language arts/reading incorporates the strands of literature, writing, language, and oral communication that are combined into a unified discipline for study. Reading curriculum at the Scholars’ academy is formulated around the North Carolina Standard Course of Study and supported with materials/best practices as recommended for gifted students. Literature involves reading and critical examination of texts in a variety of genres. Writing begins at kindergarten and is a process of conceptualizing and presenting experiences through language. Language incorporates grammar, usage, vocabulary, and spelling. Oral communication involves presentations, debate, discussion, and oral interpretation. Foundational skills for language arts are learned through both direct instruction and differentiated, targeted instruction for small groups of children. Research proven instructional strategies are used and include phonemic awareness, phonics, and vocabulary development, reading fluency and oral reading skills, and reading comprehension. Literary principles such as figurative language and themes are introduced beginning in kindergarten and grow in intensity over the years. We use curricular programs developed for gifted children such as The Junior Great Books and literature units from the Center for Gifted Education at the College of William and Mary. We utilize materials that are appropriately accelerated and challenging for our students and focus on reading comprehension, critical analysis and integration of reading, writing, and communication. Teachers choose text at all grade levels that connect with civic literacy, social and emotional learning, social studies instruction and science connections.

Mathematics is a language of relationships. Our program includes acceleration, depth of study and an orientation to problem solving. All grade levels focus on the eight mathematical practices in alignment with Common Core Standards. Foundational skills in math are taught through our adopted mathematics curriculum, Singapore Math. The philosophy focuses on children to understand the “why before how.” Children develop a strong understanding of number sense in the early elementary grades to develop into problem solving techniques in later grades. Students are also taught with a focus on developmental appropriateness starting with concrete to pictorial to finally abstract methods. Children move through these methods in a way that meets their learning style and developmental needs. The mathematics curriculum is designed around the range of math abilities that are the hallmark of gifted students. Some students are ready for radical acceleration, while other students demonstrate a need for traditional instruction with modeling, guided practice, and repetition. Based on this range of characteristics of the student body our math program incorporates the expectations from the North Carolina Standard Course of Study spanning kindergarten math through Math III.

Science study at the Scholars’ Academy begins in kindergarten and is approached as a way of understanding the natural world with a focus on the methods and ways of discovering and interpreting new ideas and/or systems of ideas. Science study is inquiry based and is structured around themes, such as systems and patterns. Much of our work in science involves small group investigations that emulate the way that scientists work together in real world situations. Foundational skills in science instruction are taught through experiences and hands on learning. While vocabulary instruction and learning through text are key components of our science curriculum, a focus is on experimentation, discovery and connections to the world. Essential questions are a key factor to all science units taught.

Social Studies include the fields of geography, economics, political science, anthropology, philosophy, history, and current events. Social studies instruction is also focused around essential questions that student explore and analyze as they gain an understanding of their world. Beginning in kindergarten, students

develop skills in research, inquiry, discussion, writing, and group processes. Social studies is a core discipline for learning about and understanding the way the world works from a social/human perspective. Our students learn the foundational skills of social studies through simulations, primary texts, and research that is developmentally appropriate. Civic learning is a primary focus of our social studies curriculum, which carries over into language arts and science. Our students participate in Mock Trials, simulated elections, analyzing democratic documents, Socratic discussions, persuasive argumentation, and service learning to make connections with their community and the nation at large.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Students at Scholars Academy participate in a visual arts program twice a week for periods of 50 minutes. Beginning in kindergarten, students work with investigating a variety of media and content. This includes painting, fabric art, architecture, perspective, graphic design, and ceramics. The skill development continues throughout the grade levels with intentional scaffolded instruction and experiences for our students. Through our visual arts program, students study art history, local artists, and artists globally and through a cultural perspective. Our students all engage in field experiences to local art museums and workshops to complement their study of art history and art appreciation. Our students display their art throughout the school, in local museums, and culminate their year in our Night of the Arts production, which includes a student art sale. Visual arts is a time for our gifted students to display their creativity, their passions, to take risks, and to demonstrate their wide array of gifts beyond academics.

Scholars students also participate in performing arts through our music program two times a week for periods of 50 minutes. In kindergarten through fourth grade, students participate in general music, which includes music history, music theory, music appreciation, an introduction to the recorder, choral singing, learning through movement and Orff instrument introduction. Our middle school students choose to study either band or choir two times a week over the course of four years. In these classes, students study their instruments of choice or their vocal instruments intensely. Children participate in local competitions in our band and choir programs, receiving consistent high marks. These performing arts programs also perform at Night of the Arts in the spring for our entire school community, presenting all that they have learned throughout the year.

Scholars students from kindergarten through eighth grade participate in physical education two times a week for periods of 50 minutes. Physical education instruction includes a focus on developing gross motor skills in the youngest grades and focuses on physical fitness, dance, and athletic skill development in the upper elementary and middle school program. Good sportsmanship, team work, cooperation and perseverance are also key components of our physical education lessons. Lessons are instructed in a developmentally appropriate manner and include global awareness with instruction of sports found around the world. Health and nutrition are taught through the physical education program for specific units of study across all grade levels over the school year. In health class, our students focus on a wide array of skills including nutrition, safety, peer pressure, and risk taking. Our students also have 30 minutes daily of recess time, which is supervised, but unstructured to increase their time for physical movement.

Foreign language is an integral component of our curricular structure. Students receive 1 hour and 40 minutes of instruction in both Chinese and Spanish in our grades K-4. In 5th grade, students choose one of the two languages to study for a total of 3 ½ hours per week of instruction over the course of 4 years. This allows our children to graduate from our school with high school credit in the foreign language they choose. The curriculum in foreign language is structured around the cultural aspects of language study and fluency in reading, writing, conversation and speaking.

Technology instruction is integrated into our core content areas with the support of our technology facilitator. Children begin using technology in kindergarten for simple research skills and practice in math and reading. As they develop through the grades, technology becomes a natural part of our students' day. Research skills are strengthened with exposure as well as direct instruction into the best techniques for reliable sources, internet safety, social media awareness, and foundational keyboarding skills. Our students who have special needs, often rely heavily on technology to support their learning. In the middle school, teachers and students use technology to enhance learning, produce student work, as a communication tool,

and to add a level of creativity and engagement in student work and participation in the classroom.

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is a final key component of our curriculum. To support the intellectual, social, and emotional needs of our highly gifted children, an SEL program is taught everyday for a 20 minute block of time. Students are instructed in and practice skills in self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making in developmentally appropriate ways. While we use a standard curriculum to focus our lessons and skills, teachers use their training in gifted education and experience with our students to drive instruction in SEL. SEL skills are integrated into content area classes where tools taught in the isolated time periods are used to problem solve, collaborate, improve executive functioning, and provide continued support for our students throughout their days. All staff members throughout the school, including support staff, teach SEL classes to select groups of students each day.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

If you walked into any classrooms at the Scholars' Academy on any given day you would see demonstrations of a variety of instructional methods and strategies. The strategies you would see at our school include Socratic seminar, independent study, didactic instruction, pre-assessment perhaps leading to curriculum compacting, mentorships, problem-based instruction, inquiry learning, and strategies developed for gifted students; the Taba Method, the Parnes Model, and others. Differentiation is a natural component of gifted education and is clearly demonstrated in all of our grades across subject areas. Students receive instructional differentiation (process) based on data, assessment differentiation (product) to allow students to demonstrate learning in various modes, and content differentiation based on readiness. In the elementary grades, this is seen in small group instruction, learning centers, and student choice of products and novels. In the middle school grades, differentiation is apparent in our various levels of content classes, in student products, through project based learning, and in small group instruction delivered by the classroom teacher or specialists. Technology based instruction is provided for our students to deliver differentiated learning opportunities. This is mainly seen in our foreign language, math and science classes.

Scholars Academy has been consistently high performing as defined by the state of North Carolina since the beginning in 2000. There are several factors that are connected to this high performance, mainly excellent student performance on standardized state testing in reading, math, and science. Scholars Academy does not use the state testing as a sole determinant in our high performance. The state testing is based on traditional grade level standards and because our curriculum is typically one grade level advanced of the traditional curriculum, it is expected that our students grow at least one year in all subjects from where they begin. This is measured through Scholars Academy developed assessments and through the adaptive, computerized, nationally normed IReady assessment used multiple times a year. To maintain high levels of achievement in our students, instruction appropriate to the learning needs of gifted children is provided across the school. This curriculum and learning goals are consistently analyzed and refined to ensure the development of good instruction for Scholars Academy students. The areas of study are analyzed regularly and adapted to ensure our students' needs are met. For example, at the middle school level, data supported that a group of students required a slower pace for Math I content, which enabled the school to create a course over two years versus the traditional one.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

The focus of our school is to engage and motivate gifted students across the entire school day and in all content areas. We do this by creating classrooms that are active, collaborative, encourage creativity, and focus on critical thinking and problem solving. The majority of our lessons are hands on through manipulatives, discussion, project based learning, simulations, and movement learning. Gifted children need learning experiences that focus on essential questions, connections, patterns, and big picture thinking. Our curriculum and instructional strategies are centered around these areas and other best practices in teaching gifted children.

The grading system used is centered around a growth mindset model. It allows for our children to demonstrate mastery or development in learning standards and larger skills from kindergarten through eighth grade over time. Our teachers in grades K-5 use a rubric system based on Robert Marzano's model in grading and reporting. In grades 6-8, teachers use a traditional letter and number grade model. Middle school and elementary students have the opportunity to redo or reassess areas where mastery was not demonstrated. Children also present their learning in many modes versus traditional paper and pencil assessments. This grading and assessment system motivates our children to learn and not feel that they have just one opportunity to demonstrate knowledge or just one model to show what they know.

Our discipline system is another area where we support students in their environment. To keep a safe learning environment for our children, the focus of our discipline policy is to encourage changes in behavior and an understanding of why behaviors occur. In the majority of our discipline cases, we use restorative practices versus punitive measures to correct behaviors and counsel our children in their social and emotional awareness and self regulation. Our social and emotional learning program also supports our students in their growth of self regulation and social interactions to teach our children about tools they can use in understanding their emotions and reacting to stimuli.

Our school culture creates an environment where teachers feel valued and supported in multiple ways. We have a very active and committed Parent/Teacher Organization that supports our teachers through monthly appreciation gifts, volunteering in the classroom, and teacher start up funds. Our parent community and teachers work in collaboration to support our students, which in turn creates a positive learning and teaching environment. Teachers are treated as professional experts at Scholars Academy and are depended on to provide excellent curriculum and instruction to our students. They are granted a high level of autonomy that allows them to use their best judgment in what is needed to meet our students' needs. Teachers are also offered and provided intense professional development that is differentiated to meet their individual needs and support them in their growth and development.

Our school embodies the idea that is "Takes a Village" to teach each of our students and models what the village should look like in supporting all within the school.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

The students who attend the Scholars Academy reside in seven different counties spread out among the Charlotte Metro Area. Therefore, building partnerships with parents is a geographic challenge that requires intentional action on the part of the school. Using a variety of communication tools and school wide activities, parents and teachers have the opportunity to discuss the success and challenges of each child regularly throughout the year.

Parents receive feedback about their child's academic progress happens through quarterly progress reports and report cards. Report cards include narrative assessments that give parents individualized and specific information about the progress of the child. Teachers at the Scholars Academy are given adequate planning time to allow time for teachers to regularly communicate directly with parents via in person meetings, phone conversations and email. Parent conferences are held in the fall and in the spring. At the middle

school level, conferences are student led so the process includes parents, teachers, and the child. School wide information about the daily activities at the school are shared digitally through a weekly community newsletter, classroom newsletter, the school website, and Facebook.

Some examples of school wide activities designed to help parents participate in the educational process include parent education talks, town halls, and surveys. Teacher talk is an event held each September in which parents are invited to hear presentations by the teachers about the curricular program. In addition, regular talks are scheduled by the school counselor to present information to parents. The town hall is scheduled each fall for parents to ask questions directly to the Board of Directors and administrators. Parents are surveyed about various topics each year. Feedback is collected and analyzed to inform the Board of Directors and administrators of areas for growth within the school environment.

Parental involvement takes on many forms at the Scholars Academy. The school is governed by an independent Board of Directors which is mostly comprised of current parents. The Board of Directors provides many opportunities for parental involvement that directly impact the students through the work of committees such as development, strategic planning, finance, and diversity. Volunteers play a huge role in the school environment. Many of these volunteers led by the PTO who hosts many community events throughout the year. One major function of the PTO that has a significant influence on student success is the operation of the school library. Members of the PTO have built both an elementary and middle school library through funds earned by an annual book fair. The PTO also staffs the library every Wednesday for all students to be able to check out book. Other volunteers work in classrooms assisting teachers, chaperone field trips, coach sports teams, or sponsor an after school club. Through the countless hours of volunteerism, the student experience is greatly enriched.

3. Professional Development:

The first strand for professional development is required study in gifted education. Prior to the opening of school each year a targeted area for staff growth is identified through surveys and/or questionnaires. The topics of focus this school year are on the social and emotional development of gifted children and differentiated instruction for gifted children. Topics covered in previous school years include developing curricular materials for gifted children, characteristics of gifted children, and twice-exceptional children. Employment standards at our school also require that full time teachers who do not have certification and/or degrees in Academically/Intellectually Gifted Education at the time of hire will complete those requirements within two years of the anniversary of their employment. To support this requirement, the school provides financial support for the completion of the four graduate level classes required for the certification. When staff complete the course work on Instructional Models in Gifted Education, they are required to provide a copy of lessons created in the class as a resource to other teachers in the school and in the wider community of gifted educators.

A second strand of professional development is available to staff through the Professional Development Plans (PDP) each of them creates at the beginning of the school year. The PDP is a vehicle for teachers to identify topics they wish to investigate to strengthen pedagogical skills or content knowledge that correlate with teacher evaluation and/or classroom topics. Allowing teachers to self-select training provides opportunities for all teachers to grow as professionals which has a direct impact on student achievement. Staff have selected to attend conferences in a content area, such as music, science, or social studies. They may have taken on-line classes in reading or writing. Several teachers have been presenters at state or national conferences. In all cases, information and skills gained in self-selected training sessions are shared with the rest of the staff at designated times during the year so that all staff and therefore all students benefit from the information learned at the training.

A third strand of professional development is in technology integration in the classroom. In a constantly changing world of technological advancement, it is important for teachers and students to stay abreast of new applications. Monthly technology integration sessions are held for teachers to investigate and learn new ways to incorporate technology in the classroom. Teachers receive training in small group settings with the technology facilitator who tailors instruction to the needs of each different teacher.

4. School Leadership:

The leadership team at Metrolina Regional Scholars' Academy recognizes that the population of children served are considered an "at risk" population of students in most school settings. Highly gifted children in traditional school settings are often left to their own learning devices and are at risk of falling through the cracks. Many are under-performing in traditional settings and there is strong research to support high drop out rates and criminal activity among children considered highly gifted. In 1998 and 1999 a group of concerned individuals in Charlotte, NC, collaborated on the development of a charter for a school for highly gifted children. Knowing that a population of highly capable students was at risk and not being served to meet their potential in traditional educational settings, Scholars Academy was developed. With the approval of the charter in 2000, a unique school was created with the purpose of providing the best possible learning community for highly gifted children. Into the seventeenth year of our school, we remain committed to the ideal that gifted children deserve the chance to be educated to the highest limits of their potential. They need content, experiences, and instructional support to maximize the exceptional possibilities of the people they may become. To this end, the leadership philosophy of the school is to operate our community to provide an atmosphere that meets the intellectual, and social and emotional needs of gifted children in a safe environment where they develop relationships with intellectual peers. We strive to prepare our graduates to become independent, productive, responsible, and creative individuals capable of making positive contributions to society.

Our school leadership structure grants governance responsibilities to an elected Board of Directors. The Board of Directors is organized in a series of working committees, such as development, finance, strategic planning and policy. The committees function as originators and/or a clearinghouse for policies. For example, the development committee guides the fundraising efforts on behalf of the school. The finance committee oversees funding allocations and expenditures. The strategic planning committee guides the short and long term academic and operational goals and for the school.

The Executive Director serves as chief administrator of a school in developing and implementing policies, programs, curriculum activities, and budgets in a manner that promotes the educational development of each student and the professional development of each staff member. The Executive Director also ensures that the school program follows the legal and financial obligations set forth by the Office of Charter Schools, state of North Carolina and the federal government.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

There is not one specific practice that makes Scholars Academy so successful. Recruiting and retaining excellent educators is the beginning. The school puts a lot of intentional focus on providing ongoing professional development opportunities for our staff to support them in educating gifted students specific to our students' intellectual, social and emotional needs.

Our assessment process has a focus on providing the best instruction for our students, using assessment and data to help make that determination. Assessments are not used for the purpose of measuring our students against others or to measure our school success as a whole. Our school is successful because we do focus on individual children and their learning needs, including their social and emotional support and do not look at them as a test number or factor in our performance as a school.

The practice that has been added recently with an intentional focus on social and emotional learning each day is a key component to ensuring our mission is met and our students receive instruction in all areas during their day that develops them as a whole child and not just an intellectual. It is very early in the process to measure if this is a practice that leads to our success, but through student, teacher, and parent data, it is our vision that the SEL program will enhance and impact student's academic success in the near future. It is also a key component to developing a school culture focused around collaborative learning and supporting our students, staff and parents in many ways, which ultimately leads to school success.

Our academic practices are the strongest, most developed part of Scholars Academy. Having instructional practices in place for seventeen years to support highly gifted children, has allowed our students to consistently perform with high marks on assessments used to measure school performance and growth. For us, the growth piece is the most important measurement for our gifted children. It is expected that our students can perform to meet expectations on traditional grade level assessments, but it is the growth measurement that we value and use to measure our true success as a school. Once our students leave us, it is their personal success in high school, college and beyond that allows us to reflect on our success. Alumni feedback is used regularly to help improve our practices.

While there is not one factor that we can attribute our success to, it does all come down to the people. The students who are curious passionate learners, the teachers who are dedicated professional educators and the parents who are supportive advocates of their children.