



## **Part I – Eligibility Certification**

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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

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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):
- 21 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 7 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 4 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 32 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	31	31	62
1	46	24	70
2	45	36	81
3	32	38	70
4	40	28	68
5	38	33	71
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>	232	190	422

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 1 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 3 % Asian
  - 8 % Black or African American
  - 20 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 65 % 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: 19%

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, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	43
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	30
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	73
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2015	388
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.188
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	19

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 5 %  
20 Total number ELL

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 38 %  
Total number students who qualify: 164

8. Students receiving special education services: 10 %  
41 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.

- |                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <u>15</u> Autism               | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness              | <u>4</u> Other Health Impaired                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness        | <u>8</u> Specific Learning Disability          |
| <u>1</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>33</u> Speech or Language Impairment        |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment    | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>1</u> Mental Retardation    | <u>1</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |
| <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities | <u>0</u> Developmentally Delayed               |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 4
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	2
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects	20
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	10
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a licensed professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	11
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 22:1
12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

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

13. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**  
Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2016.

<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 X

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.

Team Smithfield: Determined to EXCEL above the line.

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**

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Smithfield Elementary is and has always been a place where students, parents, the faculty, and the community come together as learners. From its inception in 1875, this small community has placed a high value on learning. In fact, the school is named after the landowners who donated the property on which the school is built. While the landscape has changed and the population has become more diverse, the community spirit and belief in continuous improvement that created this school is still a hallmark of Smithfield Elementary.

Even after the small town of Smithfield was annexed by North Richland Hills in 1959 and Smithfield Elementary became one of 21 elementary schools in the Birdville Independent School District, the community and its school retained a small-town feeling. At Smithfield Elementary, positive partnerships with students and their families is an essential part of achieving academic goals. This belief is put into action from the moment students step foot on the school grounds in the morning until the moment they leave in the afternoon. Each morning students and parents are greeted with a warm welcome from administrators and staff. Students on the school leadership team also foster this caring atmosphere by holding open the doors and greeting everyone who enters. Teachers welcome students at the classroom door and reinforce life skills such as giving firm handshakes, maintaining eye contact and greeting one another with a smile. The consistency of these small but powerful acts creates a warm, supportive learning climate in which students thrive.

Currently, 440 students from kindergarten to fifth grade are enrolled at Smithfield Elementary. The student body is comprised of 65% White, 20% Hispanic, 8% African American, and 7% students of other races. Of the student population, 40% are economically disadvantaged, 5% are English language learners, and 10% are in special education.

In addition to 20 traditional classrooms and push-in and pull-out support for students with special needs, an early intervention program is provided for students with multiple learning and language acquisition challenges. This program, called Structured Environment to Enhance Communication (SEEC), includes two self-contained special education classrooms. It not only supports students from Smithfield but also serves students from surrounding schools. All these diverse learners find success at Smithfield Elementary. The focus on supportive relationships and continuous improvement at Smithfield Elementary has resulted in new levels of academic success over the past four years. In 2013, the average percentage of students who “met the standard” on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) was 72%. In 2016, the average percentage of students who “met the standard” was 95%. Furthermore, the average percentage of students who achieved “advanced” levels of proficiency doubled during the same period, improving from 16% in 2013 to 32% in 2016. These gains are a direct result of an increase in the level of rigorous work designed for students, the use of continuous improvement strategies, and a focus on building strong relationships that enhance learning partnerships between teachers, students, parents, and the community.

The way problems are solved at Smithfield Elementary is further evidence of the positive impact these supportive relationships and continuous improvement mindset has on student achievement. When teachers needed more time to work with students in small groups, they redesigned the school day. Now, in addition to the recommended time allotted for each subject, teachers designated a block of structured intervention time, called What I Need (WIN), when they can meet the learning styles and needs of students at all levels of achievement. Students move in and out of these flexible groups as their level of proficiency changes. Students who have not mastered the skill may work in a small group with an expert teacher who focuses on prerequisite skills or presents the skill in a different way. Students who have demonstrated mastery extend their learning by applying the skill in unique contexts. For example, third graders designed a game to reinforce the standard the class was learning. This game was used by the class to reinforce their learning. Students become partners in their continuous improvement by creating tools they will use to master skills. Parents and community members are also viewed as key learning partners. When the community found out that some Smithfield Elementary students lacked school supplies, local businesses provided donations to fill those gaps. But community support extends well beyond material support. When parents and community members found out that some at-risk students needed positive role models, they became mentors for these

students, regularly joining them for lunch and attending monthly events. Teachers report that these mentor-student relationships have resulted in increased motivation and academic performance for these at-risk students.

Smithfield Elementary is a strong community of diverse learners. This includes not only students, but also teachers, administrators, parents, and support staff. They don't just talk about continuous learning for some; they work together to make it happen for everyone. When students become Smithfield Wildcats, they become part of a learning community that cares and supports their continuous improvement and well-being.

## **PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

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### **1. Core Curriculum:**

At all grade levels, core curriculum is built on state learning standards known as the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). These grade-specific standards are taught using proven research-based practices that help students with diverse experiences, learning styles, and levels of proficiency meet or exceed the state standards.

Inquiry learning supports the core values of Smithfield Elementary and is embraced across the core contents. This structure not only triggers curiosity but also fosters collaborative relationships as students of varying levels of proficiency work on common goals. The process of examining issues and looking for patterns teaches problem solving skills that build self-motivated learners and develop the skills required for continuous improvement.

In language arts and math, inquiry learning is provided through a workshop structure that begins with a question or investigation designed to teach a state standard. This is followed by a block of independent practice when students apply the skill in authentic ways while the teacher confers or meets with students to address specific needs. The workshop concludes by talking or writing about learning. In science, inquiry learning is provided through the 5E model of investigation (Engage, Explore, Explain, Extend, Evaluate). Students learn through hands-on, minds-on exploration, including writing or drawing to record observations and insights. In social studies inquiry learning is provided in a variety of ways such as simulations and projects designed around a state standard. These experiences build the foundational concepts and democratic principles students need to be productive citizens.

At Smithfield Elementary, the ability to read and write is treated as essential skills that set the stage for success in other subjects and in adult life. Reading and writing are taught as reciprocal skills. The curriculum is intentionally designed so that the specific TEKS taught during the mini lesson in reading workshop is paired with a corresponding writing TEKS during writing workshop. Often quality literature used to teach a skill in reading workshop is examined as a mentor text in writing workshop. Students have significant blocks of time to apply the skills they learn in authentic reading and writing tasks, including reading in self-selected texts and writing about self-selected topics. In reading workshop, guided reading occurs during independent reading time, allowing teachers to differentiate instruction. In writing workshop, teachers address individual needs through conferences that occur during independent writing. In addition to improving students' literacy skills, the workshop approach has increased their enjoyment of reading and writing.

To help close the achievement gaps between students from high socioeconomic and low socioeconomic backgrounds, math instruction begins by building academic vocabulary through interactive activities, word walls, and higher-level questioning. Mini lessons are designed to teach specific TEKS and reinforce the UPSC routine (Understand, Plan, Solve, and Check). During independent practice, teachers meet in small guided math groups to target specific needs while the rest of the class works in interactive workstations that require them to apply their skills in meaningful ways, such as planning a party on a budget. The intentional focus on building academic vocabulary, asking higher-level questions, and designing authentic practice has resulted in higher achievement in math.

Science instruction is based on TEKS. Students spend 50%-80% of their instructional time engaged in investigations that build upon experiences and skills taught in previous grades. Learning is structured to help students make meaning out of their inquiry experiences and link academic vocabulary to the concepts and skills they are learning. This approach promotes continuous improvement and fosters strong relationships between students as they work together to solve problems. In addition, students have numerous opportunities to connect civic learning and science. For example, students created and continue to run a campus-wide recycling program that raises awareness about the importance of conserving resources.

While social studies is taught daily and directly teaches state standards, it is not restricted to one particular

time of the day. Instead, civic learning and engagement are intentionally woven throughout instruction in all contents. Not only does this promote civic responsibility, it also makes learning in math, science, reading, and writing more relevant. State standards are used to generate a question or issue that is explored through simulations, Socratic-style discussions, projects, and opportunities to interact with the community to see concepts in practice. These experiences provide the relevance and depth necessary to develop the knowledge and skills students will need to participate fully in their community.

## **2. Other Curriculum Areas:**

At Smithfield Elementary, all students participate in visual and performing arts programs, physical education (PE) and technology classes. These courses are based on state standards (TEKS). They play an important role in providing experiences that low-socioeconomic students might not otherwise have. A weekly rotation schedule provides a 55-minute block for PE every other day and music and computer on the alternating days. Other non-core curriculum areas in which students participate regularly are art and media literacy.

In music, the state standards provide a spiraling K-5 curriculum that delves deeper each year to build knowledge and skills in four core areas: music literacy, creative expression, historical and cultural relevance, and critical evaluation and response. Students explore rhythm, movement, a wide range of instruments as they sing and act out music from across the ages and across cultures. Each year the music teacher coordinates with community groups to arrange field trips to local fine arts performances such as ballets, operas, and symphonic performances. Students apply their learning by participating in grade level performances where they dress in costume, sing, dance and perform on stage for multiple audiences. Fifth graders travel into the community to perform for local preschools and nursing homes. In addition to teaching the state music standards, the music teacher and classroom teachers work together to identify authentic ways to integrate and reinforce the skills students are learning in each content area. For example, rhythmic notation is related to fractions in math and songs are used to deepen students understanding of historical events.

Limited district funds and personnel necessitated a different structure for teaching art. Art instruction is provided by a team of district art teachers who rotate from campus to campus. These designated art days occur approximately once a month for all K-5 students. While formal art instruction is provided less often, this structure has benefited learning by providing a longer block of instruction, allowing more time to apply their learning. The state standards for art focus on the same four core areas as music: art literacy, creative expression, historical and cultural relevance, and critical evaluation and response. Students learn about the elements of art and principles of design by examining works of art from various cultures and historical time periods. Then they apply this knowledge to create original artworks using a variety of media. Art teachers plan with grade level core contents in mind, making meaningful connections between art standards and core content skills whenever possible.

Physical exercise (PE) is essential in building not only strong bodies but also strong character. Lessons and physical activities are designed around the state standards for each K-5 grade level. Lessons that help students understand the relationship between physical activity and health are taught directly and indirectly through a wide range sports and activities. For example, after participating in a game of soccer, students reflect on how it developed endurance, strengthened muscles, and how nutritional choices or hydration may have impacted performance. The Smithfield PE coach has created a “No Flex Zone” to teach students about being a good sport, regardless of whether they win or lose. Every year students look forward to applying these skills during Field Day and the Smithfield Elementary 3rd-5th Grade Kickball Tournament. The coach also looks for opportunities to connect activities students do in PE with skills from core subjects, such as figuring out the distance around the bases on a baseball field or demonstrating civic responsibility by supporting the community by participating in Jump Rope for Heart to raise money to support the American Heart Association.

To teach technology skills, Smithfield Elementary uses the K-5 state technology standards which are based on the National Educational Technology Standards for Students. Three computer labs provide opportunities for K-5 classroom teachers, as well as the technology teacher to teach and reinforce skills appropriate for

each grade level, including social media manners, internet safety, keyboarding techniques, identifying reliable internet resources, using online databases, and generating a message through text, graphics, audio and video. In addition, language arts standards related to technology and media literacy teach students skills necessary to understand and become critical consumers of the information available on the internet. The teaching and application of technology throughout the instructional day is highly motivating and provides another avenue for students to apply core skills in a variety of ways that develop the 21st century skills they need to succeed in their academic and adult lives.

### **3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:**

Becoming the high performing school that Smithfield Elementary is today did not happen by accident. Instead, it was the result of increased rigor in daily instruction and intentional use of intervention time, called What I Need (WIN) time.

Daily instruction is driven by state standards and a systematic approach called the Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) cycle. The marriage of these tools has increased the rigor of teaching by creating a continuous improvement mindset that is embraced by teachers, administrators, and students.

The PDSA process begins by analyzing data in Professional Learning Communities that includes teachers and support personnel. At least three kinds of data are considered at different times throughout the year. The yearly State Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) assesses proficiency in reading and math at grades 3-5, writing at grade 4, and science at grade 5. The entire faculty reviews this data to identify skills that were and were not mastered. Since state standards are vertically aligned, K-2 teachers identify prerequisite skills they need to teach more rigorously. Grade 3-5 teachers used the data to modify and adjust instructional techniques used the previous year. District content-based assessments (two per core content) are directly aligned with the district's written curriculum based on the state standards. These are spaced across the year to provide a snapshot of students' proficiency in the core contents at grades K-5. Teacher-created assessments are used to assess standards taught in each core content unit of study.

While the principal facilitates discussions by compiling the data and ranking students in the entire grade level, teachers take ownership of the data analysis and identification of specific learning targets. Their discussions focus on what students know and do well, what needs more practice, what needs to be retaught, and how students' progress will be monitored. Teachers at Smithfield Elementary do not look at students as "yours" and "mine" but as "ours." Therefore, there is no sense of shame or competition when students in one class outperform another class. Instead, teachers share strategies and ask questions about how the TEKS were taught, how students practiced the skill, and how progress was monitored. Finally, teachers divide the students into groups according to their specific needs and decide which teacher or support personnel is best qualified to teach each group. Each teacher uses the data for her assigned group to plan instruction. Teachers work with these groups during the grade level WIN time. This PDSA cycle successfully maximizes student achievement across the year and has resulted in differences of less than 10 percentage points between sub-populations at Smithfield Elementary.

Once a day all students receive one hour of specialized instruction during WIN time designed to accelerate learning or close achievement gaps in math and reading for each student. This is an all-hands-on-deck endeavor. The resource teacher provides support for special education students, including working on specific individual educational goals. The speech teacher provides support for students who need to develop language processing skills. Smithfield also has a reading and a math interventionist who work with students who are not performing on grade level. The Gifted and Talented Enrichment (GATE) interventionist works with gifted students in a small group setting, providing problem-based learning and adding depth and complexity to the TEKS students are studying. This concerted support allows classroom teachers to work with smaller groups and make learning more personalized.

For every unit of study, K-5 teachers use a PDSA cycle to evaluate whether state standards were mastered. First, they analyze the standards included in the unit by identifying the content, context, prerequisite skills, and academic language of each standard. This includes setting goals and identifying demonstrations of mastery. Next, they determine what they need to do to ensure every student masters the standard. They

identify strategies, lessons, resources, and tools for monitoring progress. At the end of the unit, teachers study the data to determine what parts of their plan worked and what still needs work. They also review the data with students to celebrate successes and set future goals. Beginning in kindergarten, students learn how to analyze their own data. This partnership between teachers and students helps students understand the value of continuous improvement and has contributed to the success Smithfield Elementary has achieved over the past four years.

## PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

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### 1. School Climate/Culture:

“There is something different about Smithfield. It just feels like home.” Comments like this are common when parents or visitors enter Smithfield Elementary. It begins with the warm welcome they receive from administrators and support staff as they enter the building and continues as they walk down the halls, exchanging greetings with teachers who stand at their doors with a kind word, a smile, or a handshake for everyone who passes by.

At the beginning of each year, the teacher and students work together to build a collaborative culture. Team building activities help students get to know and trust each other. To promote respectful interactions, the class writes a mission statement that captures their shared vision for working together, and students sign a social contract that outlines how they will treat each other and contribute to a respectful learning climate. Teachers continue strengthening these relationships by building in affirmation time each day. Students are encouraged to share small steps they accomplish as they strive to achieve personal or academic goals. While this affirmation time takes only a few minutes each day, it has a lasting impact on the way students interact and appreciate the unique qualities of each other. These activities build emotional bonds and teach social skills necessary for collaborative learning and academic goal setting.

An affirmation board, pep rallies, and awards assemblies are other ways teachers and students are recognized. Every six weeks, students receive collectible dog tags for academic and behavioral achievement and Golden Awards for achievement in non-academic classes. Cheers, songs, and games build Wildcat pride that inspires continuous improvement.

Teachers also feel highly valued. At Smithfield Elementary, continuous improvement is not just a mantra it is a way of life. Teachers are empowered to be innovative as they plan differentiated instruction based on their data. The administration trust their decisions and backs that up by providing requested resources, showing interest in the progress of their implementation, and supporting them when challenges arise. For example, when teachers began designing more rigorous lessons, they quickly realized it required more time to review student progress, align instruction, and plan challenging lessons. The staff worked together to implement Planning and Collaboration days each Friday. Support faculty provide additional time in PE, music and the computer lab for students to do projects that are supported by the state standards. This gives grade level teachers large blocks of time for planning and collaboration.

Students, teachers, parents, and visitors to Smithfield feel valued because they are. This sets a tone that builds the positive relationships essential for continuous improvement to take place.

### 2. Engaging Families and Community:

At Smithfield there is a strong focus on building relationships with parents. Parent outreach begins before students enroll as kindergartners. Kindergarten Round-Up allows new students and their parents to tour the school, talk to teachers, and spend time in a kindergarten classroom. This outreach continues every year at a family event called Meet the Teacher. Students visit their new classroom, meet their teacher, find where they will sit, and unpack their supplies. These types of before school events build excitement for the new year and help students and parents feel welcome.

These outreach events continue throughout the year, including Bring Your Mom/Dad to Lunch day, Grandparent’s Breakfast, Science Night, and a Father/Daughter Dance. These activities make parents eager to visit again and have resulted in more positive, active support of their child’s continuous academic improvement.

Parents also play a role in the continuous improvement of their child, so teachers plan opportunities to share the curriculum and offer ways to support their child. At the beginning of the year, each grade level hosts Curriculum Night. Teachers present an overview of major units of study, classroom expectations, and

nuts-and-bolts issues like how to contact the teacher and when weekly work folders will be sent home. The partnership between teachers and parents extends to academic or behavior challenges that arise. Teachers are intentional about presenting the information in a way that conveys a genuine interest in the child and includes the parent in generating solutions.

The PTA provides additional opportunities for involvement. They embrace the school's commitment to building relationships and play a vital role in making sure every student has what they need to succeed. For example, when students need funding for field trips or school supplies, the PTA is there to help. Their goal is to make sure Smithfield students never see a difference between those that "have" and those that do not. They also operate a workroom two days a week, organize a Fine Arts Day, run a holiday store so students can purchase gifts for their families, and host fundraising events such as the Fall Carnival, Fun Run, and family night-outs.

Community partnerships include a mentor program with a local church where church members form positive bonds with at-risk students by regularly joining them for lunch and attending monthly events. Another highly successful partnership between a local church and the PTA implemented a "backpack program" that provides food for low income students on the weekends.

It truly "takes a village to raise a child," and parents and the community are valued partners in the meeting the social, emotional, and academic needs of students at Smithfield Elementary.

### **3. Professional Development:**

As the community which Smithfield Elementary serves has become increasingly more diversified, one of the biggest challenges has been how to best meet the needs of students with a wide range of experiences, proficiency levels, and support from home. The continuous improvement cycle (Plan, Do, Study, Act) helps teachers and administrators make better decisions and recognize when to replicate or abandon a strategy or practice.

The principal has extensive training in continuous improvement practices and has developed a framework which is used to identify and monitor growth for the staff, as well as students. Because of high teacher-satisfaction, teacher turnover is low. However, whenever a new teacher is added to the faculty, training in this continuous improvement process is a high priority. In addition, the faculty regularly revisits what they know and believe about continuous learning. These ongoing conversations increase the fidelity with which teacher implement this process in their professional learning and with students. As a result, more students are successful more of the time.

At the end of each year the leadership team uses available data, the campus improvement plan, and staff input to plan professional development for the following year. This team includes campus administrators, teacher leaders from each grade, and any additional staff who will be impacted by these decisions. Three key questions guide these professional development decisions: Does the data support this need? Will this build capacity within our teachers and students? Does this training reflect best practices? Once training needs are identified, the leadership team schedules campus staff development days, vertical team meetings, and monthly professional learning time.

In addition to these campus trainings, teachers and administrators meet regularly in professional learning communities (PLC) that work together to study and learn about issues that may be unique to the grade level or content and then implement and assess the impact of their learning on student achievement. For example, when the fourth grade team began teaching their own writing and students failed to make the sufficient progress, they planned embedded training with a consultant. After each training session or model lesson, the teachers implemented what they learned. That year students "meeting the standard" on STAAR Writing rose 23% higher than the previous year and students earning "advanced" proficiency rose 27%. Moreover, each teacher identifies personal learning goals as part of the yearly teacher evaluation process. With the support of administrators, they determine what they need to learn, implement this learning in the classroom, and assess their growth. As a result of the self-initiated, continuous improvement of teachers, students are also more successful.

#### **4. School Leadership:**

Leaders create inspiring visions and motivate others to embrace that vision. They create a culture of trust and acceptance. That accurately describes the leadership team at Smithfield Elementary.

“Empowering” is perhaps the one word that best describes the principal. She understands that successful students require successful teachers, and she measures this success in terms of continuous improvement and supportive relationships. This creates a clear vision for the campus. Teachers, students, parents and the community understand that the norm at Smithfield Elementary is continuous improvement and supportive relationships. This vision shapes every action and every decision the principal makes from how students, teachers, and visitors to the campus are greeted when they walk through the door to the way challenges are faced. It is also embraced by the assistant principal who works closely with the principal.

This shared vision manifests itself in tangible ways. For example, throughout the day, the principal and assistant principal can be seen walking the halls. They greet students and teachers by name and take time to personally connect by asking about their families, last night’s ball game, or what they find most interesting about a unit of study. They use affirmation boards or work displayed in the hall as opportunities to compliment growth and reinforce the continuous improvement mindset. The school counselor is another important member of the leadership team who supports the vision of continuous improvement and positive relationships. She works within the classroom to share lessons designed to support academic achievement and personal/social development. As needed, she counsels individuals or small groups of students on issues like making friends, dealing with divorce, or managing anger.

A representative from each grade level makes up the leadership team known as, Leaders of Learners (LOL). These teachers work collaboratively with campus administration to support the core work of teaching and learning. Using the Plan, Do, Study, Act cycle, they generate solutions for campus-wide issues. These leadership opportunities help build the capacity of the staff to achieve the vision of the school.

Teachers also work in vertical teams to increase student success in each core content area. They meet regularly to ensure alignment across grade levels and to identify ways to improve. These groups use the continuous learning cycle to design school-wide initiatives that enhance learning. For example, the Science Vertical Team created an aligned list of academic vocabulary to be taught at each grade level. The reading vertical team identifies reading strategies to be used school-wide and created an acronym for remembering the strategies.

At Smithfield Elementary, leadership is everywhere. The shared vision of continuous improvement and supportive relationships naturally builds leadership capacity.

## **Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

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There are many factors that play into the success of Smithfield Elementary, but the implementation of the continuous improvement framework and the unwavering focus on building strong relationships have been the biggest game changers. Any decision that impacts students' academic achievement is viewed through this lens.

It starts with the campus administrator. Operational systems are created around the continuous improvement framework. The principal models the Plan, Do, Study, Act cycle in making decisions with the staff and sets clear expectations that all classrooms will follow this model. Whether it is leading the campus in creating a campus improvement plan or making the daily schedule, she demonstrates that decisions based on data and best practices are more sound. This builds trust and emboldens the staff to be innovative, knowing that missteps are viewed as temporary and accepted as a natural part of the process forward. It is no coincidence that the continuous improvement process also builds strong relationships as the staff collaborates to identify, plan, and assess their decisions.

The consistent use of the continuous improvement cycle at the campus level deepens teachers' understanding of this process. In turn, they design units of study using the same Plan, Do, Study, Act process they experience. As grade-level or content teams, they analyze data, identify objectives, plan, monitor and adjust based on their results. Not only does this improve their students' academic performances, it has also strengthened relationships on every team. Individually, teachers apply the continuous improvement cycle as part of their yearly evaluation process to target areas of growth, create and implement a plan for improvement, and monitor and assess their results. Teachers feel empowered and demonstrate greater leadership within their classroom, on their team, and in their participation at the campus level. Teachers also teach students to use the Plan, Do, Study, Act cycle. Working with the teacher, they review assessment data to identify strengths and weaknesses, set personal goals, and create a plan for reaching the goals. Perhaps the most powerful part of the process is teaching students to objectively reflect on their data to understand the relationship between their effort and the accomplishment of their goals. Each six weeks, students share a data folder with their parents. This communicates much more than the numerical grade on the report card they receive at the same time. Parents see their child's progress, goals, and areas where support is needed.

The continuous improvement mindset creates a strong partnership between student, teachers, and parents that motivates each of those partners to be the best they can be.