

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):
- 9 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 3 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 2 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	27	32	59
K	54	36	90
1	48	49	97
2	52	44	96
3	52	49	101
4	58	41	99
5	36	54	90
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	327	305	632

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 6 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 2 % Asian
 - 0 % Black or African American
 - 89 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 3 % White
 - 0 % 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: 12%

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	40
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	35
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	75
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2015	640
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.117
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	12

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 28 %
182 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: 60 %
Total number students who qualify: 386

8. Students receiving special education services: 6 %
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.

- 2 Autism
- 0 Deafness
- 0 Deaf-Blindness
- 5 Emotional Disturbance
- 0 Hearing Impairment
- 1 Mental Retardation
- 0 Multiple Disabilities
- 0 Orthopedic Impairment
- 6 Other Health Impaired
- 8 Specific Learning Disability
- 20 Speech or Language Impairment
- 0 Traumatic Brain Injury
- 2 Visual Impairment Including Blindness
- 0 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:

	Number of Staff
Administrators	3
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects	31
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	6
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a licensed professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	14
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 22:1
12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

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

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

Post-Secondary Status	
Graduating class size	0
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	0%
Enrolled in a community college	0%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	0%
Joined the military or other public service	0%
Other	0%

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.
Yes No
If yes, select the year in which your school received the award.

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

Our mission is to provide the highest quality education in a positive, safe, and united environment for all students.

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

Rancho Verde Elementary (RVE) reflects its environment. Nestled between the city of Brownsville, Texas, with a population of nearly 182,000, and the small town of Los Fresnos, population 6,200, the beautiful brick school building is surrounded by empty fields. The property was previously designated for a housing development before the recession of 2009, but those plans were put on hold. The nearby Border Patrol station and county jail reflect the struggles of a community on the US-Mexican border. Tall palm trees and vibrant tropical flowers decorate the flat terrain, a reminder of the beautiful potential of the area. The community here is culturally rich, combining customs from Mexico with the traditions of Texas farmers and ranchers. The Texans in this southernmost tip of the state are rich in family values and pride, yet many in this area live in financial poverty. The greatest natural resource here is the children of South Texas, the children who Rancho Verde is committed to teach, inspire, and equip to lead the way.

RVE serves 632 students in prekindergarten (PK) through fifth grade. The ethnic composition is 89% Hispanic, 6% American Indian, and the remainder being White, Asian, and African American. Living in a bilingual community, 28% of RVE students are identified as English Language Learners (ELLs). Sixty percent of the students are eligible for reduced or free lunch. Six percent of RVE's students qualify for services in the Special Education program. To meet the needs of other diverse learners, RVE provides a Gifted and Talented (GT) program, Response to Intervention (RTI), and 504 accommodation plans including dyslexic services. ELL students are served through a transitional early exit bilingual program beginning in PK. Recent immigrants attend a Language Development Lab with instruction in their native language while they transition to English.

This dynamic school opened its doors in 2008 as part of the Los Fresnos Consolidated Independent School District (LFCISD). Administrators, staff, and students tackled the challenge of creating a new community with a variety of bonding activities. Before the school doors opened, the newly-appointed principal led the staff on a tour through the well-designed building. Staff, students, parents and community members attended a special ribbon cutting ceremony. Students and teachers voted for the school colors and mascot. The newly-christened Rattlers, wearing their green and orange school colors, shared their school pride in a ceremony honoring the land donors. Teachers became acquainted through informal gatherings as well as organized lunch dates with a mix of staff members. The original principal recalled a staff meeting when she addressed the frequent statement, "Well, at my old school we used to do it this way." She emphasized, "We will now do things the RVE way!" The entire staff stopped looking back and began to move forward as a new, united campus. That forward momentum brought RVE many honors for state-level testing achievement.

High standards, rigorous curriculum, and dedicated teachers and students focused on learning resulted in success as measured by state-level testing. Under the Texas Education Agency (TEA) accountability rating system measured by the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), RVE earned the highest rating of "Exemplary" in its very first year. RVE maintained the exemplary rating each year through 2012. In 2013, the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) and a new accountability system replaced the TAKS. RVE's 2013 accountability rating was "Met Standard" with one out of three possible Distinction Designations: Academic Achievement in Mathematics. This performance inspired teachers to work even harder the next year. In 2014, RVE achieved "Met Standard" accompanied by six out of six Distinction Designations. RVE earned similar results in the following years.

RVE's educational philosophy is summarized by the campus mission statement: "Our mission is to provide the highest quality of education in a positive, safe, and united environment for all students." The unofficial mission statement is, "If it's good for kids, DO IT!" Decisions are based on potential positive outcomes for students. For example, Daily Math Enrichment was added to the schedule for the many students arriving before the instructional day officially begins. During this forty-minute block, students apply math skills through computerized programs. Since this initiative began, students have shown large gains in math facts fluency and math comprehension. Administrators and teachers receive training and implement innovative teaching techniques such as student-led learning groups and new educational technology. To explore a variety of interests and extend their learning, students may choose from twelve options for extra-curricular

activities. In addition, parental and community support is encouraged. All of these factors contribute to the success of RVE students.

No one can deny that RVE is located in a community facing many challenges. However, those challenges stand in contrast to the positive, supportive environment of the school. When visitors enter the doors of this school, staff members and students greet each person in a friendly, sincere manner. The atmosphere is energetic yet orderly, supportive yet firm in maintaining high-standards. This is a place where children are valued and nurtured. This is Rancho Verde Elementary.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

Core instruction at Rancho Verde Elementary is guided by the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) standards, as well as the district’s teacher-developed pacing guides that align the TEKS to state adopted textbooks, supplemental resources and technology-based learning. To address the needs of our English Language Learners, teachers incorporate the English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS) across the curriculum. Teachers meet frequently to assess the effectiveness of curriculum components and search for innovative approaches.

RVE staff members recognize that TEKS-based reading instruction is foundational since successful readers apply their comprehension skills in all subjects. To supplement the core reading curriculum, teachers incorporate novel reading and student-led literature discussion groups to help students identify unfamiliar vocabulary, key concepts, and themes within the novel. Teachers chose this learner-centered approach because it is highly motivating for the students. In Kindergarten through second grades, additional daily phonemic awareness activities increase early readers’ success. Students are motivated to read independently by earning points via computerized quizzes. Accumulated points are traded for rewards. Use of another computer-based supplemental reading program has increased rate of reading as well as comprehension. Administrators acknowledge student success via announcements and hallway displays. Because teachers believe written communication reinforces and extends learning, writing is integrated in all subjects, at all grade levels. Teachers model writing and other language arts skills before students practice. Administrators write encouraging notes when reviewing student responses to monthly writing prompts.

RVE uses the core math curriculum to teach foundational math standards at all grade levels as prescribed by the TEKS. A review of spiraled math skills is part of the daily classroom routine. Teachers recognized that students were struggling to master basic math computation facts, so two teachers applied for and received a grant to fund a computer-based math program. Because of impressive gains in this skill area, this program is now implemented school-wide. Monthly “Math Downs,” popular math-based competitions between classes in each grade level, motivate students to master this skill. Champions earn a traveling trophy. Other computer-based math programs that focus on concepts are incorporated into the weekly schedule, often before the school day officially begins.

The heart of the science curriculum is the science lab run by a dynamic science lab teacher. Since the innovative assignment of one teacher as a Science Lab Specialist was implemented, science scores on the state-level test jumped dramatically. Grade-level teachers provide TEKS-based science instruction during regular class time which is then coordinated with weekly hands-on lessons in the science lab. This lab is replete with science equipment and displays the energy of motivated, active learners. Annual science events include a mobile planetarium, a science fair displaying individual projects, and field trips to observe sea life, dissect a shark and learn about sea turtle conservation. Through a Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)-based supplemental curriculum, students use creativity and technical skills to build robots that perform specific tasks.

Teachers supplement the TEKS-aligned Social Studies curriculum with real life experiences because this approach allows students to connect textbook lessons to life in the community. Students learn about the armed forces and honor local veterans at an annual Veteran’s Day ceremony. During the 2016 Presidential election, students participated in the election process through a mock election. Students study local history via field trips to nearby Palo Alto Battlefield National Historical Park. Students meet local government leaders when civic servants read aloud to classes and participate in a career fair. Students serve the community through scout troops, the Recycling Club, canned food drives, and charity fundraisers. The Kinder Cares program provides opportunities for students, families and teachers to volunteer together in community service events. Local culture and traditions are celebrated as students dress in western attire to celebrate the local rodeo or in colorful Mexican-style outfits honoring the Hispanic heritage of the community.

RVE students participate in the district's Elementary Academic Event (EAE), an academic competition. Students try out for teams, are coached in their particular subjects, and then compete against students from all LFCISD elementary schools. Students select from a wide range of academic teams including Oral Reading (dramatic oration) in both English and Spanish, Number Sense (mental math calculations), Writing, and Science. The friendly competition motivates RVE students to succeed. In a related event, RVE students prepare and participate in the annual district Spelling Bee.

RVE offers an open-enrollment, half-day prekindergarten (PK) for 4-year olds. The curriculum provides beginning reading and phonics skills, mathematics, science and social studies. The curriculum is supplemented with interactive notebooks, technology, dramatic play and a wealth of hands-on activities. Engaging oral language activities are used to transition non-English speaking students into use of English. The curriculum follows the TEA PK guidelines which align to the Kindergarten-3rd grade standards. RVE PK teachers previously taught kindergarten, second and third grades, making these teachers aware of the standards of the next grade levels and therefore ensuring alignment. RVE kindergarten teachers all agree that students who attend the PK program are more academically and socially prepared for kindergarten.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

RVE values student engagement in a variety of non-core subjects because engaged students are enthusiastic, motivated learners. Exploration of non-core subjects provides opportunities for creativity and application of higher-order thinking skills, which then leads to better overall school performance in all subject areas. Student engagement increases school attendance, reduces future dropout rates, and leads to less class disruption since students strive to be responsible, independent learners.

RVE is located in a community where children are at a higher risk for obesity, diabetes, hypertension and cancer. Because of these high-risk factors, the Physical Education (PE) program uses TEKS-based lessons to emphasize healthy habits that hopefully will last a lifetime. Kindergarten through fifth grade students attend three 50-minute PE sessions and one 50-minute health class each week. The PE assessment program measures growth in aerobic capacity, muscular strength, muscle endurance and flexibility. The Coordinated Approach to Child Health (CATCH) provides specific instruction on nutrition and other health topics. This health program also promotes community events such as a health fair and a walk/run race. Parents are encouraged to participate and practice these healthy habits at home. One popular after-school activity is a running club that meets twice a week and participates in local race events at least once a month. Staff members participate in these races with students. After-school sports are also sponsored by various staff members. Over the past nine years, these sports teams have included soccer, volleyball and basketball. The school's trophy case is filled with evidence of the success of these sports-related clubs.

RVE has a strong music program guided by the TEKS. Students attend a weekly 50-minute music class where activities range from counting beats in kinder to reading and playing music on bar instruments, recorders and drums in the upper grades. RVE is the first LFCISD elementary campus to offer an extra-curricular strings program. This year eighteen students are learning to play the violin, and eleven students are studying cello. RVE's music teacher trains a student group that performs vocal and instrumental presentations at various RVE events. Every other year, the RVE drama club performs a junior musical for the students, parents and community. The Rattlerette Dance/Cheer Team combines music and movement for 32 participants. This team performs during local parades, community events, and school district sporting events.

Kindergarten through fifth grade Technology TEKS are embedded in the core subjects rather than taught as a separate subject. Each classroom is equipped with four computers for student use. The school building houses three separate computer labs. Each class attends the computer lab at least three times weekly in order to use the many computer-based learning components. Three sets of Computers on Wheels (COWs) are equipped with 25 laptops for classroom use. Six more COWs with 26 tablets each were added this year for use with a STEM-based supplemental program. Teachers train all students in basic coding skills before participating in the Hour of Code, a nation-wide event. Many students arrive 30-45 minutes before the school day is scheduled to begin. During this time, the computer labs are full, and extra tables line the hallways where students use tablets loaded with educational applications. Teachers model the use of a

variety of technological tools that enrich student learning such as document cameras, interactive whiteboards, internet applications, websites and multi-media resources. Student project presentations incorporate these same tools. Students learn to use computer databases for research as part of their library lessons. Students are encouraged to bring their own devices to participate in interactive classroom lessons. The Robotics Club provides a platform for student exploration of technology with twenty fifth grade students currently participating. The club will accept fourth grade students in the spring.

The benefits of playing chess are well documented and include strategic thinking, prediction, spatial perception and complex analysis. The chess club has 85 members from kindergarten to fifth grade. Chess club members have earned many individual and team trophies at monthly tournaments with the most recent honor being a 1st place regional trophy earned by the K-First team. Top chess students will be attending the state and national tournaments this year.

Student engagement at RVE ensures increased involvement in school activities that broaden students' understanding of themselves and their relationships with each other and their community.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

Assessment and data analysis is a key component that steers instruction for the varied learners at RVE. Grade level teams meet with administrators monthly to analyze testing data and identify "hot spots", or non-mastered skills. Grade level teams meet weekly to analyze data and adjust instruction according to student needs. When academic weaknesses are identified, teachers target instruction on these skills until mastery is achieved. PK teachers assess their students every nine weeks using curriculum-based instruments, and three times yearly using the Circle Phonological Awareness Language and Literacy System (C-PALLS). Kindergarten through second grade teachers monitor progress using the Texas Primary Reading Inventory (TPRI). Flexible tier groups are formed based on TPRI results. The Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS) and the Woodcock-Muñoz Language Survey measure the progress of the English Language Learners (ELLs). Computer-based instruction uses periodic benchmarks to show growth. Teachers use local and STAAR assessment data to pinpoint weaknesses and measure mastery in order to maintain a high level of student achievement.

The goal of each RVE teacher is to develop independent learners and critical thinkers. Students create their own reference materials and learn to take notes using interactive notebooks. Student-made anchor charts help learners focus on crucial information. Pre-reading and post-reading discussions encourage analysis, self-assessment, and other critical thinking skills. A method called "Careless/Clueless Mistakes" teaches students to analyze their own errors and allows teachers to identify skills needing further instruction. Students use a self-assessment technique when skills are introduced. In this method, throughout the lessons students indicate where they fall on a scale of 1-5 with 1 meaning, "I have no idea yet" and 5 meaning, "I am confident enough to explain it to another." A STEM-based program develops creative problem solving in the science arena. Classroom learning takes place in all settings: whole group, small group, cooperative groups, and one-on-one. Classrooms are rich with technology-assisted learning, visuals, and manipulatives. Teachers constantly seek new methods to engage and challenge their learners.

Within the regular classroom, Response to Intervention (RTI) is a 3-tier model used to meet the needs of struggling students. A campus committee supports teachers by creating and overseeing the Individualized Intervention Plan (IIP), focusing on data-evidenced weaknesses. Research-based interventions are pulled from various resources. Thirty-minute small group Tier II blocks are built into the daily schedule for both Reading and Math. Tier III students receive an additional fifteen minutes daily in a one-on-one setting.

An extensive, needs-based tutoring program is offered to students who need differentiated instruction or smaller group settings to achieve mastery in reading, math, writing, and science. Tutoring groups meet before, during, and after school, depending on the transportation options available for the students. RVE offers supplemental tutoring for bilingual students in addition to regular tutoring.

Approximately 10% of RVE's student population is identified as Gifted and Talented (GT). In addition to GT students being challenged with extended, enriched learning opportunities within the regular classroom,

they attend a daily 60-minute pull-out class. The GT curriculum supports grade-level TEKS, is guided by a district-created timeline and curriculum, and involves investigation of broad questions. For example, older GT students explore the works of Shakespeare while answering the question “To be or not to be?” Lower grade GT students learn practical computer skills while exploring various topics. They create imaginative products by combining technology, art, and writing.

RVE maintains a high level of student achievement by addressing the needs of diverse learners. The Dyslexia Supplemental Services Lab (DSS) offers a specific curriculum that systematically identifies and addresses weaknesses in phonics and other reading skills. Most students attend 45 minutes daily, according to their 504 Individual Accommodation Plan. Students identified as learning disabled receive additional support in either the Resource Room with a certified Special Education teacher or through Inclusion services in their homeroom. The Resource instructor teaches foundational concepts and helps students understand and master grade-level assignments. RVE also provides a Redirection Unit that assists students with diagnosed behavior issues. Students learn to self-identify triggers of their emotional reactions and how to cope with challenging situations. Once emotions are controlled, the student returns to the least restrictive environment. In the Language Development Lab (LDL) for third through fifth grade recent immigrants, students are taught in their first language before transitioning into a traditional bilingual class. A rich language environment supports both the LDL students’ native language and their developing English.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

A positive school climate contributes to the success of RVE students and staff. By supporting emotional and social needs, RVE staff members create confident, motivated students. Each year, a school-wide theme is adopted to unite the staff and students. This year's theme is "Super Heroes." On Fridays, student T-shirts proclaim "Super Hero in Training," and staff T-shirts announce that adults are "Saving the world one student at a time."

RVE is goal-oriented. Percentage goals for different areas of potential success are displayed and announced. Teachers set goals for student performance and professional growth. The administrative staff holds individual goal-setting conferences with each third through fifth grade student. During this conference, scores on previous diagnostic assessments are discussed. Students analyze their own performance and set realistic yet challenging goals for future testing. Everyone celebrates success when goals are achieved.

RVE's counselor and nurse are key supporters of social and emotional growth. RVE's counselor uses classroom lessons, group counseling, and individual sessions to teach skills that help children cope with challenges. The nurse counsels students and parents on health-related issues including emotional health. The counselor, nurse, administrators, and other staff members informally check on students with behavior challenges throughout the day as a form of support.

In the classrooms, teachers use a variety of motivators such as tickets that are exchanged for rewards and color-coded behavior charts. A behavior-monitoring technology application encourages social growth through peer support and cooperation as teachers award points for positive individual and group behaviors. In some grade levels, teachers use a classroom economy system where students earn a paycheck and pay rent for use of classroom items and privileges. All classrooms have student leaders who fill various roles. A positive classroom atmosphere is evident in the respectful words and actions of both staff and students.

Engaged and motivated teachers are also a hallmark of RVE. Administration and the PTO support the teachers in tangible ways. Staff luncheons offer delicious food and social support. During Teacher Appreciation Week, students and parents express gratitude with notes, flowers and small gifts. During this same week, teachers are treated to a "Spa Day" featuring haircuts, manicures, and mini-makeovers. Teachers also receive intangible support that creates a positive climate. An "open door policy" with the administrative team provides quick access to solutions. Since administrators are well-acquainted with students, principals address discipline needs quickly when teachers ask for support. When a personal need arises, administrators are quick to cover classroom responsibilities so that staff can address the issue. Staff members feel as though they are treated like family as administration listens, cares, and acts upon requests and needs.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

RVE parents and community volunteers are valued members of the educational team. Parents are a child's first teacher and strongest source of support. Community members provide inspiration as role models for young learners. Parent and community involvement at RVE motivates students to attend school regularly, become involved in extracurricular activities, and take pride in their accomplishments.

Many family events have become annual traditions. Parents attend "Round-up" before school begins in order to meet new teachers and receive crucial information to ensure a smooth start. At "Back to School Night" parents learn about grade level expectations. Once the first grading period is complete, parent-teacher conferences are held to discuss progress as measured by the report card, as well as strategies for future success that can be implemented at home. During second semester, teachers hold group and individual parent meetings to discuss academic topics. Since prekindergarten is an introduction to public school, the PK teachers hold monthly parent sessions to explain techniques that enhance learning at home.

During Texas Public Schools Week, families join their children for square dancing, kite flying, and viewing of project displays. Family members celebrate Grandparent's Day, Thanksgiving, and National Breakfast Week by attending special meals at school. Families attend year-end award ceremonies celebrating student success. The highlight of these ceremonies is the kinder and fifth grade "graduations," both very formal affairs.

The Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) is active at RVE. The PTO sponsors fundraisers that support field trips, offer student and staff incentives, and promote school beautification. PTO carnivals and the annual Haunted House not only raise funds, but also bring families, staff and community members together for enjoyment. Kinder Cares events encourage interaction among teachers and families outside of school such as attending a weekend play or movie. Parents are active supporters at running club races, parades, performances and chess tournaments. Parents serve on the Campus Advisory Committee (CAC), Language Proficiency Acquisition Committee (LPAC), the School Health Advisory Council (SHAC), and CATCH committee.

The community is invited to celebrate Veteran's Day with a ceremony of honor featuring student readings and performances. On Career Day, community members teach students about their chosen field. Periodically through the year, the librarian invites community leaders and high school role models to read favorite stories to students. During Red Ribbon Week, members of the Border Patrol and S.W.A.T. teams are guest presenters. Firefighters assist with fire drills and safety presentations. Local businesses support various events with donations and volunteers.

Partnering with parents and community members through a wealth of activities contributes to the overall school improvement and academic success of RVE students.

3. Professional Development:

RVE teachers receive a wealth of professional development/learning (PL) opportunities. The overall PL goal is to address student needs and increase academic growth. PL planners use a scaffold approach as training is linked vertically between grade levels. Additionally, the study of key concepts continues from year to year. This approach leads to school improvement and increased student success.

Each August, teachers attend intensive district-level training on TEKS-related topics and other vital information ensuring a successful school year. Required safety and work environment issues are addressed through computerized trainings. Other district-level trainings are offered throughout the school year on various topics. Campus representatives who attend these trainings return to campus with information to share with the staff or grade-level team. Since technology is constantly evolving, monthly educational technology sessions are offered at either a district or campus level. District grade-level meetings focus on vertical alignment, revision of curriculum and timelines, and discussion of future training topics.

Teachers set individual PL goals each year based on student needs and professional growth. As part of the teacher appraisal system, a principal's feedback regarding teacher observations may lead teachers to revise goals or pinpoint areas needing improvement. RVE administration ensures that when needs are expressed, training will be available to address staff capacity.

RVE teachers utilize an online professional learning program with access to training videos, lesson plan ideas, research articles, educational blogs and networking sources. The pace and content is self-selected, based on a teacher's individual PL goals.

At the campus level, administration invites district staff and other trainers to offer sessions tailored to RVE goals and needs. Within grade-levels, teachers view PL videos together so that implementation of new techniques becomes a team effort. RVE teachers often make time to learn from each other. Teachers observe other teachers from RVE and other LFCISD campuses for insight into class management, presentation of new skills, and implementation of new technology. Feedback between colleagues is constructive and supportive.

TEA's Region One Education Service Center offers training sessions that benefit teachers. Campus representatives attend professional conferences on the topics of math, technology, Bilingual Education, Gifted and Talented education, and prekindergarten instructional strategies. All participants willingly share the knowledge gained with campus colleagues.

RVE administrators attend annual district-level leadership conferences which address topics such as improved working environment and school law. Administrators receive training in state-level testing, Bilingual Education, and Special Education through TEA's Region One Education Service Center. Administrators also opt to attend many of the teacher training sessions to be aware of new trends, techniques, and requirements. This allows administration to support teachers in the implementation of instructional strategies that lead to student success.

4. School Leadership:

RVE successfully operates under a shared leadership model. The principal and two assistant principals comprise the main administrative team. The librarian, nurse, and reading specialist form the support team that acts as a sounding board for administrators, discusses potential changes, and serves as members of interview committees. Grade level team leaders are experienced teachers who conduct team meetings, motivate peers, and act as a curriculum resource. The administrators meet periodically with grade level leaders who then communicate back to their teams. All leaders focus on student achievement as the first priority.

Key components of RVE's successful leadership style are trust, flexibility, and good listening skills. Trust is reciprocal between administrators and teachers. When decisions are made, the administrators know the policy will be effectively implemented. Since school leaders know the strengths of staff members, roles are assigned to ensure success. Flexibility allows teachers to be innovative. If a process seems ineffective, teachers modify the approach. For example, the campus tutoring plan varies between grade levels and is designed to meet the needs of each grade's students and teachers. Decisions are open to critique and improvements. RVE leaders take time to truly listen to colleagues. Teachers appreciate having a sounding board as they work on challenges. Beyond listening, RVE leaders take the initiative to transform ideas into action that impacts student achievement.

One role of school leadership is to identify needs and then respond. For example, when students did not master math facts at an expected rate, teachers took the initiative to apply for a grant for a computerized math facts program. Once this proved successful, the program was added to the campus curriculum. In another situation, teachers struggled to find time for their students to use a required computer reading program. Leaders realized that many students arrive at school 30-45 minutes early due to bus schedules, so this time is now designated for specific computer math programs.

RVE encourages students to take on leadership roles to foster independent learning. Peer tutors reteach and clarify content skills for struggling students leading to increased academic achievement and social growth. Members of the Principal's Cabinet lead the morning announcements and pledge. These student leaders act as ambassadors and masters of ceremony at school events. The Breakfast Club organizes third through fifth grade students who read aloud to younger students during breakfast time. The Breakfast Club members take pride in this service, wearing an orange reader's vest when they visit a classroom. Members must be passing all subjects and exhibit exemplary behavior. In the Chess Club, experienced players work with beginners. Students teach each other in multi-grade settings in many of the school clubs.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Each morning, a student recites the RVE Student Pledge via intercom: “As an RVE student, I pledge to do my best. I will make great choices because they will affect me and others. I will listen, follow directions, and be honest. I will respect and protect the rights of other students. As an RVE student, I will learn as much as I can each day because every day matters and my future is built one day at a time.”

Beyond curriculum, assessment, and the daily work of school, the key to success at RVE is that staff members strive to build positive relationships with each student. The RVE Vision Statement sets the tone for student-staff relationships: “Our vision is to provide a challenging learning environment as well as an atmosphere of unity and patience where all children know they are valued.”

RVE administration sets a caring tone with students. This can be as simple as calling children by name and offering friendly greetings. Administrators have adopted the time-consuming practice of holding individual goal-setting conferences with third through fifth grade students. Goal-setting is important, but even more valuable is the personal connection created by spending one-on-one time with each student. Students sense the caring in someone who may at times serve as their disciplinarian. This is a person they can trust when problem-solving is needed.

One teacher expresses this affective factor with these words: “Children can sense when you are invested in them, and they will respond to your devotion. We believe that no matter what the child’s background, they all want the same thing: to feel loved and to be treated like they matter.”

Another teacher invites students who struggle with math to attend early morning tutoring sessions. This tutoring starts months before the principal requests “formal tutoring” to begin. Four mornings each week, students stand at the whiteboard with a marker in hand, solving equations, drawing angles and figures, and tackling difficult concepts. Students from other classes ask to join the sessions because of the devoted attention of this teacher.

RVE’s Resource teacher helps his students overcome struggles with failure. He states, “I focus on self-worth. Failure is a process. It happens to everyone and students need to know that. But in my classroom we will not accept failure as an identity. Failure is a step towards success because failure gives us the opportunity to learn. Success is not instant and success is relative, but all of my students will find success and this does wonders for their motivation.”

These examples represent all RVE staff members who understand that when positive relationships are fostered, all other educational elements are more effective. As staff members listen to the daily recitation of the student pledge, all are reminded to “Save the world, one student at a time.”