

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 2018 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 2012 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: 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, or 2017.
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 (2017-2018) unless otherwise stated.

DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 46 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 13 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 7 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 66 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
 - Rural or small city/town
3. Number of students as of October 1, 2017 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	36	43	79
1	53	35	88
2	40	44	84
3	52	40	92
4	60	37	97
5	61	42	103
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	302	241	543

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 1 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 14 % Asian
 - 2 % Black or African American
 - 8 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 1 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 65 % White
 - 9 % 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 2016 – 2017 school year: 5%

If the mobility rate is above 15%, please explain.

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, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	16
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	11
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	27
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2016	538
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.05
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	5

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 9%
47 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):
Amharic, Arabic, Bengali, Bulgarian, Cebuano, Cantonese, Mandarin, Croatian, Eastern and Western Farsi, French, Georgian, German, Hebrew, Hindi, Hungarian, Kannada, Kashmiri, Khasi, Korean, Marathi, Mongolian, Panjabi, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Spanish, Tamil, Telugu, Tulu, Urdu

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 6%
 Total number students who qualify: 34

8. Students receiving special education services: 13 %
68 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>11</u> Autism | <u>6</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>2</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>6</u> Developmentally Delayed | <u>20</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>2</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>20</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>0</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>1</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

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	1
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	22
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	14
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	26
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	2

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 15:1

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

Required Information	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013
Daily student attendance	96%	97%	97%	97%	99%
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 2017.

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. 2005

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

Together we create a lifelong foundation for all students to thrive in a global society. As a diverse learning community, we challenge our students to grow academically, socially, emotionally, and physically.

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

Willow Creek Elementary School allows students to choice in from other areas of the Cherry Creek School District. Parents can fill out a "School of Choice" (SOC) form between January 1st and February 1st. Decisions are based upon space availability and are made at the end of February for the following school year. If parents miss the deadline for the SOC form on February 1st they can fill out an "Intra-District Transfer Form" to also try to attend Willow Creek for the upcoming school year. These forms are available beginning March 15th. In addition, if parents live outside of Cherry Creek School District, beginning April 1st they can fill out a "Non-Resident Student Application Form" to try to gain access into Willow Creek.

PART III – SUMMARY

Since the doors of Willow Creek Elementary School opened in 1977, it has been a pillar of this community. From families who move in just to be part of this school community, to families who have raised their children

and remain members of this community, to the 27%-30% of families who choice into Willow Creek, the school is the cornerstone of the community. The history of Willow Creek is steeped in a tradition of “excellence”. In

1987-1999 and again in 2005-2006, Willow Creek was awarded the prestigious National Blue Ribbon Award. Willow Creek has received the Colorado John Irwin Schools of Excellence Award for at least 15 years. The Governor’s Distinguished Improvement Award was received by Willow Creek in 2013, 2014, and 2016. Not only has Willow Creek received recognition from the state of Colorado and from the National Blue Ribbon association, the school is greatly known and acknowledged locally as one of the best schools for supporting student growth academically, emotionally, and socially.

The strength of Willow Creek has been firmly rooted in the notion of excellence: by staff, by leadership, by parents, and by the community. Even though success has had different markers since the late 1970’s through

today, Willow Creek has always been able to meet and often exceed benchmarks of success. The Cherry Creek

District has carefully selected principals over the years to lead “excellence” and balance the District’s vision with that of Willow Creek. As a result, the principals have hired, coached, and maintained quality teachers to execute effective and meaningful learning experiences for all students.

Willow Creek is blessed with diversity both from the families that live in Willow Creek and those that choice

into Willow Creek. Willow Creek staff and principal are well aware of the diversity and strive to be an inclusive community. The diversity provides the school with an ongoing opportunity to dive deeper into the cultures that make up Willow Creek. We seek voices from the community to assist in educating staff and students in learning about a variety of cultures. There is a healthy and positive relationship between the community and staff that allows the school to have authentic, firsthand knowledge of other cultures. We value counter stories and strive to have a variety of voices present in our school. For example, families have been invited into classrooms of all grade levels to share traditions and holidays that may not be celebrated by the majority culture. Our Willow Creek families and community support the school’s endeavors to grow in knowledge of other cultures.

There is a variety of extracurricular clubs and organizations that students of Willow Creek can participate in. Some clubs and organizations are facilitated by staff, others are facilitated by parent and community members, and some are facilitated by outside organizations who rent the space and charge a fee for participation. The beauty of offering a variety of clubs is that all students have opportunity to participate in activities that meet their needs and suit their interest level. Needless to say, the physical plant of Willow Creek is busy day after day, and on weekends, hosting these wonderful opportunities making the school building truly a hub of the neighborhood.

Willow Creek offers excellent opportunities for students of all abilities. There is a successful gifted and talented program that has served hundreds of students while undergoing changes over the years based on state and district expectations. Students with specific learning disabilities experience a phenomenal team of special educators who are able to provide services aligned with student’s goals, and develop meaningful, productive relationships with families. The Integrated Learning Center (ILC) program has served hundreds of students over the years with significant academic, cognitive, and physical challenges. Many families over the years have moved into the neighborhood just to receive the services provided by the team of trained and passionate special educators at Willow Creek. In addition to special education services, there is an intervention system that catches students early and provides support for quality universal instruction and research-based intervention which has been another key to the success of Willow Creek.

A challenge to note is that each year there are difficult decisions to be made based on staffing. While the PTO provides support for the paraprofessionals, over time the resources have decreased not only from the PTO, but from the district as well. Through thoughtful staffing decisions, while honoring the factors that have historically supported excellence at Willow Creek, the focus on growth mindset, hiring and maintaining qualified and talented teachers, and strong community support continue to lay the foundation for ongoing excellence and success.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

Colorado Academic Standards (CAS) provide definition for college and career ready students prepared for success in the 21st Century. Curricula encompasses four questions: what students need to know, how educators know students are learning, how educators respond when students do not learn, and what educators do if students already know.

Language arts is acquisition of literacy, involving reading, writing, and communicating, skills crucial to higher-order learning and critical thinking. Our belief is that children, when reading, construct meaning, and reading and writing abilities develop together.

Reading instruction engages readers to be knowledgeable and strategic. Methods develop phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency and offer schoolwide continuity in literary, informational text, and foundational skills. Writing and communication continuum includes informative, persuasive, and narrative.

Primary grades utilize phonemic awareness and phonics through Wilson Foundations program, a multi-sensory approach enabling students to understand letters and sounds in relation to words and spelling. Foundations is paired with Guided Reading instruction which provides targeted differentiation. Instructors use retells to focus on text grammar across genres.

Intermediate grades' curriculum maximizes leveled novel units for needs based instruction. Guided Reading groups provide targeted comprehension strategies, oral fluency, vocabulary, and communication of ideas. Complex units integrate science and social studies content. Formats of written response to reading include expository, compare/contrast, and persuasion.

Writing and communication curriculum belief is that all children can and should write. Features include: writing for multidisciplinary purpose and authentic audiences; students taking ownership of their writing; writing involving a process, including idea generation, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing; and spelling, grammar and mechanics in context. In addition to teacher-designed units, the school deploys Lucy Calkins' Units of Study curriculum for teaching writing.

CAS and Standards of Mathematical Practice (SMP) outline scope and sequence of acquiring mathematical knowledge, including reasoning abstractly and quantitatively, constructing viable arguments, using appropriate tools, and attending to precision. Our Bridges in Mathematics curriculum allows students to evaluate and model problems and make conjectures about relationships, goals that move students on to middle and high school with solid foundation.

In primary grades, number sense emphasizes concept of quantity through concrete modeling using base 10 blocks. For primary through intermediate grades, number sense develops through representational models progressing to abstract models involving numbers and symbols. Students are taught to understand composition/decomposition of numbers and to utilize multiple strategies.

Unique features of curriculum include: dedicated math block of 75+ minutes, co-taught classrooms for ELL, needs-based intervention with special education and gifted/talented specialists, and online individualization tools.

Along with grade level teacher-designed science units, Willow Creek utilizes Full Option Science System (FOSS) curriculum. The curriculum is inquiry-based with real world application and emphasizes scientific process while integrating reading, writing, and math.

CAS defines science instruction along three strands: earth, physical, and life science. Earth science requires students understand interactions of Earth's systems and dynamics of Earth. In primary grades, students

understand role of the sun as a source of heat and light. Intermediate students recognize multiple sources of energy.

Life science involves structure of living things and processes of life. Life science follows students from primary grades where they understand that organisms can be sorted by physical characteristics to intermediate students' understanding that organisms have systems designed for survival.

Study of physical science involves common properties, forms, and changes in matter and energy. Primary students explore properties of solids and liquids. Intermediate students explore conservation of mass.

Scientifically literate graduates will ensure economic vitality by encouraging development of research and technology, managing environmental treasures, and caring for the well-being of citizens.

Willow Creek utilizes Social Studies Alive (SSA), an experiential curriculum that develops history, government, and economical concepts. SSA grows students' understanding of how societies have evolved, how past events occurred, and how enduring ideas have impacted the lives of people. SSA and teacher-designed units help students understand how different societies are structured and governed. Students gain perspective that the world is diverse and multicultural yet interrelated. All instruction fosters students' abilities to evaluate existing knowledge of ideas so students' applied thinking can design new solutions and policies. Students are provided opportunities to present ideas in the form of debates, essays, role plays, and class projects, including problem-based learning (PBL) projects.

Teachers ensure that content is not kept in isolation, but that all curriculum areas are integrated in order to best meet the immediate needs of learning concepts with long lasting comprehension of content.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

All students at Willow Creek participate in Art, Music, STEM, and PE (Physical Education). Every class follows a rotation that best meets the needs of the content. When a class attends Art or STEM, they attend for the entire week, so there is more time to complete a project. When a class attends Music or PE, they attend every other day. These special classes at Willow Creek allow students to tackle and engage in problems on an individual level, partner work, and in groups. The intentionality behind these different processes is to have students wrestle with authentic and engaging problems in a variety of situations.

The Arts at Willow Creek is always pushing the creative buttons to have students reflect on their inner-self and display their creation in an art form. K-5 artists learn the importance of understanding the Elements and Principles of Design through a variety of 2D and 3D projects. Once artists explore and discover all different types of artistic materials and tools, their concepts grow to make art represent their personalities and character style. Willow Creek art projects are based on the artistic process: idea, create a plan, make, then share and reflect. This year, artists applied problem-solving skills and creative communication through puppet-making, Stop Motion presentations, portraiture, and created recycled art sculptures. Artists are taught to stretch their creative thinking through discovery and play. From very young artists to pre-teen artists, the students at Willow Creek are exposed to a variety of rich art forms.

Music is an opportunity to connect with others through rhythm and sound. Whether students are interpreting the patterns of another composer, or creating their own sequences to share, the rhythms and melodies echo and form a connection between performer and listener. Often the student is a performer and a listener at the same time. They are analyzing "how does my performance fit in with the other sounds happening in time around me?" The performance transcends the barriers of culture and language. When the student is the composer, they are encouraged to pull from their experiences in the real world to organize sound in a way that is meaningful to them. Whether performing, listening, or composing, the goal is to connect with others in the world.

The focus of Physical Education is not to create the next superstar or Olympic great. The goal is to have all students love PE, develop confidence in themselves, and become proficient at a wide variety of skills. In general, the philosophy is a simple one: give students the skills they need to be active for the rest of their

lives. Physical education at Willow Creek can be broken down into two groups. In the primary grades the focus is on building a foundation for physical movement. Basic locomotor skills such as running, skipping, hopping, galloping, sliding, throwing, catching, tumbling, etc. are the focus. These primary fundamentals are the building blocks for our intermediate grades as they are introduced to sport-related skills. Some of the units covered are basketball, volleyball, fitness, lacrosse, juggling, cup stacking and adventure team-building. All students, K-5, are able to find success in some activity or game in PE.

In STEM, students focus on programming, manufacturing, aerospace, and circuitry. The overarching theme is to have students creatively and collaboratively tackle authentic tasks. Their creations can be produced from 3D printed plastic filament or even recycled goods from home. They learn that technology is a tool which can be strategically applied in a variety of contexts, such as a production tool in creating and editing their own videos. This allows them to focus on effective ways of communicating as individuals and as a part of a team. Students at Willow Creek utilize modern technology and problem-solving skills in order to equip themselves with a mindset and understanding for life in an ever-changing world.

Even though the four different Specials classes implement varied content, there is an overarching goal of having students embrace problems in an authentic setting and persevere in solving them. The goal is to have students thrive as well-rounded individuals as they head into Middle School and beyond!

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

Developmentally appropriate, ever-changing instructional methods involving relationships, conditions, processes, causes, effects, and feedback for all subjects in all grades, takes the form of four main methods: Didactic, Modeling, Managerial, and Dialogic throughout Willow Creek.

Didactic teaching offers verbal presentation for purposes of mastering specific concepts, such as letter sounds in kindergarten, syllabic patterns in third grade, and standard algorithms in fifth grade. Didactic instruction is whole class and small group teaching by teacher or guest-expert speakers, and flipped classroom strategies, including Google slide presentations and teacher-made video lessons.

Modeling offers visual instruction in the forms of demonstration and practice fostering explicit mastery of skills. Uses include reading aloud to first graders where intonation is modeled, and demonstrated use of balance scales to compare weights of unknown solutions in fifth grade science.

Managerial, or indirect teaching, provides facilitation for individuals or groups to independently explore content. Managerial allows inquiry so learners derive their own meaning. For example, second grade students gather evidence about different plants to develop common characteristics of living things while fourth grade students interact with magnets to establish rules about magnetism and polarity.

Dialogic utilizes dialogue and question to extend learners' thinking, harnessing the power of talk to extend student's growth. Dialogic discussions in third grade classrooms sort historical individuals who are notable rather than famous while fourth grade classrooms use questioning to analyze Colorado biographies.

Teachers implement all four methods in isolation and mixed practice based on reflection of what students need to know, evidence of student learning, response to students not learning, and next steps for students who already know content. Educators select methods based on mission, including fostering social interaction, information processing, facilitating behavioral and academic modifications, interpersonal development, academic objectives, and maximizing learning modalities.

Kindergarten through fifth grade teacher-designed grade-level formative and summative assessment results guide whole class and individual instruction, including planning, reteaching, and intervention. District assessments, used in all grade levels, and state assessments, used in third through fifth grades, guide design of units of study and year-long curriculum mapping activities. All assessments help teachers and parents measure and articulate what students know individually and collectively and the cognitive rigor of content. Grade level formative and summative assessments are evaluated during weekly professional learning community (PLC) discussions for instructional purposes and at each trimester for content validity,

reliability, cultural fairness, and student engagement and motivation. Grade level and cross grade level PLCs evaluate results of assessments to guide learning and comprehend a well-rounded picture of student performance. Educators regularly modify assessments so that authentic learning can be measured and maximized. Instructional intervention and differentiation combines formal and flexible programs and methods that intentionally improve students' areas of need.

Intervention begins in classrooms with teachers' responses to variance among learners. Daily, all teachers differentiate content, process, products, and learning environments to maximize learning experiences. Teachers use small group instruction, the zone of proximal development, one-on-one instruction, technology, manipulatives, differentiated tasks, or independent studies to meet individual needs. Additionally, struggling readers in kindergarten through third grade have pull out specialized reading instruction from a specialist trained in methods of reading. Special education students in kindergarten through fifth grades receive instruction from learning specialists who provide small group instruction in reading, writing, math, speech, and gross and fine motor. Mental health services provide integrative care to kindergarten through fifth grades improving social and emotional capacity of students so their educational attainment can be increased. Inclusive instruction for students of the Integrated Learning Center (ILC) is another specific feature. Gifted/Talented (GT) learners in kindergarten through fifth grade have access to push in and/or pull out instruction from a licensed G/T instructor who offers enriched and accelerated learning opportunities that promote continuous growth. English Language Acquisition (ELL) students benefit from push in instruction from a specialized ELL teacher. The teacher focuses on linking students native culture with new culture, aiding acquisition fluency in both written and spoken English, and fostering curriculum accessibility with math, science, and social studies until English is mastered. For example, the school's ELL teacher recently made fifth grade chemistry content accessible for ELL learners by designing content specific vocabulary picture cards.

Combined instructional methods, assessments, and interventions, woven with effective differentiation, promote mastery of learning outcomes for all learners.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

POWER is Willow Creek’s acronym for positive culture and climate which was created by the school’s PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention System) team and the principal to reflect a growth mindset and valuable lifelong skills beyond the classroom. POWER stands for Persistence, Optimism, We are Flexible, Empathy, and Resilience.

Implementation includes a 10-15 minute designated time of day called POWER TIME in which teachers facilitate activities and study texts that teach growth mindset and a common language. A weekly video, produced in collaboration with the principal and staff, teaches, promotes, and supports a growth mindset and appropriate school behaviors to ensure a safe and healthy learning environment. POWER TIME videos began with the ‘why’ of growth mindsets and gave concrete definitions and examples of the words. The production of the videos has grown to include participation by grade levels, classes, programs, etc. It is evident that the POWER philosophies are permeating classrooms and instruction through the noticeable increase in areas such as common language and the “not yet” mindset. Additionally, it has given teachers the frame to both celebrate student success and challenge one another’s thinking to promote growth both academically and socially.

Overall the school culture is promoted at least three times a year through all-school POWER pep assemblies. The content of these assemblies is grounded in the POWER philosophy. For example, students have an opportunity to share with the entire school specific ways that their teachers show POWER. Time is taken to celebrate achievements of students both in and out of school.

Another way that the school’s culture supports students’ academic and emotional growth is Principal Lunches. Every student, first through fifth grader, is invited to have lunch in groups of 8-10 with the principal. Students are able to bring concerns, ideas, and questions to the principal. In return the principal is able to gain a better understanding of the culture of the school through the voices of the students. Parents are informed of the day their child has lunch with the Principal which supports the positive culture extension into the community.

The efficacy and morale of staff is directly impacted by the intentional celebrations of the staff as a whole, and their individual achievements such as receiving National Board Certification, being nominated for Celebration with the Superintendent (a District sponsored event), and by simply highlighting teacher success at staff meetings and in weekly emails sent by the principal.

Willow Creek has a culture that creates confidence in the parent community and brings the staff together through collaboration resulting in a safe and positive learning environment for all students.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

The success of Willow Creek could not be realized without the seamless connection between the principal, staff, and parent community. Student clubs, parent/staff committees, and the common language of “growth mindset” are examples of the powerful connections.

Parents and teachers collaborate to provide valuable learning opportunities for students after school. Examples are: foreign language classes, Chess Club, Lego Robotics, Destination Imagination, Mad Science, Art Club, Kids Stage, Scouting and more. With over 25 Lego Robotics and Destination Imagination teams, Willow Creek is a leader in the district and the state in STEM offerings. This parent and teacher collaboration strengthens the home/school connection as all parts of the Willow Creek community work together to provide enrichment opportunities that complement classroom learning.

Parents, staff, and the principal work together on several committees at Willow Creek. The Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) is very supportive of the school. Generous pledges collected by PTO partially fund para-professionals who work with students to positively impact achievement. The School's Accountability Committee

is a group that supports the school by serving as an advisory committee to provide feedback on matters, such as curriculum and instruction, school programs, and systems and structures of the school. P.A.S.S. (Partnerships for Academically Successful Students) is a parent driven forum to share concerns and celebrations related to race, culture, and equity. As an example, in response to a parent concern about cultural differences related to food this year, the P.A.S.S committee planned a school-wide event in which students brought their favorite foods and had lunch with teachers and other staff members. Students were given instruction in growth mindset vocabulary to encourage and support each other around cultural food choices that were unique. Some classes even took it a step further and wrote about their favorite foods. This was hugely successful and parents were grateful for this avenue to share about their culture.

Willow Creek has embraced a growth mindset culture. Teachers and parents participated in a book study on growth mindset, and it is a standard part of every school day. The principal leads a weekly video highlighting a particular trait within the growth mindset philosophy. These videos include students and teachers engaged in real time activities demonstrating the traits of growth mindset. The videos are shared with families each week to strengthen the school-home connection. Students are encouraged to recognize and use the traits in themselves and each other as they go through the school day. All members of the school community share the common language of growth mindset and it has become a powerful link between staff and students across all grade levels and within the community as well.

3. Professional Development:

Because Willow Creek is such a successful school, one challenge is to acknowledge that "Good" is the enemy of "Great." Professional development is key in meeting all students where they are and moving them, even if they are at grade level or above.

The most important professional development that takes place at Willow Creek is during collaborative team meetings doing the work of Professional Learning Communities. During PLC conversations, teachers have the opportunity to be reflective, support each other's growth, and share best practices. When sharing common assessment data, teachers are able to identify areas of strength and areas for growth not just for their students but for themselves as instructors.

Bi-monthly staff meetings are another system for professional development. Intentional efforts have been made to minimize the amount of "information" shared with the staff and maximize the amount of professional learning. One meeting per month is always dedicated to Inclusive Excellence and the learning required to be the best school that we can be for all students. The other monthly meeting has the focus of strengthening the PLC work or growing and developing teacher skills to incorporate 21st century learning and innovative teaching/thinking which are two district and school initiatives. Staff meetings provide a platform for teacher leaders to bring back their learning from outside opportunities so that all staff can benefit and grow.

In addition to these in-building professional development approaches, the district offers many opportunities for teachers and administrators to develop skills and competency. Examples of district professional development include consultants that provide support with Inclusive Excellence work, Professional Learning Communities, and Innovation. Principals and teachers participate in professional development led by not only consultants, but by a generous department of staff developers, such as content specialists,

Culturally Responsive Education coaches, Instructional Facilitators, STEM coaches, Digital Learning coaches, and differentiation coaches.

Along with the school and district provided professional development at Willow Creek, there are opportunities for staff to attend conventions. One that has been attended for the past several years is InnEdCo, which is a summer convention held in Keystone, CO that provides opportunities for staff and school leaders to increase their understanding and capacity for 21st Century learning. Another experience in this past year was the ability for the principal to take a teacher leader to the PLC Summit in Phoenix.

The success of the professional development of Willow Creek is directly related to the district resources and opportunities, the leadership within the staff, and the desire to continuously improve.

4. School Leadership:

Leadership at Willow Creek is based on a shared leadership philosophy. The principal for the past two years began her tenure inviting the school to focus on “growing together”. Growing individually, growing as teachers, growing as teams, growing as learners, growing as a school, and growing as a community has been the recent theme of leadership.

Willow Creek has recently expanded teacher leadership opportunities. TRAC (Teachers Representing and Advising Community) is the newest leadership team at Willow Creek. It was implemented by the current principal and has offered great leadership opportunities for teachers. The team consists of one representative from each grade level team, one from Specials, and two from SPED/Intervention along with the principal.

Willow Creek strives to be a PLC (Professional Learning Community) in every sense of the definition. Each team has a leader trained in facilitation to implement and monitor the work in Collaborative Teams. Collaborative Teams meet every week to advance the goals of PLC. The teachers/facilitators help support the teams in the process of using four PLC questions: 1) What do we want our students to know and be able to do? 2) How will we know if they get there? 3) What will we do if they don't? 4) What will we do if they do? Decisions about how to teach the standards, the use of data collected from common formative assessments, and the design of interventions for both the students who learn the standards and for those who do not, is the ongoing work of Collaborative Teams and contributes to the success of the students. This work would not be possible without the strong leadership of the teacher facilitators on each team

There are leadership opportunities for teachers to lead smaller Site Teams, which include technology/innovation, PBIS/IE (Positive Behavior Intervention Support/Inclusive Excellence), and safety. TRAC, Site Teams and the principal working closely together creates a very shared leadership approach. A new Mission and Vision Statement was written the first year of the new principal leadership, and it influences the decisions that are made on all teams.

The quality and leadership of a mostly veteran staff, the willingness of everyone to grow, and the vision and leadership of a new principal the past two years has proven to be an effective combination for leadership at Willow Creek Elementary. Student achievement has remained above state and district norms, and the school is a thriving, happy place for all members of its community.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Willow Creek's success is attributed to our long history of fostering growth mindsets, even before growth mindset was a term. It has been our firm belief and practice that individual's growth and learning go hand in hand. Every member of the school's staff believe that people have within their nature and control to improve, change, grow, and progress with patience and hard work.

Student success begins first with staff who wholeheartedly adopt a growth mindset themselves. Willow Creek's staff thrive on challenge and see setback as an opportunity for improvement. Our staff is constantly attending professional development, reworking lessons, problem solving, and seeking feedback that builds knowledge that aids the work of learning and growing. As staff learns better we do better and pass that knowledge and practice on to students. Teachers use growth mindset practice, for example, when evaluating unit post-assessment scores. Teachers reflect on scores by student name and need and consider lesson implementation during weekly professional learning communities (PLCs). As data and lessons are analyzed, teachers discuss strategies that earned the highest marks of mastery. Teachers take this information and grow as instructors, improving their craft which in turn increases student success with content.

Student growth mindsets are fostered from the day students enter the school. Students are encouraged to seek independence, mastery, and purpose with new learning. Students experience praise for effort and process, rather than on individual ability or ease of completion. A natural appreciation for the learning process is fostered through challenge and timely feedback. Staff's explicit communication of high expectations and the support provided to students to reach expectations increases motivation and trust. Motivation, trust and the established belief in students, allow students to seek challenge to build competence, a perspective that further encourages growth. When setbacks occur for learners, learners are provided opportunities to be resilient problem solvers. Staff encourage students to face obstacles and question issues with a can-do-attitude. Students use growth mindset when self-selecting and progressively monitoring trimester academic and affective goals, a practice correlating actions and results.

Our school's widespread adoption of growth mindset practices impact students emotionally which impacts students academically. Our students are encouraged to utilize grit and perseverance to gain skill and knowledge. With skill and knowledge, intelligence increases. Staff believe that students can and will learn which fosters students' belief in themselves, making learning a completely attainable task, with no time limits, as learning is continuous and never ending.