



## **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 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

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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):
- 7 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 2 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 1 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 10 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
<b>PreK</b>	0	0	0
<b>K</b>	37	54	91
<b>1</b>	46	49	95
<b>2</b>	43	40	83
<b>3</b>	56	38	94
<b>4</b>	45	33	78
<b>5</b>	41	43	84
<b>6</b>	0	0	0
<b>7</b>	0	0	0
<b>8</b>	0	0	0
<b>9</b>	0	0	0
<b>10</b>	0	0	0
<b>11</b>	0	0	0
<b>12 or higher</b>	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	268	257	525

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 4 % Asian
  - 3 % Black or African American
  - 13 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 75 % White
  - 5 % 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: 7%

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.

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	19
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	17
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	36
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2016	525
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.07
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	7

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 7%  
38 Total number ELL

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

Arabic, Macedonian, Mandarin, Spanish, Twi, Urdu, Vietnamese

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 30%  
Total number students who qualify: 160

8. Students receiving special education services: 15 %  
77 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>14</u> Autism                 | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>2</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>15</u> Other Health Impaired                |
| <u>0</u> Developmentally Delayed | <u>8</u> Specific Learning Disability          |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>37</u> Speech or Language Impairment        |
| <u>1</u> Hearing Impairment      | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>0</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 17
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	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.	5
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	1
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 0:1

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

<b>Required Information</b>	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013
Daily student attendance	96%	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 2017.

<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

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.

C- Confident A- Articulate R- Responsible/Respectful E- Engaging S- Skilled Students forms the foundation for the success of all members of the Solon community- students, staff, and parents. Together we hope to provide a legacy for continuous life-long learning.

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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Nestled in a quiet neighborhood in Northwest Indiana is the home to Solon Robinson Elementary School. Solon Robinson continues to have an "A" ranking by the Indiana Department of Education along with numerous 4 Star School Ratings. Solon Robinson Elementary School has the feel of a small, family community; however, the world-class city of Chicago is just an hour away. Solon also is fortunate to be just a short drive away from the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore. To start the day off right for the students, the principal can be found out in the halls, standing in the parking lot, greeting children by name and giving hugs, or even a gentle fist bump.

As part of the Crown Point Community School District in Crown Point, Indiana, Solon Robinson Elementary Schools serves approximately 525 students in kindergarten through grade 5. The Crown Point Community School district continues to grow in population. In response to the community need, Solon Robinson is a Title 1 federally funded school. Solon Robinson also houses an extended care room for students of working parents. Being a Title 1 school provides many challenges, yet the staff is well trained to meet those challenges with the love and passion they have for children. The Title 1 program gives Solon Robinson the opportunity to have many supports in place to meet the needs of the at-risk population.

In addition to Principal Barbara Merrill, Solon has 22 licensed classroom teachers, one full-time LRE teacher, one full-time exceptional learner teacher of the autistic classroom, 4 exceptional learner paraprofessionals, 3 specials teachers: art, music, and physical education, one media center specialist, 1 part-time high ability teacher, 2 Title 1 interventionists, 7 Title 1 paraprofessionals, one English Language Learner paraprofessional, and two mathematics paraprofessionals. The student services offer one part-time guidance counselor and one full-time Positive Behavior Specialist. The front office is staffed with two extraordinary secretaries and one full-time awesome registered nurse. Teacher turnover is extremely low. In addition to the faculty and staff, Solon has a very active parent volunteer group.

Several Solon teachers, as well as the principal, live in the Solon community. They have chosen to have their own children attend Solon; this is a strong testament to the quality of instruction. It is clear that all school staff are expected to get to know the students in order to understand and personalize their learning, to make them feel loved and cared for, and to anticipate and help them achieve our expectations, effort, and accountability.

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

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

Solon Robinson's curriculum is aligned with the Indiana Academic Standards and student achievement on ISTEP+ is a reflection of this. Assessment of our students' progress and the effectiveness of instruction and programs are done annually. This is a continuous process that results in new goals each year. The Indiana Academic Standards are the foundation of our school's curriculum, but we believe in going far beyond those expectations by utilizing research-proven instructional strategies and high-impact practices. Teachers have worked with Effective Supervision Supporting The Art and Science of Teaching by Robert Marzano, Visible Learning by John Hattie, The Continuum of Literacy Learning by Pinnell and Fountas, The Café by Boushey & Moser, and The Daily 5 by Boushey & Moser. Reading: Solon Robinson believes in a balanced approach to literacy and abides by the following Literacy Core Principles: Students learn to read, comprehend, and connect materials of all genres independently; students learn to communicate effectively through reading, writing, and speaking. Teachers incorporate a balanced approach to teaching literacy including: Guided Reading, Junior Great Books, Novel Studies, Words Their Way, SRA Reading Laboratory Kits, Sustained Silent Reading, 6+1 Traits of Writing, and Academic Vocabulary. Literacy instruction is integrated throughout the content areas of the curriculum and everyday life; students and teachers utilize all available resources. Solon Robinson teachers provide daily opportunities for modeled, shared, guided, and independent reading and writing. Specific comprehension strategy instruction includes: making connections, inferring, synthesizing, creating images, asking questions, determining importance, monitoring understanding, and using fix-it strategies.

Math instruction at Solon Robinson is a hybrid-based model: some teachers are using the Everyday Math program, which has been implemented for the past seven years, while others are in their first year of instructing Bridges Math. Both of these programs are based on core principles that students will learn the use of mathematics to solve problems; students will learn the application of logical reasoning to justify procedures and solutions; students will learn the design and analysis of multiple representations to learn, make connections among, and communicate about the ideas within and outside of mathematics, and students will learn that computation is a sense making activity that allows them to see beyond the algorithm. When using best practices, the instructional approaches are implemented so that students develop personal meaningful solutions to problems. Students are expected to explain their solution methods to each other, are expected to listen to and try to make sense of others' explanations, and are expected to ask questions and raise challenges when they don't understand or don't agree with someone else's reasoning.

Math is integrated into multiple subject areas through the use of problem solving strategies and both math curricula are based on the NCTM Standards. Manipulatives, problem solving, common vocabulary, technology and understanding word problems help enhance our mathematical instruction. Science is inquiry-based and is also integrated throughout the curriculum. In order to address all student needs, several supplemental programs have been integrated into the science curriculum. Such programs include: Full Option Science System (FOSS), National Geographic, Carolina Curriculum, Science Companion, and Delta Education of Science. All science is inquiry-based and centered on students' mastery of the scientific method.

Solon Robinson also is partnered with Purdue University Northwest. This partnership includes an opportunity for our fifth grade students to participate at the Challenger Learning Center. The Challenger Learning Center of Northwest Indiana is Chicagoland's premiere Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) education facility for field trips and more. Our students have the opportunity to participate in the famous simulated space missions with hands-on workshops and labs. The Challenger Learning Center offers our students the unique learning opportunities, STEM activities, as well as resources for our teachers. Social Studies curriculum is centered on giving students real world opportunities to connect with their past, as well as understand their place within their community. Our philosophy is to create good citizens through character development instruction within Solon Robinson's traditions. Students gain a better understanding of their own culture, as well as others, through a variety of instructional practices. Community resources, including field trips, allow unique opportunities for students to make real world connections embedded in the curriculum.

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

Visual and Performing Arts are highly valued at Solon Robinson School as an outlet for students to positively express themselves. Students enjoy a well-rounded visual and performing arts program that goes beyond the Indiana State curriculum. We are proud to provide such opportunities as: plays, band, orchestra, art clubs, PULSE music group, All City Honor's Choir, and monthly music programs. In the past, our students also look forward to visiting the Northwest Indiana Symphony's Annual performance where they are given the opportunity to meet the conductor and participate in a question and answer session. Our upper grade students also have the opportunity to meet with the high school music conductors to help build band, orchestra, or choir into their middle school schedules.

Physical Education/Health/Nutrition is blended within the curriculum with the purpose of creating healthy students. It is our goal for all students to develop skills that adopt, practice, and maintain healthy choices throughout their lives. Crown Point Community School's lunch program has been recognized with the Healthier U.S. School Challenge Silver Award which recognizes schools that meet high standards in school nutrition while providing physical fitness and physical activity opportunities for students. Such opportunities include the Presidential Fitness Award and Field Day.

Technology and Media are integrated throughout the curriculum at Solon Robinson. Every student is given access to the latest technology. Each student is issued their own Chromebook at the beginning of the school year. Solon's Media Center is an epicenter of activity: video morning announcements, book collection carts, book hospital, parent helpers, student helpers, and classrooms of students. Our Media Center has received both the Model Award and the highest Master Award by Renaissance Learning.

Our Media Center houses 17,548 books and last year had a circulation of 68,000 books. Every class is guaranteed a minimum of 40 minutes a week in the Media Center. Our Media Center also houses a STEM section for students to work with different projects: coding, color/light interaction, seeds, electricity, filming and animation projects, force and motion, and other physics related projects. In the past, Solon Robinson's Media Center has partnered with Purdue University to host the Star Lab. Students were able to work in an actual star lab studying different planets and the solar system.

In addition, the Solon Robinson Media Center works in partnership with the Lake/Porter County Poetry Consortium. Students work with our Media Center Specialist on writing and illustrating poems that are published in a hard-bound book- The Power of Poetry. Other Media Center programs include: author/illustrator visits, book fairs, Hoosier Reading Program, Accelerated Reader Program, and literature interpretation.

All classrooms have access to high speed wireless internet. Other uses of technology at Solon Robinson include: parent/teacher e-mail, school website information, school messenger email and parent phone calls, document camera projection systems, Apple Televisions, and smart board technology.

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

Researched-based Teaching Methods:

High expectations are achievable for all students who participate in learning activities that are challenging and attainable. Using learning goals and proficiency scales, students monitor their progress; receive feedback from teachers, peers, and other resources. Additional time outside core instruction is provided in small group learning and individual tutoring sessions by certified staff using direct instruction that involves clear expectation, criteria for success, motivation, lesson that includes student input, modeling, checking for understanding, guided practice, and independent practice. Formative assessment (conference, observation, explanation, technology, problem/answer), is used to monitor the needs of student and whether or not needs have been met.

Teachers provide individual and small group instruction to help create a learning path for each student.

During and outside core program time paraprofessionals work with small groups of students under the direction of certified staff. Literacy Teams consist of paraprofessionals, classroom teachers, and licensed interventionist to work in grade level classrooms outside core reading and math times regularly in small group literacy activities with students at their instructional level. Extended year tutor and small group programs, after school homework help, summer school, jump start, and before school math and reading interventions for small groups of identified students. Instruction for extended time opportunities are carried out by certified staff.

In professional learning communities, teachers are deciding the uses of academic assessment to improve student achievement by determine the following. What is it we want our students to know and be able to do? How will we know if our students are learning? Did our instruction have an impact? How will we respond when students do not learn? How will we enrich and extend the learning for students who are proficient? How will we increase our instructional competence? How will we coordinate our efforts as a school?

For ranking, Crown Point Community Schools teachers, each building principal utilizes the Robert Marzano Protocols, to evaluate instructional methods used within each classroom. 1. Teachers in their first 2 years teaching in Crown Point will have as their focus elements 1 and 2. The rubric scale of Innovating, Applying, Developing, Beginning, or Not Using will be used. Teachers will receive a rating for each of the 2 elements. The ratings will be averaged for a composite rating in Domain 1. Communicating Learning Goals and Feedback Element 1: Providing Clear Learning Goals and Scale Element 2: Tracking Student Progress 2. Teachers teaching in Crown Point 3 or more years will have as their focus elements 1, 2, 17, 18, 19, 20. The rubric scale of Innovating, Applying, Developing, Beginning, or Not Using will be used. The ratings will be weighted by a percentage below to attain a composite rating in Domain 1. Communicating Learning Goals and Feedback Element 1: Providing Clear Learning Goals and Scale Element 2: Tracking Student Progress Element 17: Examining Similarities and Differences Element 18: Examining Errors in Reasoning Element 19: Practicing Skills, Strategies, and Processes Element 20: Revising Knowledge 3. The chart below illustrates the alignment of classroom strategies to a student learning goal and scale. • Elements 6, 8, 11, and 12 align to instruction in new vocabulary, content, processes and skills, a score 2. • Elements 17, 18, 19, and 20 align to instruction to help students practice and deepen understanding and achieve the learning goal, a score 3. • Element 22 aligns to helping students extend their thinking, a score 4.

#### CURRICULUM INTERVENTIONS:

Identified students that fall into the Tier I, Tier II, and Tier III categories receive additional support through our RTI process. Specifically, some fail-safe measures include morning math/reading remediation with a licensed teacher and Bridges Math Intervention program. In addition to addressing remediation needs, our RTI program supports high ability students with compacts and possible subject acceleration. To guarantee success for each student and avoid reading failure, we employ continuous monitoring of each individual student's growth at each grade level. Key literacy areas are assessed through: RTI, Acuity, mClass, Star Reading progress monitoring, as well as weekly vocabulary, spelling, and phonics assessments. Instructional practices are adjusted frequently after student data is analyzed. Differentiated instruction takes place within the classrooms and additional support is given to students that fall into the Tier II and Tier III categories.

Our Title 1 instruction goes beyond that provided by the comprehensive core program because the core program does not provide enough instruction or practice in a key area to meet the needs of the students. Solon students who are lagging behind their classmates in the development of critical reading skills are involved in many researched-based intervention programs: Leveled Literacy, Quick Reads, Reading A-Z, and the Burst Reading Intervention program. The instruction is guided by a specific intervention program that focuses on one or more of the key areas of reading development. This type of instruction is needed by only a relatively small minority of students in a class. In some cases, students may need to receive instruction guided by a comprehensive intervention program (addresses all 5 areas of reading) that is specifically under the supervision of a licensed teacher. Both of our Title 1 interventionists are licensed teachers.

## PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

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### 1. School Climate/Culture:

While there is no official definition of school culture, a visitor senses it when first walking through our school's doors. Is the school culture collaborative? Is it caring? Is it friendly? Is this a competitive environment? One of Solon's main priorities is family. The sense of family is easily felt as you enter the building. Solon's principal is "extremely accessible" and greets faculty, staff, students, and visitors warmly. Students walk in orderly lines, their voices low but their energy high. Their faces light up and they easily accept the principal and teachers' warm hugs and smiles as they enter the building and travel to their classroom.

Each school day begins with live television announcements that are done school-wide. Every morning fifth grade students produce and broadcast a television show under the direction of our Media Specialist. The student anchorpersons report on the weather and school news, celebrate student achievements, and lead the school in reciting the pledge of allegiance and the Solon pledge:

I promise to be respectful, responsible, safe and kind, every day in all that I do.

After the morning announcements conclude is when the magic really begins. The principal and teachers fully believe in the delicate balance of fun coupled with extremely high academic achievement/expectations. Less formally, teachers promote good classroom behavior through reinforcing statements. Several teachers throughout the building are often heard offering students specific praise through "I like the way you..." statements, such as, "I like the way you used your math strategy to find the answer" and "I like the way your class is quietly walking down the hall." "Wow, class- I think you have earned another puzzle piece or link for our celebration." This approach to specifying what was going right was systematic. Compliments were never a vague, "good job," but were always specific—"good job on your paper, Addy!"

Also, it is not surprising to see very flexible seating in many of the classrooms. The use of the traditional desk is limited. Teachers and students use the floor, classroom tables, etc. as a platform for classroom instruction. Many classrooms have sit spots on carpets, reading corners, math learning corners, learning centers, technology spaces, special guest readers, etc. It is not unusual at all to see small groups of students working in the hallways under the direction of an adult with reading or math. The hallways and small nooks seem to be as busy as general education classrooms. Even bathroom break time is a time of learning. Teachers waste no time in the hallways with students for this too is a learning space. Whether working on sight words, math facts, or spelling words, time is not wasted.

Our Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Teresa Eineman, has always wondered about what makes the culture at Solon so special. Is it the singing and dancing in the classrooms? Could it be one of the secretaries going down to the kindergarten class each morning to participate in their welcome to the day dance? The students/teachers participate in every holiday- Halloween is classified a National Holiday at Solon. The principal and teachers believe in a balance of fun and academics. Celebrating our success is a high priority! We have a double donut party for our high-flying readers, ice cream parties, climbing into the star lab and looking at the planets, a pizza party to honor new students, or a limo ride to a local restaurant to treat our students with local fundraising efforts.

There's more than one way to make a delicious bread, soup, or stew. Similarly, there is not just one recipe for reducing risk in young students' lives. But there does seem to be one essential ingredient to the process: Caring-Sustained Relationships - at-risk students need relationships that are both caring and stable. They need to build a sense of trust and have the time to communicate the complexity, frustrations, and positive aspects of their lives in and out of school. Only after creating a strong relational base will an adult have the platform to be a source of enduring and cherished advice to a student. These relationships are the cornerstone of Solon.

To benefit our at-risk population, it is vital for the staff to make fun memories for our students. The students will always remember the teachers dressing up for different days: Halloween, college spirit day, the 100th day of school, sport spirit day- especially celebrating our Chicago Cubs and Solon spirit day. Even the school treasurer breaks out the head gear for practically every occasion and makes a guest appearance during the morning announcements. There is hardly a day that goes by that she is not wearing some type of headgear- kids and staff loves it. Her Solon spirit is contagious! The front office, 'Our Ambassadors of First Impressions,' reflect our contagious spirit. The parents understand this as well; on special dress up days, you can easily find copy moms wearing the attire of the day- everyone gets involved! Solon definitely breaks the mold on interweaving high academic success with fun and light-heartedness.

It is very hard to capture the true essence of Solon Robinson. The success and strong academic achievements at Solon are a testament to the students, staff, and the Solon community. Solon is a true anomaly; our school/community is unable to be duplicated in any way. Solon Robinson's staff represents family, friendship, support of one another, and love; all of which is carried over to the wonderful educational experience each and every child not only receives, but deserves.

At Solon, every student is "Born to Shine". In order for our students to shine as bright as they possibly can, we challenge them each and every day with a rigorous and relevant curriculum. Our Music, P.E., Media, and Art programs are considered to be part of the essential core curriculum. We believe we must work in partnership with all stakeholders to support each student as he/she works to radiate ever brighter academically, socially, and emotionally. We believe providing a nurturing and compassionate environment that honors differences and diversity is essential to helping this success take root. The sun is known for being an exceptional source of energy and life. Our Solon faculty has a focused collective energy towards providing a strong relevant education that will prepare our students to be responsible and productive individuals throughout their lives. We want each of our Solon Stingers to leave us with the tools they need to shine their absolute brightest and beyond.

## **2. Engaging Families and Community:**

Home-school communication takes many forms: back-to-school night, parent-teacher conferences, quarterly progress reports, tests and homework for parents to see and sign, weekly newsletters, communication logs, formal IEPs for special education students, and daily contact with parents when teachers walk the students out to the front of the school at the end of day.

Parents regularly volunteer in the school and participate in activities and field trips. Each year the school holds a Back to School Night and provides parents with packets of information on what they should expect their children to learn during the year. At Kindergarten Orientation, parents are given ideas for what they should be doing with their children at home to assist with learning.

The active PTO at Solon Robinson not only organizes fundraisers for the school, they sponsor popular family events. Parents rave about our burger bash, ice cream and bingo night, daddy daughter dance, and mother son night. All of these events are for the entire school with donations that benefit our community. For example, these donations are collected and given to the struggling families of our school community. The culminating activity, our End of the Year Bash, is the most special event of them all. All parents and students are invited to attend our school-wide picnic celebration. This is a celebration to honor all of the accomplishments and achievements of our students, teachers, and staff. This celebration has grown over the years. Several families volunteer their time to grill. Hot dogs, brats, and hamburgers are grilled to perfection, while others are involved in working with food preparation, face painting, and scooping ice cream. The food is donated by Solon families. The End of the Year Bash has games, balloon artists, and karaoke, and climbing walls for kids to enjoy. There is no cost for anyone to attend. At the end of the night, all left over food is packaged and delivered to the local fire/police stations for first responders to enjoy. The End of the Year Bash is another way to bring our small school community even closer. Parents indicate that they feel very welcome at the school, and that they appreciate the high academic standards and the dedication of the school staff to meet student needs.

Solon has shown itself to be successful, responsive, and resilient—the very qualities it nurtures in our students.

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

Professional development at Solon Robinson is one of the foundations to our success. The principal truly believes that success is a collaborative effort and she promotes leadership by committee. Each grade level team leader serves as a member of the leadership team.

Each month, the principal develops a comprehensive professional calendar for all staff members. This calendar focuses on school and district curriculum professional development opportunities. Many of the Solon teachers volunteer their time to present at the corporation Learning Academies covering various topics that are valuable to them: technology use in the classroom, use of google doc for students, Junior Great Training just to name a few.

Our professional development calendar helps the teachers stay laser-focused to the needs of the students. The teachers are given bullet points for discussion and then submit meeting notes to the principal. Each month, there are many meetings that teachers attend: professional learning communities, literacy roundtable discussions, language arts meetings, math meetings, problem-solving team meetings, and evaluation conferences. Teachers, as well as the principal, are involved in monthly meetings discussing topics such as English Language Learners, Special Education, and Title 1 at-risk students.

Teachers also meet to discuss vertical and horizontal articulation curriculum issues. It is a Solon priority to address how curriculum integrates from one grade to another. Teachers utilize these meetings as a platform for discussing strengths/weakness of curriculum. When new curriculum is introduced, the principal believes that all teachers need to work together to support each other as well as the curriculum. Teachers also have used classroom visitations to observe and assess the new curriculum, share their input, and experience how it is being implemented with the students.

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

The leadership style of the building principal has taken many years to cultivate. The building principal has been at Solon Robinson for the past seventeen years. Before coming to Solon, the building principal came from a high school principalship. Thus, it was quite a learning curve for her, but the principal leaned on many of the veteran teachers to help guide her into understanding elementary level: students, staff, curriculum, and the Solon community. After just a short time, the principal was able to adapt to this very energetic level of education.

School staff members attribute the school's success to strong collaborative leadership—at the district and school level, a high level of staff commitment and collaboration, and a solid instructional program in both math and reading that uses data frequently and holds students to high expectations.

After reflecting over the seventeen years, the building principal has a shared philosophy and a hands-on leadership style. The building principal has a very competitive spirit; thus striving to be the very best is always the goal for herself, her teachers, and her students. This begins with being accessible to all staff members as well as being very visible throughout the building. The building principal has extremely high expectations of her staff and they have no problems rising to the occasion. The building principal meets both informally and formally with all staff members. Relationships are a key part to the success at Solon. The principal understands the need to know her staff beyond their role of a teacher. The principal takes pride in knowing their spouses and children. Solon is extremely family-oriented. The Solon staff relationships go well beyond the working environment. They are known to socialize with together. They genuinely get along and support one another both in school and outside of school.

Over the years, the Solon staff has established a culture of collaboration, teamwork, respect for one

another, and high expectations for not only students but also staff members. As the school population continues to grow, and teachers retire, the newly hired teachers are the ones who fit into the Solon culture. The school has experienced very little staff turnover and has established a reputation for its teaching climate; teachers looking for such an environment want to work at Solon. The principal carefully screens and interviews potential teachers, looking for people who will fit the culture. Smiling and joking with one another, teachers easily speak of how much they enjoy their jobs and value their relationships with each other and the principal. Solon teachers have a lot of fun here—people learn and are motivated to do their best when they are having fun. Teacher absenteeism is very low at Solon; this is attributed to the unique Solon culture.

Along with building positive relationships with her staff, the building principal takes great pride in supporting her teachers. The building principal allows teachers to be risk-takers. The teachers know that the administrative support is very important to their success. The principal's support is unwavering to her staff. The principal's philosophy emphasizes empowerment and professionalism. Convinced that most people go into teaching because they want to help kids, the principal maintains oversight but strongly believes in letting the teachers do what they know how to do best, and giving them opportunities to do just that. The principal really believes in the personal touch with her staff. One of the major roles the principal has is that of a listener. The principal always tries to listen to her staff- this is a critical component of her job. The principal is known for positive words of encouragement, positive notes or emails to staff members, or even a personal text/ phone call when it is needed by a teacher. The principal understands the daily stress that teachers have and helps with positive motivation.

All staff members are treated as part of the Solon family. The principal has a special desire to also build relationships with not just the teachers, but the support staff as well. Getting to know the custodians, food service personnel, and bus drivers are just as important to her as knowing her teachers. The principal often states their jobs are just as important as anyone else's. The principal, as you can ascertain, has a very hands-on approach to leadership. Her leadership style is not just a one size fits all mentality. It is critical to the principal that everyone knows they are supported and cared for in all aspects of life. The principal is known for giving a gentle pat on the back or a high five to her staff members on a job well done. The principal loves the staff, like her extended family; in fact, she easily laughs that she sees and interacts more with the staff than her own husband and adult children. The Solon family is a remarkable group of high energy staff members that have the passion and heart to work with all students. Their dedication, desire, and determination are what set them apart from any other faculty. We truly believe these are the qualities that make Solon Robinson worthy of being nominated as a National Blue Ribbon School.

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

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The success at Solon is extremely difficult to explain to an outsider; Solon is a school that is a very special place. Solon's culture has continued to change over the past 17 years. The principal saw that changing the culture was a priority several years ago. With the support of the district office, the principal was given the latitude to make the needed changes. The staff began to embrace the philosophy of leadership by committee and a true shared-belief style.

The Solon culture is based on teachers having very high expectations for all students. Even though Solon is a Title 1 school, we never see that as a crutch to learning. In fact, the Solon staff sees working with the at-risk students as a challenge to overcoming obstacles and a vehicle for continued success. The culture embraces all students in our learning community: at-risk , high poverty, exceptional learners, English language learners, and gifted/talented learners. With such a diverse learning population, Solon teachers take on an additional role, that of a student advocate. Each teacher at Solon is an advocate for their students; they are the voice of students who need a caring adult that they can count on to be there for them on a daily basis.

The students and Solon community can sense the special culture that Solon has the minute they step in the building. Solon continues to foster a culture of family. The staff members are invested and committed to excellence each and every day. The learning culture is focused on students first. Unfortunately, student data in schools has taken on such an important role for schools. However, the Solon teachers' priority will always be the students. Students are viewed as individuals and not just a data point.

In conclusion, the academic success of the Solon family is based on a remarkable group of high energy staff members that have the passion and heart to work with all students. Their dedication, desire, and determination are what set them apart from any other faculty. These attributes are what makes the Solon culture so very special. We truly believe these are the qualities that make Solon Robinson worthy of being nominated as a National Blue Ribbon School.