U.S. Department of Education
2018 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

For Public Schools only: (Check all that apply) [ ] Title I   [ ] Charter   [ ] Magnet   [ ] Choice

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

Official School Name Ridgway Area High School
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 1403 Hill Street
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

Ridgway   PA   15853-2316
City   State   Zip Code+4 (9 digits total)

County Elk County

Telephone (814) 773-3164   Fax (814) 776-4247

Web site/URL http://www.rasd.us   E-mail   bensonbrice@ridgwayedu.com

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

_____Date_____
(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent*Mrs. Heather McMahon-Vargas
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)
E-mail mcmahonheather@ridgwayedu.com

District Name Ridgway Area School District   Tel.   (814) 773-3146
I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

_____Date_____
(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board
President/Chairperson Ms. Aimee Kemick
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

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

_____Date_____
(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

The original signed cover sheet only should be converted to a PDF file and uploaded via the online portal.

*Non-public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, write N/A in the space.

Part I – Eligibility Certification

The signatures on the first page of this application (cover page) certify that each of the statements below, concerning the school's eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education and National Blue Ribbon Schools requirements, are true and correct.

1. The school configuration includes one or more of grades K-12. (Schools on the same campus with one principal, even a K-12 school, must apply as an entire school.)

2. All nominated public schools must meet the state's performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group and all subgroups, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.

3. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 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   1 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
   (per district designation):   1 Middle/Junior high schools
                                         1 High schools
                                         0 K-12 schools

                                         3 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
   [X] 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	0	0	0
1	0	0	0
2	0	0	0
3	0	0	0
4	0	0	0
5	0	0	0
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	31	30	61
10	45	31	76
11	35	40	75
12 or higher	34	25	59
Total Students	145	126	271

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:

<u>1</u> % American Indian or Alaska Native
<u>1</u> % Asian
<u>1</u> % Black or African American
<u>3</u> % Hispanic or Latino
<u>0</u> % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
<u>94</u> % White
<u>0</u> % 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: <u>8</u>%

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 *to* the school after October 1, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	10
(2) Number of students who transferred *from* the school after October 1, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	12
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	22
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2016	276
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.08
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	8

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 0 %
   0 Total number ELL

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: <u>40</u> %
   Total number students who qualify: <u>109</u>

8. Students receiving special education services: <u>14</u> %

                                                       <u>38</u> 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>1</u> Autism	<u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities
<u>0</u> Deafness	<u>1</u> Orthopedic Impairment
<u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness	<u>2</u> Other Health Impaired
<u>0</u> Developmentally Delayed	<u>20</u> Specific Learning Disability
<u>9</u> Emotional Disturbance	<u>0</u> Speech or Language Impairment
<u>1</u> Hearing Impairment	<u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury
<u>4</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: <u>3</u>

10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	Number of Staff
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	17
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.	4
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	3

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1   <u>16:1</u>

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	95%	94%	95%	95%	95%
High school graduation rate	95%	92%	85%	94%	86%

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	65
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	47%
Enrolled in a community college	10%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	10%
Found employment	33%
Joined the military or other public service	0%
Other	0%

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.
    Yes _   No X

    If yes, select the year in which your school received the award.

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

Where students will discover their purpose for today and their passion for tomorrow.

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

The scenic community of Ridgway is situated in the northcentral region of Pennsylvania. Ridgway was founded by Jacob Ridgway, a Philadelphia-based businessman who noted its potential as a location for a lumber town. Jacob Ridgway was born in poverty but rose through determination and skill to become a successful entrepreneur. His example was modeled by many who came after him to this area of Pennsylvania. First settlers arrived in the Ridgway area by 1824, while the town was incorporated in 1881. Abundant natural resources such as timber, natural gas, and coal made the location possible for steady economic growth. In fact, Ridgway was once hailed as being home to more millionaires per capita than anywhere in the United States due to the turn-of-the-century's lucrative lumber industry. Ridgway Area School District is composed of Ridgway Borough, Ridgway Township, Horton Township, Spring Creek Township.

The community of Ridgway is often referred to as the "center of the PA Wilds." The PA Wilds (pawilds.com) is a twelve county region of northcentral Pennsylvania that includes various outdoor –themed recreation and abundant natural beauty. Our community would best be described as rural in nature, yet coupled with a strong manufacturing base. Population has declined in the school district steadily since 1960, when Ridgway Borough's population peaked at 6,387. The 2010 census placed the borough's population at 4,078. According to latest data, median income in Elk County is $46,000. With 33% of the high school student body eligible for free and reduced lunch, our school district serves a diverse population of learners with socio-economic challenges.

Elk County is known as the powdered metal capital of Pennsylvania. Various businesses, plants, and smaller tool and dye shops are tied to this product. Powdered metallurgy is used to make unique materials used in the automotive industry. The readers of this summary would be surprised perhaps to realize that a sizable portion of many parts in various automobiles, or even basic household appliances, are manufactured within a ten mile radius of Ridgway Area High School. Other notable industries include lumber, paper manufacturing, oil and natural gas production activities, and health care. Tourism is prevalent as the county, true to its name, is home to the largest free-roaming elk herd in the northeastern United States. The community of Ridgway hosts an annual Chainsaw Rendezvous each March. The Chainsaw Rendezvous draws thousands of visitors and carvers to experience this unique and creative form of artistry.

Ridgway Area High School has various school traditions which provide for opportunities for the community and student body to together celebrate spirit activities. Homecoming week each fall is coordinated in partnership with the alumni association to showcase Ridgway Elker spirit. Businesses will decorate storefronts and place school spirit messages on their marquees. Community booster organizations assist in decorating the school grounds in the colors of maroon and white for the week. Homecoming week culminates with a parade in Main Street in downtown Ridgway that features class floats, the marching band, and alumni groups. We believe a sense of community promotes a school culture that leads to positive educational outcomes.

The Elker athletic programs flourish as many teams are recognized as perennial powers in our region. The football team has won two straight district titles, while the boys basketball team last year advanced to the state quarterfinals. Wrestling has achieved status in the past as a USA Today top nationally-ranked program. Girls soccer and boys golf have each recently won district championships as well. The community attends our home events in great numbers to support our students. Instrumental band and chorus has featured students who routinely advance to state level competitions. Theater productions occur each spring that showcase student talent in performing arts. The high school is especially proud of our academic awards. Each year our high school sponsors participation in Science Olympiad, Skills USA, Envirothon, and DECA competitions. Students who are engaged in extra- curricular activities are instilled with valuable habits that support the educational mission of the school district. Our coaches and advisors work closely with each other to provide pathways in order that students can concurrently participate in multiple activities.

Ridgway Area High School endeavors to provide a multitude of learning experiences in order to meet our mission of providing an education that promotes student discovery of their purpose for today and their

passion for tomorrow. Our school district focuses on enhancing offerings to prepare our students for a rapidly changing world that will require our graduates to become life-long learners. Flexible scheduling models at the high school promote a much more personalized educational approach to each student. Our rural school community offers the advantage of a personal educational experience. Ridgway Area High School's tradition of academic excellence is a testament to our rural community's dedication to the importance of education.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

The Pennsylvania Department of Education's Standard's Aligned System (SAS) is a foundational website resource that provides state standards, resources, and a curriculum framework that forms the basis of the Ridgway Area High School curriculum and courses of study. Pennsylvania, in order to meet federal accountability standards, has put in place a system of Keystone Exams that focus on the areas of Algebra I, Biology, and Literature. Student success on these exams has become a chief goal of the curriculum design at Ridgway Area High School.

Pennsylvania has started a transition of the ranking methods (school report card) of school districts from the current School Performance Profile to the new Future-Ready PA Index. Both systems place a strong emphasis on the Keystone Exam scores of our students, as well as a growth model called Pennsylvania's Value-Added Assessment System which charts student growth over time. Essentially, the Keystone Exams serve to measure student achievement on an end-of-course exam while PVAAS scores measure whether a student has shown predicted growth in that given area of assessment.

Ridgway Area High School utilizes a block model of scheduling academic courses. We operate four instructional mods daily, each mod running 78 minutes in duration. The schedule is split between "maroon" and "white" days. The high school makes use of a 30 minute common remediation time prior to lunch each day in which all high school students may access high school teachers for additional coursework assistance. Many of our graduates have cited the block schedule as important towards their college transition.

English Language Arts courses at Ridgway Area High School follow two separate pathways modified for those students who identify as college-bound (academic) and those who will either seek higher education or enter the workforce after graduation (integrated). The department focuses on skill development in the areas of reading comprehension, critical thinking, evidence-based writing, analytical discussions, and literary analysis. English 9 (both academic and integrated) stresses a survey of a variety of literature genres as students refine research, writing skills through exposure to short stories, poetry, nonfiction, novels, and drama. English 10 (academic and integrated) expands upon critical thinking associated with evidence-based writing and literary discussions as all Ridgway Area High School students will participate in the Keystone Exam in May of their sophomore year.   Students in grade 11 take part in either an integrated English course with a primary focus on American Literature, or a course offered through a partnership with the University of Pittsburgh in English Composition. Senior students again may take an integrated, or practical English course that emphasizes reading skills and composition with the main project including the development of the senior research paper. Grade 12 students may also enroll in a course via the University of Pittsburgh in Literature. Advanced Placement Literature and Composition is offered for students seeking to attend highly selective colleges or those preparing for serious academic rigor at the post-secondary level.

Ridgway Area High School offers challenging coursework in mathematics designed to accommodate learners of various abilities. Skills mastered by students include integers and rational numbers, data analysis, linear equations, and linear inequalities. Beginning in a student's freshman year, coursework is tiered with likely college-bound students progressing through Algebra II, Geometry, Trigonometry, Calculus (University of Pittsburgh class), and finally Advanced Placement Calculus AB. Classes are also offered in Algebra IA, Algebra IB, Algebra III, and Statistics. Students at various mathematic levels, with close consultation with teachers and the guidance office, can pick a minimum combination of four high school mathematics courses from the above listed as opportunities to meet graduation requirements.

The science curriculum in grades 9 and 10 features a focus on the Keystone Biology exam. Advanced students will test after a 9th grade Biology course, while other students will enroll in Environmental Science in grade 9 and then participate in Biology in grade 10. Science courses develop skills in scientific processes, biological and chemical processes, matter and energy, gas laws, and cellular processes. Additional courses in the high school include Chemistry, Physics, Anatomy and Physiology, Advanced Placement Chemistry, Advanced Placement Biology, as well as University of Pittsburgh courses in Environmental Science,

Chemistry, and Physics. After completion of the Keystone Exam in Biology, students enroll in coursework that best challenges them to develop necessary knowledge and skills for their future.

Ridgway Area High School offers social studies/civics education in a variety of courses. American Cultures, World Cultures, Government, are all required courses for graduation. In addition, students must enroll in one elective offering to fulfill the four required credits necessary for graduation. Elective options include Military History, Current Events, and Conspiracy Theory. Advanced Placement World History, as well as Economics and Psychology through the University of Pittsburgh, are offered as electives.

Career readiness is a focused endeavor at the high school with a mandatory careers course completed by all 10th grade students. The class includes topics on career awareness, acquisition, retention, advancement, and entrepreneurship. All junior students must complete two job shadow experiences with a mentoring adult who can provide in-depth insights into specific occupations.To further support career readiness all junior and seniors students receive instruction on resume writing and interview skills as part of their integrated curriculum.

2.   Other Curriculum Areas:

Visual arts offerings at Ridgway Area High School include both full year and semester courses such as digital photography, graphic design, advanced painting, and wood craft. In addition, both dual enrollment art appreciation courses through the University of Pittsburgh, and Advanced Placement courses in Drawing, 2-D Art, and 3-D Art are offered as opportunities. Students obtain knowledge in self-reflection, critique, and project design through these popular offerings. Performing arts courses are offered in instrumental band, chorus, musical theatre, music appreciation, music theory, acting, and advanced instrumental techniques. The high school programs showcase public events annually such as theatrical productions, band concerts featuring nationally-renowned guest conductors, and art exhibitions.

Trends towards personalization prompted the high school to offer a unique course of study in the area of physical education. While students must complete a physical education course each year, we provide options regarding how this requirement is met. Personalized Fitness class is a popular option for students to meet the requirement, which promotes healthy lifestyles through established fitness goals, a fitness tracker for accountability purposes, and culminating assessment. An emphasis is placed in all physical education/ health offerings on students developing a fitness mindset. Students participate in a full credit course in health and also have the option of participating in more traditional, team-oriented physical fitness opportunities. The high school prides itself on a thriving foreign language department. Foreign languages courses include French, Latin, and Spanish. Students may progress through five levels of both French and Spanish, with University of Pittsburgh dual enrollment offered at level 4 for both languages. In addition, a two year progression is available in Latin. Ridgway Area High School's foreign language courses emphasize grammar, vocabulary, oral proficiency, and cultural context. These foundational skills support the core curriculum while also promoting necessary knowledge to thrive in the changing demographics of the local, national, and global workforce.
Technological education has been the focus of additional curriculum offerings to meet both student interest and the local, state, and national job climate. All high school students may elect courses in drafting, architecture, computer-aided drawing ("CAD"), construction, machining, power technology (including electronics, fluid power, mechanics), engineering, and robotics. Through expanding partnerships with local career and technical centers and neighboring school districts, Ridgway Area High School recently added Vocational Agriculture, Cosmetology, Automotive Technology, and many other opportunities that prepare students for the work force or for trade schools. Students pursuing traditional college preparation/academic courses of study are now entering these technology education courses to augment their academic experiences with applied skills. A journalism and communications course of study is also offered at the high school seeking to promote hands-on experience in contemporary media. This sequence involves mass communications skills used to produce official media productions for the Facebook page and school webpage.

Ridgway Area High School offers additional electives for all students in family and consumer science, business, and computer applications. Popular family and consumer courses include interior design, nutrition,

and vegetarian food. Business courses such as accounting, business math, business law, marketing, entrepreneurship, personal finance are offered to all students in the high school. As the prevalence of computer technology has accelerated in nearly every sector of the workforce, courses that develop computer competency skills are essential. A dual enrollment course through the University of Pittsburgh named Micro- Computing for Business allows students to demonstrate a thorough understanding of common software applications. Additional courses are provided in specialized Microsoft applications.

Additional opportunities exist for students to explore curricular concepts beyond just the traditional school day. Students groups compete at the local and state competitions in Science Olympiad, Envirothon, DECA, Model UN, Mock Trial, Poetry Out Loud, Rotary's 4 Way Speech Contest, Robotics, and various Pennsylvania Music Educators festivals. These competitions are eagerly encouraged by the faculty, as students gain valuable skills and experiences through participation in these pursuits.

3.   Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

As a small rural school that has annually demonstrated consistent high achievement, our focus remains on quality instruction. Ridgway Area High School's recipe for student success mirrors the Ridgway Area School District's mission statement of "Achievement Through Learning." Ridgway Area High School believes that effective teachers plan and prepare for content lessons using their extensive knowledge of the given content area and reference to the core curriculum. The application of lesson content, or emphasis on the relevancy of the subject matter to real world scenarios/examples is stressed in instructional design development. While instructional techniques (inquiry-based, direct instruction, collaborative learning) may vary depending upon the lesson design, all curriculum design is clearly related to intended outcomes. Learning activities must be designed to require all students in the classroom to think, problem-solve, inquire, defend conjectures, and be accountable to others. Significant instructional focus is placed on fundamental concepts of instruction. We emphasize with our teachers a continuous model of self-reflection. Success on state and local summative assessments is a mere outgrowth that arises through the learning process. Our administration and faculty focuses not on test scores, but instead on maintaining high expectations and improving instructional practice in the classroom.

A key point of emphasis at Ridgway Area High School is student engagement. The high school faculty annually develops and revises anticipatory sets, or "hooks", that occur at the outset of lessons. These anticipatory sets are intended to put the learner in a receptive state of mind at the outset of the lesson in order to promote student engagement. The administration reviews these anticipatory sets with individual teachers as part of the supervision process. Educator development in this regard has largely been based on Phillip Schlechty's research into levels of student engagement. As technology has accelerated as a competing source of attention for our students, Ridgway Area High School teachers have embraced this challenge by emphasizing new approaches to student engagement. An investment in mobile laptops, coupled with blended learning via platforms such as Google Classroom, has served to provide unlimited access to curriculum and instruction for our students. Students now can access course information "24/7" and they frequently make use of the online platform to submit work and engage with instructors.

Student assessments are implemented for the purpose of measuring mastery of goals and objectives in courses of study. While Ridgway Area High School is routinely honored for high levels of student achievement per state test scores, the emphasized approach to the concept of assessment in the high school is to use assessment for its pedagogical benefits. Teachers align student learning objectives to assessments that demonstrate progress towards key course concepts. Teacher feedback is specific to learning goals and offers concrete areas for improvement.

Pennsylvania is one of many states that make use of a differentiated supervision plan that includes student learning objectives (SLO's) as part of the evaluation system. Teachers at Ridgway Area High School formalize a learning objective tied to specific assessment criteria for courses of study. These assessments measure both student growth and mastery. SLO's are aligned to the state standards and act as one of a number of data points collected as the high school continually reflects upon curriculum strengths and areas of growth. Through Classroom Diagnostic Tools as well as Study Island, progress monitoring occurs throughout the school year in applicable subjects to provide current levels of monitoring towards desired

outcomes. It is a critical component of formative assessment. This data is then used to specifically close gaps in both the curriculum area of instruction and individual student performance. Students found to be deficient have various levels of remediation available which is targeted towards the specific area of weakness. Student assessment is then personalized to individual student needs.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. **School Climate/Culture:**

An unofficial motto that is commonly used at Ridgway Area High School is that we are "More Than a Test Score." It is used in the yearbook, on our website, and even appears on school t-shirts. This phrase summarizes our commitment to a positive, productive school climate that fosters our concern for each individual to be able to reach their fullest potential. Our students are encouraged to involve themselves in the host of activities that are offered as part of the overall learning experience. The high school seeks to promote a spirit of gratitude and service to others through community service. We, as administrators and teachers, strongly value the idea that those who are involved in teams, groups, causes, and service, tend to be those who demonstrate habits which lead to productive citizenship. While we require our graduating seniors to have acquired 50 hours of community service in local non-profit organizations in the Ridgway community, the major aim of this graduation requirement is to instill in our student body a sense of service above self.

Students can access academic support services during daily common remediation period and through the after-school campus center. While some high schools have discontinued a homeroom concept, our students keep the same daily homeroom and teacher for four years. This has enhanced the protective factors of connectedness and relationships which are ingredients for student achievement. Another example of how the high school seeks to meet the engagement of all students in the school and greater community is through our Friday club activity. Weekly we provide time for students to engage in various student organizations such as the "Random Acts of Kindness Club," which promotes positive school culture through motivational activities and positive messaging. Club activity time also gives groups the chance to run competitions that revolve around service projects. This year our National Honor Society students held a unique challenge for student groups to generate items for cancer care packages for individuals affected by this disease in the Ridgway community. Our close-knit school community provides for relationships to develop between students, teachers, and other staff which makes our learning environment successful.

Teachers, as professional educators, are valued and supported through access and input to the decision-making process regarding educational issues Ridgway Area High School teachers serve on curriculum review teams, school climate teams such as the continuous school improvement ("CSI") team, participate in employee teaching interview teams, district-level policy review teams, and other examples of true involvement in the decision-making process. Teacher appreciation activities are annually hosted by the administration such as holiday breakfast, and special recognitions.

2. **Engaging Families and Community:**

Due in part to its rural location, Ridgway Area High School is similar to many small schools in the fact that the local school serves as the central hub of the community. We consider our relationship with the families and community we serve to be vital to the educational mission of the school district. We use our Ridgway Area School District Facebook page, our website (rasd.us) and student productions posted via our communications/media class to communicate with the community. As high school principal, I enlist the communications class to produce a monthly "Principals Podcast" that is yet another manner of sharing high school news and student achievement stories with our families. The high school hosts a culminating open house night for our senior class where students share their intensive research project in an interactive evening with parents and the community. The ability to professionally communicate to a diverse public audience is a marketable skill that benefits our senior class students as they prepare for life after high school. Other than perhaps commencement, senior open house night draws the largest public crowd of people to the high school each April. Examples of this community engagement are plentiful and include school community members who currently serve on steering committees such as the Superintendent's Ad Hoc Athletic Committee, the district's Comprehensive Plan, and those who serve on our local vocational/occupational steering group.

Participation in our school-to-work program annually averages 20% of our senior class. This program

places Ridgway Area High School students into local jobs during a portion of the school day. Over 30 employers have participated in the program, and many students have parlayed connections formed with these employers into important internships and even full-time careers after high school/post-secondary education. The program is well-received by our local employers, with students working for the local borough wastewater treatment program, at powdered metal plants, tool and die shops, food service, and many other businesses. Our graduation rate has risen from 85% to 95% in the past five years and we believe our ability to keep at-risk students engaged is correlated to our school district's willingness to provide our students with a flexible educational experience in their senior year schedule that typically includes a school-to-work experience made possible through our local community relationship. The school-to-work program is evidence of the type of public-private partnerships which will become increasingly important in education.

The high school also partners with the University of Pittsburgh's campus located at Bradford and Oakland, PA, to provide several dual enrollment offerings. Through this partnership, Ridgway Area High School students often accumulate upwards of a semester's worth of college credits at the conclusion of high school.

3. **Professional Development:**

Ridgway Area High School subscribes to an on-going, collaborative assessment of professional development needs which leads to a responsive culture of educator growth. Previously school districts left much of professional development goals to district-wide comprehensive planning. We believe that the dynamic nature of change in education makes this older model to be antiquated. Our high school is in a continual mode of assessing both student and educator needs. The identification of professional development needs begins with the professional development committee, which consists of the superintendent, principals, and faculty members. The professional development committee analyzes data, collects teacher surveys, and examines trends in regard to student demographics, educational technology, and other valuable data sources. Administration shares instructional strengths and weaknesses noted in classroom observations, along with state test results. Targeted professional development directed towards educational outcomes for students rises from this committee.

Professional development at the building level must be supported by the central office. The high school is grateful that the Ridgway Area School District has been very supportive in providing resources for conference attendance and faculty participation in professional consortiums. The high school routinely sends teacher teams to AP teacher trainings, customized learning seminars, and STEM exploration conferences. Each year the administration and teaching staff participates in a joint book study via the professional learning community model. District-wide attention has been directed towards student engagement. The recent book studies have trended towards this overall theme and have included the books The Core Six, Tuned In and Fired Up, and Mindset.

Ridgway Area High School believes in the benefit of "train the trainer" delivery where lead teachers are often chosen to attend conferences or other outside trainings. These selected teachers then become our high school's point of reference and expertise as we bring identified professional development initiatives to the faculty. Recent examples of professional development activities include customized learning solutions, text-dependent analysis, algebra probes, strategies for student engagement using anticipatory sets, differentiated instruction, and implementing technology into instructional design. In most cases, fellow faculty members have been the designated presenters at in-service trainings. We have found much success with this approach. Much attention has also been placed on modeling differentiated instruction through the high school's own professional development offerings. We have adopted levels of training at in-services for those at different levels of implementation such as separate sessions for Google Classroom for beginners and then other sessions for more advanced users. This results in better engagement and ensures that new faculty members can become acquainted with the high school's ongoing initiatives while we can continue to push higher strategies with our veteran teachers.

4. **School Leadership:**

The principal serves as the instructional leader of the high school charged with supervision and evaluation of the building staff and direction of the educational curriculum. At Ridgway Area High School, the principal is supported by the assistant high school principal. The assistant principal's chief area of supervision is largely student affairs. Our current superintendent has served in the district for 19 years in roles that have included assistant superintendent, high school principal, assistant principal, and teacher. Longevity in leadership is a key attribute to consistent achievement. Students benefit when high standards are consistently applied throughout the building. As a leadership team we strive to promote a consistent learning culture that is one of high expectations, classroom rigor, adaptability to changing socio-economics, along with an embrace of technological advancement. The administration strives to be equitable with our treatment of all stakeholders in the school community. Board members, teachers, custodians, learning support aids, bus drivers, and other key contributors are also collaboratively engaged with the overall mission of the high school to provide best possible outcomes for our students. Promoting a spirit of cooperation requires that all stakeholders are treated with a consistent level of understanding, respect, and support in pursuit of excellence. Parents are invited as participants on various committees within the district such as the superintendent's advisory group for formulating board of education goals, for athletic and extracurricular issues, and on the school safety panel.

To do this effectively, the teaching faculty is encouraged to partner with us each step of the way. Committee structures such as the Continuous School Improvement team ("CSI"), superintendent's monthly roundtable discussions, and the open-door policy of the high school administration highlight examples of the collaborative and transparent leadership style that is most effective for outstanding schools. Administrators frequent classrooms daily, both formally and informally, to integrate themselves into the instructional process and provide feedback to teachers and students alike. Teachers accompany administrators on classroom walkthroughs to become more knowledgeable of the teaching strategies in practice throughout the building. Teams of teachers observe grade levels to gain a better understanding of effective practices.

Collaborative leadership also must include the most important stakeholder- the students. Student surveys on topics including the curricular offerings in the master schedule, careers, supports, and services offer our most vital stakeholders input into their education. The student leadership structure of the student council, in extra-curricular activities, and at the class officer level is encouraged by the building administration. Both building level administrators extend the open door policy to all students as well as adults. The building principals travel to student homerooms during common remediation to hold small, more informal sessions on school rules, opportunities, and expectations.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Education is an investment. It is an investment in the next generation. The task of a high school to prepare young people for success in the present era of dynamic technological change and economic disruption is a tremendous responsibility. In order to get the most return on the investment in public education, we believe students and staff need to own their experience in the Ridgway Area High School. Ownership leads students, teachers, and school staff to find a level of engagement that promotes positive educational outcomes.Through a systemic analysis of practices, initiatives, policies, procedures, experiences, and professional development, stakeholders determine whether the decision being made will lead back to students and teachers owning their learning. This single practice is critical to growing a student and school. Opportunities to own one's experience occur through the practices of educators, the performance of students and the culture of the school. Ownership is created by embedding an authentic strengths and needs assessment for all stakeholders and tailoring the teaching and learning experiences to the outcomes of the assessment. In addition, adjustments are made regularly to systemic practices based on those assessment results to ensure that the practice, experience, and opportunities do not result in complacency.

A common refrain we use with stakeholders is that students must take control of their education. Someone's education is unique to them as no two life experiences are alike. Student and educator engagement is best when the educational program is determined to be relevant. While foundational skills such as sound reading, writing, mathematics, science, and technology, are non-negotiable academic necessities in the 21st century, students at Ridgway Area High School are encouraged to seek opportunities to make their educational experience unique. Students must be provided a scaffold of supports as necessary, but the high school program must be preparatory for young people to become independently productive. Examples are numerous of this ownership approach leading to positive outcomes. Individual student meetings with the guidance department each spring permit students to examine course offerings, and state test requirements. Students can then create a customized experience. The high school flexible block schedule is commonly cited by our alumni as superb preparation for the rigors and independence found in post-secondary environments. The master schedule provides for a maximum of 32 credits over four years, as students are encouraged to explore various curricular offerings. This mindset of ownership, along with structural supports that promote this idea, is prevalent in specific projects such as the senior culminating project. Each senior student is assigned a mentor based on the research topic they have chosen. The students then must formulate a written action plan, schedule progress meetings, and prepare visual and interactive components for their culminating project open house event.