

U.S. Department of Education
2019 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 Dr. Andrew T Grider

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

Official School Name Rodney E. Thompson Middle School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 75 Walpole Street

(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

Stafford VA 22554-6574
City State Zip Code+4 (9 digits total)

County Stafford County

Telephone (540) 658-6420

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Web site/URL
https://www.staffordschools.net/Do
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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*Dr. Scott Kizner

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other) E-mail kiznersr@staffordschools.net

District Name Stafford County Public Schools District Tel. (540) 658-6000

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. Patricia Healy
(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. 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, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
2. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2019 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.
3. 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.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2013 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, or 2018.
6. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. If irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state, the U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school’s application and/or rescind a school’s award.
7. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as “persistently dangerous” within the last two years.
8. 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.
9. 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.
10. 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.
11. 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 (2018-2019) unless otherwise stated.

DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 18 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 8 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 5 High schools
 - 1 K-12 schools
- 32 TOTAL

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located:
- Urban or large central city
 - Suburban
 - Rural or small city/town
3. Number of students as of October 1, 2018 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	188	157	345
7	163	177	340
8	184	154	338
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	535	488	1023

*Schools that house PreK programs should count preschool students **only** if the school administration is responsible for the program.

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 4 % Asian
 - 19 % Black or African American
 - 14 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 1 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 54 % White
 - 8 % 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 2017 – 2018 school year: 9%

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, 2017 until the end of the 2017-2018 school year	51
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2017 until the end of the 2017-2018 school year	29
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	80
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2017	915
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.09
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	9

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 2%
19 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):
Spanish, Twi, Farsi, Pasha, Hindi, and Arabic

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 18%
Total number students who qualify: 180

8. Students receiving special education services: 12 %
127 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>18</u> Autism | <u>1</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>1</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>45</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay | <u>48</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>7</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>5</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>1</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: 10
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	Number of Staff
Administrators	3
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	36
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	27
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	7
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	8

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 28:1

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

Required Information	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014
Daily student attendance	96%	95%	96%	96%	96%
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 2018.

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

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.

Yes No

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

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

The mission of Rodney E. Thompson Middle School is to create a student-centered community that challenges and develops inquiring, knowledgeable, actively involved learners who will succeed in a global society.

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

Rodney E. Thompson Middle School (RTMS) serves a diverse community with students from many backgrounds and nationalities. Within commuting distance to Quantico Marine Base and Washington D. C., many families have ties to the military or are part of the federal workforce. Built in 2000 to ease overcrowding in other middle schools, Thompson Middle School and its community grappled initially to find its identity. The transient nature of the population posed a further challenge in developing a sense of community. Over time these challenges have been overcome by the staff focus on collaboration, innovation, and a relentless effort to help all students be successful.

During the 2009-2010 school year, the seeds of collaboration were planted when the staff committed to become a Professional Learning Community (PLC). The PLC process, outlined by Rick and Becky DuFour, requires staff members to work collaboratively in teams and as a school to continuously improve their practice and resulting in greater levels of student learning. Like any change process, becoming a PLC was challenging, but staff members at Thompson have always embraced going the extra mile for students.

Within grade level, content teams, general education and special education teachers meet weekly to plan for instruction, discuss instructional approaches, and assess student results. Teachers begin by developing norms and goals. They review their curriculum and identify the most essential outcomes for learning. Working collaboratively, they develop common pacing guides that include the essential outcomes. Teachers develop common, formative assessments that enable them to examine how students perform collectively once students have taken the assessments. Teachers then identify the specific areas in which students have difficulty and intervene until students demonstrate mastery.

One scheduling innovation that accompanied PLC work was the implementation of an intervention and enrichment (I&E) period known as Academic Core Time (ACT). This 35-minute period of time four days per week provides students with opportunities to receive extra time and support in multiple content areas based on common assessment results. Students identified as needing extra time and support based on their assessment results are provided that time and support during ACT. Teachers provide intervention in their specific content area to all students who need it, even students they do not normally teach. This enables teachers to get to know even more students in the grade level. This exchange of students makes teachers feel connected to and responsible for all students, not just those in their regular classroom. Teachers' collective ownership for the success of all students underlies the school motto, "All Means All."

The enrichment piece of ACT has flourished over the years. Though teachers struggled initially with meaningful enrichment opportunities for students, today these opportunities include multiple competition offerings, field trips, and activities and experiences that students normally would not have in a traditional middle school.

Specialist teachers, like math, reading, librarian, technology, gifted, and others, meet with PLC teams to augment and support instruction. Elective and physical education teachers support the PLC teams by finding ways to integrate core content in their own curriculum and by working with students in large numbers so that core teachers can intervene with struggling students in small groups during ACT.

Staff members continually find ways to help students achieve success. Last year for example, the English department underwent a transformation by adopting a reading program to support our below grade level readers. This required intensive training and a mindset shift for teachers who were only accustomed to teach English and not reading. The teachers were rewarded by significant student growth, and therefore this program continues. Another way in which teachers prevent students from falling through the cracks are quarterly reviews that are held at each grade level to discuss students who are unsuccessful academically. Interventions are put into place including assigning staff mentors, tutors, scheduling shifts, or parent conferences. Students who had been trending downward academically make positive gains as a result. Still another recent effort to help students be successful this current school year is the implementation of Mentor Mondays. On Mondays for 35 minutes teachers work with students on goal setting and follow up with students on grades and missing work.

A continued focus at Thompson has been developing a positive climate. Staff members strive to find ways to connect with students and provide opportunities for them to thrive both during and outside of school. With a number of clubs such as Hiking Club, Intramural Soccer, overnight trips, sports, and fine and performing arts events, staff members are continually engaged in the life of our students. A recent phenomenon known as Jag Jam has been a community event in which students, families, and staff come together to celebrate student work and have fun. Many other events like color runs, dances, talent shows, and other events create opportunities for staff and families to make connections and build community.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

1a. Reading/English language arts:

The English Department has worked to implement several strategies to enhance student achievement. A key strategy that enables teachers to work effectively during the year is having English PLC teams meet over the summer to unpack and redesign curriculum. Additionally, each summer English teachers meet as a department to discuss writing benchmarks and analyze vertical alignment of the curriculum.

This summer work has led to important developments in English. As part of the school division focus on developing more rigorous and engaging tasks, the PLC teams created lessons and activities to meet those goals. English teachers meet in their PLC teams once or twice a week to develop lesson and unit plans, write assessments and review student progress. During those meetings the teams have created lessons that include student choice, sense of audience, and higher levels on Bloom's Taxonomy.

One clear way English teachers have raised the rigor in the classroom is by providing more opportunities for students to write. The English department has been emphasizing writing in the classroom, to promote critical thinking and to prepare students for real world writing. This focus has gradually changed the level of writing produced by students so that teachers in 8th grade have been able to see the results of that focus beginning in 6th grade.

The reading focus has been a significant focal point for change in the English department. While considered English teachers, our teachers are learning to become teachers of reading. By implementing two reading programs, teachers are learning new strategies and exposing students to new instructional strategies to enhance their ability to read. Most recently the department implemented a computer-based program designed to work on word study, grammar, and comprehension. Four days a week during our intervention and enrichment time, all English teachers have met with small groups of students to implement a structured reading program for students two or more grade levels below in reading.

1b. Mathematics:

Math instruction at Rodney Thompson Middle School focuses on the Virginia Mathematics Standards of Learning (SOL) and incorporates the learning principles and standards of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) into all seven levels of math instructed at RTMS including math 6-8, extended math 6 and 7, Honors Algebra 1, and Honors Geometry.

At RTMS teachers collaboratively create lessons and search for resources focused on a progression of teaching math that is aligned with Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL). They focus on conceptual learning using manipulatives and representations and then linking the concepts to abstract math algorithms. The math teachers take opportunities to create rigorous lessons that allow students to critically think and engage in the mathematics by presenting students opportunities to work collaboratively with their peers in classroom station activities. Cycling through stations allows students a differentiated learning experience that provides enrichment using school division purchased technology programs, and additional support through small group time with their math teacher.

To ensure content learned is retained throughout the year, weekly warm up problems that focus on recently assessed items are created within all math classes. RTMS math teachers also create a weekly homework sheet of math problems called "Retros" that allow our students to work on building fluency of basic math skills and topics difficult for a particular grade level of math.

Common weekly assessments created within the PLC teams allow teachers to collaboratively analyze data, to adjust their lesson plans accordingly, and to provide additional support or enrichment based on student performance. Larger assessments are administered through an online program that allows for a deep item

analysis of student responses, enabling teachers to continuously provide for specific spiraled review based on those results.

1c. Science:

Science instruction at RTMS focuses on the Virginia Science Standards of Learning where students investigate, model, and explore concepts using real world examples. The science teachers continuously improve student experiences through increasing rigor throughout the year. An important initiative is to “power up” with mid and high-level activities on Bloom’s taxonomy and providing more engaging qualities based on work of John Antonetti and Phil Schlecty.

PLCs in the science department develop common formative and summative assessments. The assessment data is used to guide instruction during ACT time which emphasizes enrichment and intervention.

All 7th grade students participate in a two-week robotics unit that incorporates the idea of “design, test, and modify.” Students construct a robot that then performs different tasks to save stranded sea animals from an oil spill. Students learn how to code without knowing what coding is! Science teachers ACT as a time to enhance student experiences in concepts that are connected to curriculum and instruction.

During ACT time, science teachers offer many enrichment opportunities that help build and inspire future scientists. Biology Gone Wild for example focuses on the dissection of mammalian organs. Students research and create a poster, then dissect the mammal eye, kidney, brain, and heart. As a culminating activity, students dissect a large fetal pig. This enrichment opportunity provides real life examples of what it is like to be a surgeon. Some of our future veterinarians and doctors are in this class!

Students become citizen scientists during our Environmental Studies Group. This experience allows students a true science field study that focuses on the importance of Horseshoe Crabs and their value to human life.

Finally, Seaperch provides students the opportunity to apply their understanding of various science concepts to the engineering process. Again, students design, test, and modify a robot specialized to perform intricate underwater tasks. Through all these experiences, students develop essential 21st century skills – collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking.

1d. Social studies/history/civic learning and engagement

The RTMS social studies department utilizes PLC teams at each grade level to drive instruction and assessment. Students are encouraged to take responsibility for their learning by asking them to analyze their own test results. Students use a categorized form to draw conclusions about their performance and then develop a plan of specific steps they will take to improve. This provides students (and teachers) with the unique opportunity to pinpoint areas for enrichment and intervention.

Teachers engage their students with a variety of unique and effective learning opportunities. Students in 6th grade for example research immigration to the US and write letters from an immigrant’s perspective. These letters are presented at an annual Immigration Celebration Day. Another project requires student to take on the role of an entrepreneur and create an invention persuade classmates to invest mimicking the television show, Shark Tank. Sixth graders also experience a walk in a soldier’s life in a simulated WWI trench.

Civics students experience the importance of civic participation through various Election Day activities. They participate in a “factors of voting” simulation to find patterns and draw conclusions. They also work in groups to create a bill simulating the lawmaking process, in addition to working through stations where they must analyze landmark cases and find evidence to draw conclusions about their first amendment freedoms. Civics and science students in 7th grade work on a cross-curricular assignment where they learn the pros and cons of Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) and then write their state representative expressing their position on the topic.

Geography students use critical thinking to compare various countries' attributes and defend their work using evidence from student generated websites. Students express their learning through writing poetry, songs and using technology to enrich and connect with their world. Eighth graders participate in a simulation to explain trade relationships, various cultural perspectives, and economic motivators when asked to represent countries and persuade others to trade.

1e. For secondary schools:

The counseling department hosts "Career Day" to expose 8th graders to post-high school opportunities and to learn about different career clusters. Professionals from different fields share information about education, training, skills for their career. They discuss the relevance of school subjects and the importance of attitude and attendance in in the workplace.

Counselors visit classrooms to facilitate students' investigation of careers within 16 career clusters. Students learn about those clusters and investigate pathways to those careers. Students learn the difference between a career, job, and occupation. Students eventually complete an Academic and Career Plan that follows them to high school.

1f. For schools that offer preschool for three- and four-year old students:

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Students are given the opportunity to choose between several fine and performing arts electives as well as two world languages, Spanish and French. In art for example, students explore and create numerous styles and cultures through art. Aside from class, approximately 150 students participate in after school arts programs, including but not limited to high school mentorships, musical productions, and plays. Each year, approximately 100 students are selected to perform or display artwork in local, regional, and state-wide displays.

The physical education program at RTMS focuses on teaching students how to maintain a healthy lifestyle. From digital counters used to measure students' individual effort to bike safety and repair, students learn to develop the skills and traits for lifelong health. The five health and physical education teachers meet weekly in their PLC team to plan for instruction and develop assessments. Through this process, they have been able to design authentic project-based units to enhance students' experiences.

For the last few years, curriculum integration has been a key component to helping students transfer knowledge across content areas. Last year for example several staff members planned over the summer to identify ways to integrate curriculum. These included teachers in physical education, art, drama, English, social studies and science.

One outcome of the focus on curriculum integration married CTE and fine and performing arts into a single project. Students in 7th grade were asked to participate in "Cupcake Wars." Unlike the traditional cupcake wars, however, the students had multiple tasks required from each of the classrooms. In technology, students created a laser sleeve to overlay the cupcakes. In keyboarding, students wrote descriptions of their work, their process, and their assessment of their work. In drama, students wrote and performed a commercial for their cupcake. In art students designed a mural supporting a theme for their cupcakes. The cupcakes were made in Family and Consumer Science class. The cupcake wars led to an incredible learning experience not only for the students participating but also for the adults.

Enrichment activities during ACT enables students to delve further into various aspects of content and integrate content in a way that engages students. These numerous activities inside & outside of school serve to enrich our students' learning experiences. They may elect to participate in enriched units of study throughout the year such as the Makerspace, Coding, Scientific Investigations, National History Day, Model United Nations, Debate, Science Fair, "We the People" Mock Congress, National Geographic Bee, Mock

Trials, Stafford History Course, Delaware Environmental Summit, Watershed Environmental Program, Robotics, Dissections, Destination Imagination, and Sea Perch Robotics. Other offerings include jazz band, acapella chorus, Step class, and 1 act drama production. Students can learn to play the ukulele, guitar, or learn to write in cursive – a skill no longer taught in Virginia schools. All of these opportunities are offered to students outside of the required curriculum and all of them allow students a chance to engage and enjoy.

Additionally, the librarian has provided a maker space for students during ACT that allows them to participate in various activities including gardening, recycling, cross stitching, fitness and other activities. The librarian conducts several book clubs during lunch and after school, and she coordinates for students to participate in various competitions. The librarian has also worked closely the PLC teams to help support the work of those teachers.

The library runs on a fully flexible schedule, allowing teachers to schedule time with the librarian for a collaborative lesson, to sign up for class checkout times or send their students individually for book checkout, printing, makerspace or group work. The librarian teaches research skills, assists with technology instruction and provides resources to teachers and students alike.

With core classrooms and other curriculum areas outfitted with laptops and other devices, students use a cloud-based program to access, interpret and create digital information. Through high-quality, job-embedded professional learning, teachers collaborate and communicate with the instructional technology resource teacher to select resources that will promote learning through best practices of technology integration. Instructional staff design and implement instructional goals that increase rigor and student engagement through purposeful, effective, and responsible use of technology. Monthly, students learn important topics that focus on being good digital citizens who are digitally literate. These activities involve critical thinking, ethical discussions, and decision-making skills through problem solving and role-playing.

3. Special Populations:

While overall student achievement has been consistent, staff members realized that one group of students were not being successful - students with disabilities. While a number of factors were attributable to their lack of success, one commonality remained when looking at students' academic results - many students with disabilities had difficulty reading. A focus of school improvement efforts shifted from the PLC practices that were solidly in place to providing a greater degree of reading support to all of our students and specifically to our students with disabilities.

Our focus on reading instruction grew over time, first by providing all students in each English classroom the opportunity to read silently several times per week. Gradually as teachers became more proficient in managing sustained silent reading (SSR), they were able to meet with individual or small groups of students during SSR to provide additional reading support.

Last year staff members took another step with the reading initiative by implementing a school-wide reading program, delivered by all of the teachers in the English department during ACT. Implementing the program required training for teachers on program delivery and assessment. Secondary English teachers have little background in teaching reading, and so this step provided a steep learning curve for them. Despite the difficulties of implementing a new program, the staff rose to the challenge and students in the program made significant growth over the course of the year.

The reading focus was entirely staff initiated - the school division had not identified nor implemented any type of reading program for middle school students and had not addressed the issue of students reading below grade level. The success of the program was a school-wide effort. This year English teachers meet with students in groups of five or fewer requiring every teacher other than English teachers in the building to work with larger groups of students. All teachers have understood the importance of this work and are willing to do their part for the benefit of students, which is why the program was and continues to be a success.

The focus on reading instruction during ACT has limited the opportunity for these same students to receive

additional time and support in other content areas during ACT. As a result, our focus next year will be to provide greater support for students in the classroom using a stations or centers instructional approach. While this approach is sometimes used now, a greater focus next year will provide opportunities for students to receive extra time in the classroom and allow teachers to differentiate instruction based on students' learning needs. Ultimately, the reading program will become part of regular classroom instruction, freeing those students to receive support in other content areas during ACT.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

Faculty and staff have multiple systems in place to encourage, acknowledge, and reinforce positive student conduct. One way the school tries to create a positive climate is through a comprehensive recognition program. Academic recognition includes All A and AB Honor Roll parties held quarterly. “A Day” is another recognition instituted last year for students receiving one or more A’s on their quarterly report card. Recipients get a piece of candy for each A earned and have their names entered into a drawing for prizes.

Students are acknowledged for character in several ways. Responsible, Organized/prepared, Accepting of others, Respectful, and Safe and orderly (R.O.A.R.S.) is a recognition given to students who are caught doing something good. ROARS recipients receive a certificate and are entered in a monthly drawing. Each month a male and female student from each grade level are selected by the staff to receive a Positively Achieving Well Behaving Students (PAWS) award. Students receiving the award have breakfast with administration, receive a certificate, and have their photo displayed for the month. Finally, each semester, students who participate in extracurricular activities including sports, academic competitions, music, etc., are recognized at a student assembly.

Student organizations include National Junior Honor Society, Student Council Association, and Principal’s Advisory Committee. These student groups meet with the principal and provide input to activities that will take place in the school. The student activities recognition held each semester is one example of an idea that students had to improve school climate.

During ACT the Leadership group, comprised of about 50 students, meets to focus on ways to give back to the community. These students solicit and provide meals, clothing, and toys for families in need throughout the year. For example, at Thanksgiving the group provided 134 dinners to needy families and over 300 pounds of canned goods to a local church. Additionally, the group recognizes staff members throughout the year including cafeteria workers, bus drivers, counselors, etc., making everyone feel recognized and important in the RTMS community.

A focus on climate includes adults as well. At each faculty meeting teachers are recognized by other staff, students, and/or parents who submit an online commendation describing something positive about a staff member. Each staff member is given a certificate and the commendation is read to the entire staff at monthly faculty meetings. A Jaguar (the school mascot) Bobble-head is given to three staff members at each meeting illustrating someone who has significantly impacted another staff member. Breakfasts, cookouts, lunches, are provided throughout the year. A weekly Jag Journal sent to all staff identifies staff birthdays and “Kudos” for staff who went above and beyond for the week.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Thompson families are actively engaged in the school community. Communication is a key element to ensure that parents are informed. Several informational events are scheduled throughout the year to provide information to families about the school. For example, two weeks prior to the start of school, there is an orientation to the school for parents and students new to Thompson. Open House at the beginning of the year, and Back to School Night, give parents opportunities to come to school, meet the teachers, and learn about the school community. Rising 6th grade orientation in March introduces our rising 6th graders and their parents to middle school and provides an opportunity for future community members to begin to learn about all that is offered at Thompson.

One area in which staff members are often complimented is the degree to which teachers communicate with parents. It is customary for teachers to provide frequent email blasts to parents about upcoming assignments, projects, and assessments. Study guides, work samples, and other material are posted as well, giving parents an open window into what students are doing in the classroom. School wide events are broadcast through automated messaging both by phone and email. Staff will frequently use other forms of

social media to keep parents abreast of what's happening in school. Staff members utilize Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram as ways to keep the community at large engaged with the activities at Thompson. Parents often comment that communication with the school is frequent and informative.

A host of events sponsored by the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) help our students and families connect to the school. Countless volunteers support these events which sometimes have in attendance as many as 600 students. Another popular community event called Jag Jam brings the community into our school. Designed initially as a fundraising event for the PTO, the evening has evolved into a community night. Families come to school in the evening to see student performances, poetry readings, and examples of student work throughout the building. Various family games are available as well as food and other events. This family evening is extremely well-attended by parents, students, and staff.

3. Professional Development:

Within the past two years, Stafford County has had as a focus providing students with rigorous and engaging tasks in the classroom. For the last two summers, staff members from Thompson have attended a four-day summer institute with a nationally recognized presenter to learn how to develop more rigorous and engaging tasks. Schools have been required to incorporate this focus on rigorous, engaging tasks in their respective school improvement plans.

In addition to the summer institute, staff members have also conducted learning walks within their own school intended to give teachers an opportunity to view activities in other classrooms to determine the level of engagement and rigor. From the learning walks, teachers discuss the tasks given in other classes and reflect on their own practice through the lens of improving tasks in their own classrooms.

Staff development has and is a critical piece in helping staff members to understand first and foremost what engaging qualities look like as well as how to discern the level of tasks using Bloom's taxonomy. From there teachers developed lessons that incorporated more rigor and more engaging qualities. This year teachers have invited their colleagues to review these lessons and to provide feedback.

Outside of this school division focus, other staff development has occurred in different departments. For example, the Math Specialist at RTMS has focused on vertical alignment of math content during monthly department meetings. During weekly PLC meetings the math specialist has assisted teachers in building their own foundation in math pedagogy to increase student achievement. Teachers knowledge of instructing proportional reasoning as it relates to algebraic functions is one example.

Other departments have also had a continued focus. Social studies teachers have really focused on developing performance-based assessments as an alternative to multiple choice assessments. This focus resulted from a statewide effort to reduce the number of end of course high stakes assessments and provide a different approach to assessment in general.

The school has had other professional development initiatives over the years, but one recurring element has been the focus of staff working as a professional learning community. Regardless of the initiative or focus at the state or division level, our staff always spends time revising or enhancing PLC practices.

4. School Leadership:

Leadership at Thompson is dispersed among various teachers and staff members based on the tasks to be accomplished. For the administrative team, communication is key. The principal and two assistant principals meet daily at the beginning and end of the day to identify key tasks and responsibilities, discuss strategies, and inform each other of individual daily goals.

Each week on Mondays the administrative team, counselors, and three key teacher leaders who serve as grade level discipline designees meet to discuss student concerns. The group brainstorms strategies and action plans for assisting with the students and possibly their families.

There are three primary teacher leadership groups that meet on a consistent basis, each with slightly different responsibilities. Team leaders is a group comprised of teacher leaders from each of the grades and departments. This representative group meets twice a month and makes decisions regarding the logistical and support considerations for effectively managing the school. For example, they address the school schedule, policies, and budget.

The school improvement team (SIP) consists of any teachers and staff members who want to serve on the team. The open invitation encourages all staff members to participate and allows for those not on another team to have input into school decisions. The team meets several times during the summer and school year to identify the primary instructional goals of the school. The SIP has the responsibility of developing the plan, setting goals for the plan, and assigning key responsibilities for executing and monitoring the plan.

Lead Teachers is another representative group of staff members who meet monthly to address the instructional needs of the school. These teachers are representative of the various instructional departments within the school who develop, implement, and review activities related to curriculum, instruction, and assessment. These team members meet with school division leaders in their area, and these teachers report on the respective goals and initiatives in each area from the school division.

Several student leadership groups within the school also have input regarding decisions that are made. The Student Council Association (SCA) makes decisions about activities and events in the school. The Nation Junior Honor Society and the Leadership classes take an active role in developing community based and service learning opportunities for students. Finally, the Principal's Advisory meets regularly throughout the year to give feedback and suggestions regarding next steps related to the climate goal of our SIP.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Over the last 10 years Stafford County Schools has witnessed five different superintendents, all with different initiatives and ideas. During that time Rodney Thompson Middle School has maintained a strong culture of collaboration and commitment to student learning as a Professional Learning Community (PLC).

In the spring of 2010, a group of teacher leaders from Thompson attended a three-day conference aimed at helping schools become professional learning communities. From there the work of becoming a PLC began with teacher teams in each grade level department working collaboratively to develop shared norms and team goals. Teams examined their curriculum and identified the most essential outcomes students had to master. They developed common pacing guides that all members of the team agreed to follow and developed common formative assessments based on the essential outcomes to determine mastery. From the results of those assessments, teachers determined which students required extra time and support in order to help them achieve mastery.

The implementation of these collaborative practices evolved slowly over time. Teachers had to learn to work together, compromise, and learn from each other. Working as a PLC required a shift in thinking among teachers. No longer would they only concern themselves with their own practices and their own students' success. PLC teachers seek ways to help all students be successful and want to help each other improve their own practice.

A perfect example of this mindset shift is visible during each quarterly review. The quarterly review was a process implemented five years ago in which teachers met as a grade level. This quarterly review has a different focus: identifying students who are not being successful academically and developing strategies to help them be successful.

Unlike most grade level meetings, elective and physical education teachers and other resources teachers attend the meetings so that they can share their knowledge about the students and participate in brainstorming strategies to be implemented to help the students. From these discussions, teachers at the meeting volunteer to implement strategies to support the student. This type of collective sharing and concern for all students' learning is indicative of the culture of collaboration at Rodney Thompson Middle School.

With teacher turnover, new initiatives at the school division level, and a host of other impediments, it is challenging to maintain PLC practices. The focus is always on constant improvement. This is our goal because at Rodney Thompson All does mean All students.