

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):
- 6 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 3 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 3 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 12 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	13	5	18
K	32	26	58
1	23	28	51
2	31	33	64
3	27	24	51
4	39	21	60
5	33	29	62
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	198	166	364

*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
 - 1 % Asian
 - 3 % Black or African American
 - 1 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 94 % White
 - 1 % 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: 7%

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

This rate should be calculated using the grid below. The answer to (6) is the mobility rate.

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	9
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2017 until the end of the 2017-2018 school year	15
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	24
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2017	366
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.07
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	7

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 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: 51%
Total number students who qualify: 186

8. Students receiving special education services: 15 %
54 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>2</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>15</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>8</u> Developmental Delay | <u>13</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>10</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>2</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: 4
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	Number of Staff
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	19
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.	6
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	2

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 19:1

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%	96%	96%	95%	97%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

13. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**

Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 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 Rural Retreat Elementary School is to educate and support our students so that they may become confident, life-long learners and productive citizens.

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

Rural Retreat Elementary School, located in the charming town of Rural Retreat Virginia, is nestled in the picturesque mountains of Southwest Virginia. Our students hail from the town of Rural Retreat (population 1485), and the neighboring communities of Crockett, Black Lick, and Cedar Springs in Wythe County. Constructed in 2002, the school sits on a 24-acre tract with pristine views of the surrounding mountains and small farms that dot the landscape.

This close-knit farming community of Rural Retreat shows tremendous support for the school. School activities such as athletic events remain a social mainstay within our town. Rural Retreat Elementary hosts an annual pre-game celebration for the community early in the school year before one of the high school's home football games. This event has become quite popular with the community. This celebration was designed by school staff to encourage support for all our young people. The event showcases student performances and recognition of students from elementary school through high school and also serves as an attraction to bring in parents for valuable school information. Most of our youth league sports are played on our school campus which also brings parents and school stakeholders together during after school hours and on weekends throughout the school year. Our school also has an active PTO that hosts additional school events and fundraising efforts.

The general curriculum at Rural Retreat Elementary School is the Virginia Standards of Learning coupled with our regional Comprehensive Instructional Program (CIP). The Comprehensive Instructional Program provides our teachers with lesson plans aligned to the curriculum and pacing guides while providing quarterly assessments (benchmarks) that we use in conjunction with daily assessment strategies to monitor student progress. The key advantages of this program are teacher collaboration and data study. The CIP allows instructional personnel to look at data sources compiled on the individual student level, the school level, the division level, and on a regional level. Data study at the division and regional level allows us to make comparisons with other schools which in turn creates opportunities for teachers and instructional leaders to share successful programs and strategies with meaningful professional development opportunities. Benchmark assessments are given at every grade level.

Our school has a wonderful staff of 19 classroom teachers and 19 additional support staff positions that include full-time instructors in Art, Music, Library, and Physical Education. A full-time School Counselor provides excellent academic and emotional support while a therapeutic day treatment program provides additional counseling services based on need. We offer support for our teachers with a number of in house professional development opportunities provided by our staff. The in house professional development opportunities may include after school workshops for methods and strategies while at other times our teachers participate in teacher-led studies through the use of virtual learning systems. Our school division employs a full-time instructional resource technician who also provides support for staff through professional development as well as on-demand support for technology in our classrooms.

Our students benefit from a highly intensive early intervention program for Reading that includes Title I services, PALs Literacy groups, and Reading Recovery. We have a gifted and talented program which is led by our School Counselor and one additional staff member who serves as our gifted and talented coach. Students in grades 3 – 5 benefit from a daily remediation block built into our daily schedule where additional small group and need based instruction takes place. After school programs include our spring remediation effort with one to one and small group instruction provided by our classroom teachers; our community partners provide meals for students during this time. Student clubs provide motivation for students as well as the opportunity to participate in STEAM activities. Student clubs meet during the school day on a monthly basis. Examples of student clubs at Rural Retreat Elementary include the sign language club, science lab club, technology club, and young chef's club. The Junior Appalachian Musicians program affords our students the opportunity to explore musical interests outside of the school curriculum and meets once per week during the spring. Our students also benefit from sports programs offered through Wythe County Parks and Recreation for students in grades PK -- 5.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

1a. Reading/English language arts:

We believe that Reading is the foundation for all learning. Our overall Reading curriculum follows the Virginia Standards of Learning for grades K through five. Our teachers utilize the resources such as the curriculum framework and the enhanced scope and sequence provided by the Virginia Department of Education to plan and properly pace their instruction. A great deal of emphasis is placed on early intervention in grades K – 2. The driving force behind our early intervention effort lies in our Phonological Awareness and Literacy Program (PALS), Title I Reading, and Reading Recovery. The PALS program employs three tutors at our school who assist with assessment, progress monitoring, and small group instruction through literacy groups that meet daily. Our Title I Reading program provides intervention and small group instruction based on the needs in each classroom. The Reading Recovery program is strictly a first-grade program that focuses on intensive individualized instruction for the lowest performing students. Reading Recovery is one of our most successful strategies and longitudinal data shows continued success in students who have been a part of this program. All intervention strategies and instruction across all grade levels are driven by assessment. We utilize several daily formative assessment strategies such as questioning techniques during small and whole group instruction, one to one reading, exit tickets, interactive technology, and student demonstrations. Students are formally assessed through teacher made tests, SOL released tests, and through quarterly benchmarks through our participation in the Comprehensive Instructional Program. We hold quarterly grade level team meetings to review benchmark data and adjust our instruction and remedial plans based on this teamwork approach to data study. Teaching strategies vary at every grade level as we strive to provide differentiated instruction in order to meet a diverse group of learners; however, some commonalities can be found such as daily small group instruction, 6+1 Writing incorporated with Reading, and specific direct instructional techniques in vocabulary and skill based on the “I do it, we do it, you do it” philosophy. We use instructional materials from our Reading series in conjunction with the online materials provided by the CIP.

1b. Mathematics:

Math is a core area of our curriculum that is constantly evolving. As our curriculum shifts beyond paper and pencil skills to creative problem solving and critical thinking our focus has been on differentiated instruction. Our curriculum is the Virginia Standards of Learning. Teachers plan their lessons and pacing guides based on the curriculum framework provided by the Virginia Department of Education. One of our key strategies for math instruction lies in teaching our students to apply math skills to real word activities. This includes the use of a variety of manipulatives, projects, number talks, interactive whiteboards, and student demonstrations. One can often observe Rural Retreat students outside of their math classrooms measuring hallways, charting data, or following recipes. Our teachers employ multiple forms of classroom technology from cloud based laptops to interactive whiteboards that make our math instruction both visual and hands on. Communication has become a greater part of our instructional philosophy in math as well. This includes communication among teachers across grade levels to ensure that we are consistently scaffolding necessary skills and consistently speaking the same language when it comes to math as we share productive strategies. Communication among students has opened the doors of cooperative learning activities and math discussions among class members. This demonstrates multiple forms of problem solving and teamwork while creating meaningful learning experiences that are retained for later success. Our math instruction still includes individual skill and practice, but our classrooms have shifted to more open dialogue and discussion during whole group and small group instruction. Like Reading and Language Arts, small group instruction and multiple forms of daily assessments from teacher observations to student demonstrations are some commonalities across all grade levels. CIP quarterly benchmark test data is also analyzed by staff to formulate instructional plans.

1c. Science:

Many of our students at Rural Retreat have interests outside of school with the outdoors and farming. This makes them Students at Rural Retreat take a high interest in Science as many of our students have interests outside of school with the outdoors and farming. Our teachers take full advantage of this by incorporating lessons that involve resources from our community to help make connections with student's own areas of interest. The Science curriculum follows the Virginia Standards of Learning, and lessons are planned to address each standard across all grade levels. We use an inquiry-based approach to teaching Science as well as use Mmultiple forms of formative assessments are used to monitor student progress. while we use an inquiry-based approach to teaching Science. This means that we give our students the necessary information, guide them in their own research which leads to student discovery of the objective and, creating a more meaningful learning experience. This is quite often accomplished through a variety of student led projects and experiments that include plant growth, crime scene investigation, and using toy cars and race tracks to test the results of friction. Guidance and teacher observation make up the majority of most of our daily assessment strategies coupled with interactive whiteboard activities. Summative forms of assessment come in the form of performance based assessments, teacher made tests, and quarterly benchmarks.

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

History classes are both active and interactive. While using the Virginia Standards of Learning as a guide, our teachers use project based learning and interactive notebooks to help our students master the curriculum. With all the emphasis on memorization of important historic facts as part of the curriculum, we utilize a great deal of kinesthetic learning activities where students use a variety of movement, and song that leads to help with the retention of essential knowledge. Additionally, we have some unique opportunities to make History come to life through our partnerships with the Edith Boling Wilson Museum and the town of Wytheville museums. This partnership provides monthly visitors to our classrooms often dressed in historical attire, and with artifacts pertaining to the lesson. The museums also provide professional development opportunities that enable our teachers to continue bringing the history of our great nation to life. Our fourth-grade students participate in an annual overnight field trip each spring to Colonial Williamsburg. The historical tour of Williamsburg serves as the culmination of our VA History curriculum and affords our students a meaningful experience as they see exhibits of colonial life, battlefields of the revolutionary war, and how our government was formed. Students are also assessed multiple times through teacher made tests and our fourth grade students participate in the quarterly benchmark assessments and SOL tests. Data is utilized to address the specific need of each individual student. Students at all grade levels participate in project based assessments.

1e. For secondary schools:

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

Rural Retreat Elementary has a pre-kindergarten classroom funded through the VA Preschool Initiative. This program employs one highly qualified teacher and one highly qualified paraprofessional. Language activities are the major instructional focus. The teacher and paraprofessional work collaboratively to design daily large group and small group activities that promote the development of early literacy skills such as alphabet knowledge, rhyming, the concept of word, and name writing. Our classroom is filled with print, several children's books are rotated weekly for the children's learning and enjoyment. Various learning centers foster a love for books and reading. The pre-kindergarten curriculum is Frog Street Pre-K, a comprehensive and integrated program. It covers the curricular areas of Reading and Language Arts, Math, Science, Social Studies, Health, and Art as well as the core domains of Emotional, Physical, Cognitive, and Linguistic learning. We strive to develop number sense through daily, hands-on activities that are appropriate for four-year-olds. Thematic units utilized throughout the school year help each child expand his/her knowledge of the world. Pre-K students are required to participate in Pre-K Phonological Literacy Awareness Screening (PALS), an assessment designed to screen students' literacy knowledge in the fall and spring. This screening helps teachers design language and literacy instruction to meet individual needs.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Our daily program has focus on the education of the whole student, and we strive to offer something for everyone. In addition, we utilize opportunities to enrich and to provide meaningful learning experiences for students through our programs as we often reinforce skills taught in the classroom through movement, song, books, and individual creativity and expression through Art. The daily schedule for all students includes a 45-minute instructional block that includes Physical Education, Art, Library, and Music for all students.

Our Physical Education classes are designed to provide instruction on the development of individual skills, team play, daily exercise, and nutrition education all in a fun-filled environment. Classes begin with a daily fitness activity with instruction on the benefits of exercise followed by participation in challenging team games to encourage fair play while working with others. Students are also introduced to a variety of sports throughout the year where students can learn and refine individual skills and rules of play. Students in grades 3 through grade 5 participate in bi-annual fitness testing that monitors student progress while building an overall more confident student. All students participate in Physical Education twice weekly in 45-minute blocks in addition to daily recess opportunities. We encourage our students to play, play fair, and have fun during both recess and Physical Education.

Our Art curriculum is designed to provide instruction in basic art skills and provide enrichment opportunities. Students are allowed time to explore and encouraged to utilize their own creativity through Art. Art classes also take advantage of cross-curricular teaching opportunities such as graphing and charting and geometric shapes in Math, letter and number formation with Pre-K and Kindergarten Students, or creating project-based learning opportunities in Science and History. We also provide opportunities for students to participate in various Art contests throughout the year during special school-wide programs such as anti-bullying campaigns and Read Across America week. We also showcase student artwork annually on our yearbook cover. All students participate in weekly Art class for 45-minute blocks.

We have an outstanding music program that allows our student's opportunities to learn to read music, explore and play a variety of musical instruments, and we allow multiple opportunities for student performances for parents at PTO programs each month. Many of our students would say that they enjoy Music class as much as Physical Education. We also use our Music program to take advantage of cross-curricular teaching moments throughout the school year.

All Rural Retreat students participate in weekly Library classes designed to promote and encourage Reading. Our Librarian creates lessons designed around a monthly theme that may include introductions to various geographical regions around the world. Students are taught how to use the library, use a variety of media sources, are introduced to a multitude of books, and they can check out books on a weekly basis.

Our academic schedule also includes weekly Guidance classes taught by our Counselor. Lessons are designed to teach life skills, study skills, social skills, career exploration, and character building. All students participate in weekly thirty-minute lessons. Our counselor uses a variety of books, stories, role play, and projects to provide lessons in character education. Major Clarity is a new online program for this school year. This program allows our 5th-grade students to put in their interests and skills. From there the students are matched with various career clusters based on the things that they like.

Classroom technology plays a major role in our daily instruction. Our classrooms are equipped with interactive whiteboards while our students have access to two stationary computer labs, two tablet mobile labs, and four mobile laptop labs. Our fourth and fifth grades utilize their own classroom sets of chrome books. We have a full-time Instructional Technology Resource teacher who provides support and professional development for all classroom technology.

3. Special Populations:

Like most schools, the diversity among students and how they learn is a daily priority. Our classroom teachers are well versed in the importance of differentiated instruction, explicit instruction, and preloading strategies, yet we realize this is not enough. As stated previously our instructional plan places a great deal of

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time and emphasis on Reading as the springboard for all learning. Title I and Reading Recovery programs spend most of their time and energy in early intervention in grades K -- 3 with small group and one to one daily lessons in Reading based on need. Our PALs program provides additional small group instructional opportunities and progress monitoring. All our intervention strategies are based on teachers, and in most instances additional staff. We believe instruction provided by our teachers is the best form of intervention.

We have the luxury of having a supplemental remediation allotment that allows us to purchase materials and provide additional personnel in the form of tutors and after school programs designed to address a plethora of individual needs and fill instructional gaps. We currently are using two remedial tutors who are working with individual students while the remainder of this funding will be used for our three-week after school program during the month of April. Our after school program is staffed by our core teachers in grade 3 -- 5. We are also very fortunate to have several retired teachers who understand instructional needs and practice to provide the individual remedial opportunities throughout the school year.

We employ two full-time Resource Teachers who guide our instructional program for students with disabilities. This includes daily resource or pull out instruction in addition to inclusion services. It is our goal to provide early intervention with intensive resource services for students in grades K -- 2 while our students in grades 3 -- 5 have more inclusion services. Our intensive resource services rely on daily small group or one to one instruction on the student's ability level, while our inclusion services may include one to one assistance in the regular education classroom setting, or small group team teaching in the regular classroom. All of this requires a collaborative effort with our resource teachers and our regular classroom teachers to design instruction to meet each individual need.

Our full-time Speech Language Pathologist assists in the development of instructional plans for students diagnosed with speech problems while providing daily small group and one to one instruction for identified students. Rural Retreat also has two hearing impaired teachers who work with students who fall into this category. They assist in the development of instructional plans in addition to providing daily support in the classroom. They also work with students who have cochlear implants and provide instruction in sign language.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

It is our belief that students form their own opinions about school and learning during their elementary school years. The staff at Rural Retreat is dedicated to developing positive attitudes about school among our student body. We recognize and celebrate the success of our students often with a monthly Principal's Club to recognize great effort and character, we hold an academic and citizenship awards ceremony at the end of each 9-week grading period, and we try to have fun with our students. We offer an attendance incentive program called Strive for Five which encourages students to come to school for all five days of the school week, and we have a monthly incentive week that includes prize drawings, treats with lunch, and pizza parties for the class with the highest attendance percentage for the week. Our students participate in various clubs once per month. Club days are fun for our students, but most importantly, this program provides an outlet for student creativity, enrichment, exploration, and ingenuity.

The community of Rural Retreat plays a major role in the success of our school and for our students. We have a slogan that originated from our athletic booster club that summarizes our school climate. "One Team" has become a rally cry among our school community, and is defined as support, encouragement, and the commitment to all students in all things. This also serves as a model for students to take pride in everything they do while playing an integral role in the development of school pride.

It is both unique and important to note that 75% of our instructional staff live in the community of Rural Retreat while 48% of instructional staff are graduates of Rural Retreat High School. Our staff takes a great deal of pride and ownership in our school, but this statistic plays a vital role in the development of the relationships with parents that are necessary for student growth. Our teachers participate frequently in community events with our parents. Our parents know us and we know them. All of this leads to sound and shared instructional decision making daily through instructional level teams and monthly instructional team meetings with the principal.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Rural Retreat Elementary School has been and remains extremely fortunate to have a number of community and parent organizations that support our instruction. We have an active Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) which meets on the fourth Monday of each month. The PTO executive board is comprised of all parents and membership is open to all parents. Our PTO conducts fundraisers and offers financial support for instructional materials, provides field trip scholarships for students, and organizes a weeklong celebration each May during Teacher Appreciation Week. Aside from monetary support, our PTO affords parents many additional opportunities to be involved at school through many additional volunteer opportunities such as duty-free lunch supervisors, Field Day, and Strive for Five incentive programs. The PTO also serves as the primary sponsor for our annual pre-game football celebration each fall. This community gathering is held at our school just prior to one of our high school's home football games. The event has become extremely popular within our community with an average attendance of over two-hundred people each year. Parents and Students enjoy free food, drinks, door prizes, and the opportunity to visit with teachers and staff in a social setting. The Rural Retreat High School Dance Team and Cheerleaders provide entertainment for this event. The primary purpose of this event is to build support and excitement for students, cultivate school pride, provide a venue for parents to get to know our staff, and to stimulate the connections between our elementary, middle, and high schools.

One of our newest programs is the Classroom Buddy Program. This program, organized through Rural Retreat United Methodist Church provides a volunteer for each of our classrooms. Volunteers come for lunch with the class once per month, in addition to helping in the classroom during classroom celebrations or other special events. All the volunteers for this program were provided training during the summer by school staff to ensure a positive experience for the volunteers, for our students, and for our teachers. Classroom Buddies offers our students some excellent role models to talk to and some much needed assistance in our classrooms when needed.

Each Spring, during our after school remedial program, the Rural Retreat Baptist Church provides our school with a group of volunteers who provide meals for students. It has always been common practice in our community to have members organize themselves in the effort to serve others, and the volunteer programs in place at our school serve as a great model for students to ensure that service to others remain part of the Rural Retreat climate and culture.

3. Professional Development:

Our Professional Development plan is widely dependent upon our division-wide strategic plan and the overall needs of the school division. Both divisional need and individual school need are determined through data analysis and feedback from teachers so that the focus of our effort will be on student achievement and student needs. Wythe County Public Schools provides a host of professional development opportunities for staff throughout the summer and during the academic year. Many of our professional workshops are teacher or administrator lead in addition to other teachers or school leaders from across the commonwealth who provide training on a variety of instructional techniques and trends in public education.

Thankfully, our school has the flexibility to provide professional development opportunities for teachers through our budgetary allotment specifically for teacher travel and professional development. This gives our teachers the opportunity to choose various training courses at the regional or state level based on the needs of their classroom. In addition, we offer in house development opportunities through a virtual learning environment. Most of our work through virtual learning consists of a variety of educational articles and publications that also include feedback from everyone who participates. In most cases, our studies pertain to Reading instruction and technique lead by our Reading Recovery and Title I Reading staff. While at other times, our needs surround various forms of instructional technology, and this need is met through the provision of development lead by our Instructional Resource Technician.

Additionally, our ties with the regional consortium of the Comprehensive Instructional Program allow us to reach across the boundaries of Wythe County to learn through the success of others in our surrounding counties. This relationship with other school divisions allows all of us, teachers and administrators alike from across the region, to compare and contrast student data, build assessments that are aligned with state curriculum, and to share ideas and strategies that work in an effort to boost student achievement.

4. School Leadership:

The leadership philosophy at Rural Retreat Elementary School is solely based on teamwork and shared leadership. Our slogan of “One Team” is practiced at all levels, and shared decision making happens in many forms in our building. One way this is practiced is through committees such as our attendance committee, our behavior support team, and our instructional support team. Teams such as these are composed of grade level teachers, administrators, and specialty positions such as our school counselor. This is where plans for individual students are made based on the problem at hand whether it be attendance, behavior, or students who are struggling academically. School level policy changes are developed or changed through committees assembled by the Principal based on the committee members individual level of expertise. Changes in policy also happen after the proposed changes are presented to the faculty and time for staff input is considered.

Grade level instructional teams also play a major role in the daily flow of leadership in our building and they are a fine example of daily shared decision making. The teams consist of our grade level teachers, and they are set up in our daily schedule to have common planning time and a common lunch. Communication among team members is constant throughout the day, and a team meeting may simply look like a sit-down lunch meeting in our cafeteria; however, our teams meet quarterly or as needed with the Principal to review our instructional plans based on our assessment data. The duties of our instructional teams go beyond the normal data study and planning. Our teachers work within their teams to make schedule changes, handle social issues among students, compare strategies that work, and share information.

The primary role of the Principal is to provide support for all and to serve as a liaison for all decision making. This includes those relationships within the school and with all school stakeholders. This is accomplished through a clear and transparent flow of daily communication. Our principal maintains this flow as a visible presence throughout the school day. While this approach is simple, it is necessary and a valued commodity to our overall leadership philosophy. The Principal stays in contact with all staff through morning walkthroughs, cafeteria presence, and through the daily bulletin which is emailed to all staff. Our Principal enables and encourages our team to work as a unit when it comes to decision making thus strengthening the overall feeling of ownership towards our school.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Rural Retreat Elementary School employs multiple strategies that all share an integral role in the overall success of the school. What truly makes our school different, is our people. We have had a unique set of characteristics among our staff that over the years has led to our success in terms of student achievement. From the cafeteria workers to our bus drivers, everyone at Rural Retreat has bought in to and taken ownership of the success of our school. To us, the business of teaching and learning is personal; requiring the development of relationships with students and families in order to make real gains in student achievement. Trust is one byproduct that resonates from our relationships with students, and this leads to trust in the process of education and builds support at home for the things we do at school.

We believe that the true measure of student success is in what our students can accomplish after they leave Rural Retreat Elementary, and this success will only come to those students who form positive attitudes about school while under our care. Positive attitudes about school can only come through the development of the positive relationships we build. With our "High Five" crews (our Principal, our custodians, our School Recourse Officer, and fifth grade hall monitors) located throughout our hallways and entrances, we greet our students every morning. This is followed by our daily announcements that include motivational music, vocabulary, and enthusiastic words of wisdom and encouragement to ensure that our students get off to a great start to the school day.

We include transition activities that build bridges for our students from one level of learning to the next. One example of this can be seen each Friday during the Spring semester when our high school volunteer program (students from Rural Retreat High School) visit our classrooms, cafeteria, and gymnasium to interact with our students. This program was started by one of our high school teachers who is also an alum of Rural Retreat High School who saw the need to teach students the importance of service to one's community and the way of life in Rural Retreat. Like many schools, our staff participates in professional development activities to learn all of the latest and greatest strategies and successful interventions from across the country, but what really makes everything work in Rural Retreat is our people. We have great people in our school community who care about our students and want to make our school special. They fully understand and embody our slogan "One Team". People and the relationships we develop is by far our most successful strategy for learning.