

**Ridge and Valley Charter School**  
**2008-2009 Annual Report**

**Ridge and Valley Charter School**

**1234 Route 94**

**Blairstown, NJ 07825**

**908-362-1114**

**August 1, 2008**

This report was transmitted to the Commissioner of Education, the Warren County Superintendent and the boards of education of the districts of residence: Blairstown, Frelinghuysen, Hardwick, Knowlton, and North Warren Regional Middle School.

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**SCHOOL DESCRIPTION: Ridge and Valley Charter School**

**Startup and Current Year.** Ridge and Valley Charter School commenced implementation in the 2004-2005 school year and just completed its fifth year of operation. The school's charter was renewed by the Department of Education in February 2008.

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**Address.** The school is located at 1234 Rt. 94, Blairstown, NJ 07825.

**Facility.** The school is located in a modular building facility on an 18-acre property, owned by Ridge and Valley Charter School.

**Number of Students, Grades and Classes.** The school's charter authorized a maximum enrollment of 111 students in 2008-09 in grades K through 8. The enrollment at the beginning of the school year was 111 students. At the end of the year, the enrollment was 111 students.

**Class Size.** Class size is approximately 14-16 students per class except in the kindergarten class which was 12.

**Planned Expansion.** There is no planned expansion at this time.

**District(s) of Residence.** The district of residence is the North Warren Regional school cluster which includes Blairstown, Hardwick, Frelinghuysen, Knowlton and North Warren Middle School.

**Employees.** In the 2008-2009 school year, the school employed an Administrative Coordinator, 7 Guides (classroom teachers), a Basic Skills Guide, 5 Support Guides (aides), a special education guide/differentiated learning coordinator, and a nurse. These are all full-time positions. The school also employed a World Languages, Outdoor Living Skills and Integrated P.E. guide, a Curriculum Coordinator, Business Administrator, and consulting supervisor on a part time basis.

**Lead Person.** The school's lead person is Nanci Dvorsky (Tel. 908-362-1114), (Fax 908-362-6680), (email: nanci.dvorsky@ridgeandvalley.org).

**Board Members.** The school's board of trustees is composed of seven voting members and five non-voting members. During 2008-09, two trustees resigned for personal reasons and two new trustees were added. The non-voting members are the Administrative Coordinator, Curriculum Coordinator, Differentiated Learning Coordinator, Integration Guide, and Business Manager. Seven of the seven voting members are parents, as are two of the non-voting members. One trustee applicant has been recommended for service on the board beginning in August 2009, bringing the total to eight.

**Defining Attributes.** The defining attributes of the school are its emphasis on sustainability, Earth Literacy; project based learning and outdoor experiential education.

**Community/Organizational Affiliation (if any).** The school is affiliated with the Sustainable Ridge and Valley Alliance, Association of Experiential Educators, Alternative Education Resource

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Organization, Alliance for NJ Environmental Education, NJ Charter Schools Association, Genesis Farm Ecological Learning Center and Genesis Farm Community-Supported Garden.

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**ACADEMIC GOALS AND OBJECTIVES: ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES**

NJ ASK score reports have not been completed yet for the 2008-2009 school year.

**Discussion of Progress.**

Ridge and Valley Charter School prides itself in seeking an ethic of excellence for our children, our staff and our community. In the following pages, we have listed many academic achievements and goals where we seek to provide a better education for all our students. Since we have only been in operation for five years we also realize that until students have spent a significant portion of their educational experience with us it would be imprudent on our part to try to judge ourselves only by the scores from the mandated tests. We recognize the value of the NJ ASK and our goal is to have every student at RVCS score "Proficient" or "Highly Proficient" in all areas.

In 2008-09 our Intervention and Referral Services Team continued to be effective. Basic Skills programs supported all 12 of our students referred to the I&RS team. These interventions varied in format and were provided by licensed and professional staff. This is an important development, as in the past parent volunteers with substitute certificates provided this basic skills support. Our referred students each received regularly scheduled classes, some received one-to-one tutoring, some received support with study skills and organization and still others received emotional support with breaks provided and time out areas at their disposal.

Our Special Education population has grown over the 2008-2009 school year. We currently have 28 special education students. Most of these students were eligible for special education services this year. To help these children with an assortment of learning disabilities perform their best, RVCS continued to implement the award-winning, internationally recognized, multi-sensory Orton-Gillingham program for all our special needs students. This summer another staff member is being trained in The Wilson program. Because data is not available from the NJ ASK exams, we do not have a state assessment baseline for 2008-09. However, we did implement a number of our own standardized assessments in the 2008- 09 school year that have given us baseline data from the fall 2008 and follow up data from the spring 2009. Because the NJASK results for all grades are not available, our analysis of test results has also been interpreted through our internal assessment described below.

This year, RVCS continued to use our in-house assessment tools: Pearson Education's GRADE (Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation) and G\*MADE (Group Mathematics Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation). These well-known, nationally-normed assessment tools, in conjunction with the NJ ASK results from the 2007-2008 school year, provided valuable assessment data that helped to drive our instruction throughout the year. These assessments have given each teacher a diagnostic analysis for every student. They have provided a road map for every individual's strengths and weaknesses and affected and effected education in each classroom. This year, RVCS purchased the Pearson Education Correction Software. It provided a July 2008 SEAP

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detailed analysis of each student's work. These documents became essential pieces to  
understanding our students and very useful in conferences with parents. Results from the second  
administration of the GRADE and G\*MADE assessments in March 2009 demonstrated progress

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across the board in every area, for every student, in every class. For the 2009-10 school year we anticipate giving these assessments again in the same manner.

During the 2008-2009 school year RVCS implemented a new math series K-8. Last summer, we solicited community input and feedback on the vision of math instruction at RVCS, and formed a cohesive and varied team of parents, community members and staff to review the many options available for a math series for the school. After an extensive process, this group selected our current *Investigations* and *ConnectedX X* Math series. This program has been very beneficial to the students at RVCS. The focus of the series is on the process of problem solving and getting students to think about the *how* not just the *what*. All grades began this program in September 2008, so some adaptation and adjustment was necessary. This year we anticipate continued success with the series and its implementation.

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Throughout the 2008-2009 school year RVCS has been proactive in using our assessment data to help provide a thorough and complete academic program for each of our students. In summary, we have utilized standardized, nationally-normed math and reading assessments; we have used the information provided by the state assessments and our own standardized assessments to come up with a data driven plan for each of our students. We have correctly used our I&RS process to identify at-risk students which in turn helped us to identify students with special needs. We have provided Orton-Gillingham instruction for each of our special needs students; we have purchased consistent and extensive Language Arts resources; and we have identified and purchased a Math Series for all our students, grades K-8. Each of these steps has helped us more accurately discern students' achievements and challenges and determine the necessary resources, strategies and changes needed for improvement as we continue to strive towards excellence.

During the 2008-09 school year we had several areas that we wanted to refine and improve. Each of these areas has seen growth. In particular:

1) RVCS streamlined the statistical analysis needed for our standardized internal assessments (GRADE and G\*MADE) by purchasing the correction software that provides a complete print out about every students' work. Now, every child has a thorough diagnostic analysis that is prepared efficiently and is easily shared with parents.

2) During 2007-08, we provided extra tutoring for identified I&RS students through a select group of parent volunteers with substitute certificates, many of whom have education backgrounds, degrees or experiences. For the 2008-09 school year we hired two new Guides who provided basic academic support when special education intervention was not warranted. For the upcoming 2008-09 school year we also built in collaboration time with the classroom Guide, the basic academic support Guide and the special education Guide, to maximize differentiated instruction for all learning styles within all the class groups. The addition of professional staff to help service our basic skills population has proven to be an invaluable asset for this population's 2008-2009 school success.

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3) A continuing goal at RVCS is making sure all students are making progress related to the NJCCCS. To that end, all of our projects, units and lessons are required to address the standards. Our experience this past school year has been that we have made substantial strides in addressing the NJCCCS. This year we will continue to incorporate standards lists into student portfolios to improve further performance and documentation. Through a key grant from the NJ Charter Public Schools Association, we have developed our own software for a curriculum database application that allows us to catalog our curriculum more effectively while tracking it with the NJCCCS. This year Six Key Learning Experiences have been identified and linked to the NJCCCS. These links cover a multitude of subjects, grade levels and skills.

4) RVCS is on a continual quest for effective and appropriate professional development. This year, we hired a consultant to provide on-site professional development throughout the year. This consultant worked with the staff on a bi-monthly basis. Topics included but were not limited to: Understanding by Design or "backwards" design, data driven instruction, rubric creation and differentiating instruction to suit different learning needs. During the 2009-2010 school year RVCS will be working with the "College of Teachers" model central to Rudolf Steiner's Waldorf education model, allowing our professional staff to collaborate and teach each other in a true model of excellence.

5) RVCS seeks to challenge students continually to think critically and to problem solve. The students' projects often address a plethora of standards in many subject areas. We will continue with these thought-provoking projects and our quest for excellence, while raising student consciousness of and responsibility for the school's and New Jersey's Content Standards.

Examples of the many individual, group, and class projects that occurred during the year include:

- Junior Solar Sprints solar model car design and creation where teams competed on the county and state levels. Teams won awards at all levels.
- Student-researched, -designed and -managed overnight camping and hiking trips throughout the bioregion.
- Sustainable Design & Building Projects:
- creation and publication of the school yearbook.
- Student created books.
- Students worked on the international project "Cradle-to-Cradle"
- Autumn Olive Festival, celebrating one of our non-native plant species initiated, organized and run by first and second grade students;
- design, creation and management of organic vegetable and herb gardens.
- Service projects assisting nonprofits in our region as an example of place-based education.
- Students researched daily snacks to discover their source and their journey to arrive at the local grocery store.
- Primitive shelter design and creation.

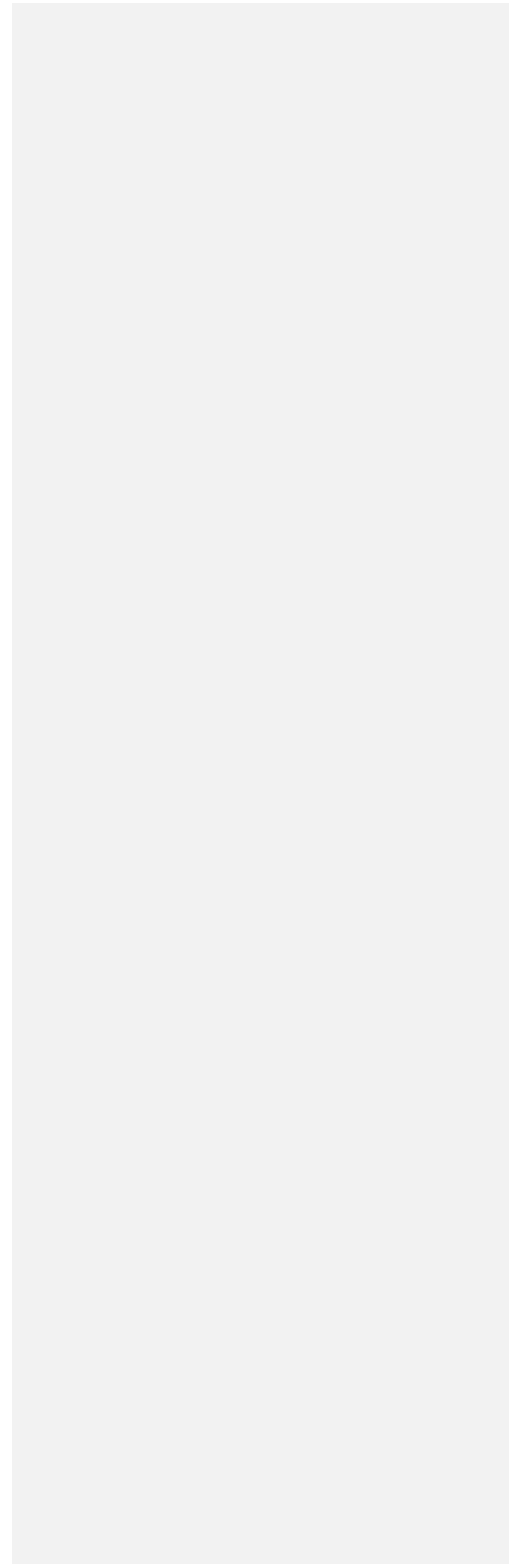
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- Nature and Insects projects using ladybugs, monarch butterflies, praying mantises, tadpoles, etc.

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- Several community service projects were completed at the local domestic abuse shelter

The mission of the Ridge and Valley Charter School is to foster ecological literacy and sustainable living. Ecological literacy is a morally and experientially engaged way of knowing, involving a sense of wonder and respect for life, and the realization that all human activities have consequences on the larger ecosystem. Infusing environmental education in all subject areas is critical because ecological literacy cannot be maintained by simply adding environmental education to a compartmentalized curriculum. Instead, this effort entails the nurturing of significant educational, cultural, economic and political transformations. In support of our goals, the curriculum promotes the mastery of interdisciplinary skills learned in real life context.

The overall academic goals of the Ridge and Valley Charter School include:

- Developing students who understand, analyze and challenge traditional assumptions about the universe
- Developing the innate creativity and imagination inherent within each child
- Developing students who are motivated to excel academically and who have a passion for wondering, questioning, and learning.
- Developing integrative thinking, resulting in exceptional problem-solving skills
- Developing strong communication and collaboration skills

The following broad academic goals for Ridge and Valley Charter School promote high academic achievement:

**Goal 1:** Students will analyze and challenge traditional assumptions about the universe and propose carefully considered, well-researched alternatives.

**Objective:** Students will understand issues and diverse viewpoints by examining and researching complex ethical and ecological issues.

**Discussion of Progress:** In each of the grades there was an emphasis to develop learning projects based on earth literacy and sustainability through an interdisciplinary approach using Constructivist methodology. The projects were assessed through age and grade appropriate rubrics and project portfolios. Each of the projects was designed to have students advance in their ability to analyze and challenge traditional assumptions through the novice-apprentice-expert range in the areas of critical thinking and problem solving. Many projects this year offered the students opportunities to examine and explore diverse viewpoints by examining and researching the complex social, ethical, economic and ecological issues that are present in our world today.

**Goal 2:** Students will openly exhibit high levels of creative expression.

**Objective:** Students will discover individually meaningful media for artistic expression, will enjoy expressing themselves through these media, and will share their work in class, throughout the school and in their portfolios.

**Discussion of Progress:** Students identified a primary and secondary medium for artistic and creative expression. The students developed creative portfolios of their work and, together with the

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Guides, collaboratively assessed the portfolio to celebrate successes/achievements and identify future development goals.

Examples of the media that manifested include: pinhole photography creations and darkroom production, musical and choral presentations, origami creations, weaving and dying, permaculture/landscape design, poetry, sculpting, painting, block printing, cave art and cosmic window art, creative and journal writing, performance and theatrical productions, creation of books including the writing of text, illustration using photography and the production of a finished project using Japanese binding techniques, creations using materials found in nature, oral presentations, Powerpoint presentations, and papermaking.

**Goal 3:** Students will be self-motivated and passionate about questioning and learning.

**Objectives:** Students will develop the foundation for life-long learning.

**Discussion of Progress:** Learning projects are built on the interests and self-direction of the learners using a Constructivist methodology. All students were assessed through age- and grade-appropriate rubrics and project portfolios. All students advanced in their ability through the novice-apprentice-expert range in the areas of self-motivation and discovery as they developed the skills on becoming artisans of the disciplines. The affective domains that this goal addresses are measured through Guide observations, debriefings during circle processes, thoughtful student responses and questioning during group critiques, answers in informal surveys and the passion demonstrated during students' presentations of their portfolios during the Celebration of Learning. Our observations indicate that most students are becoming self-motivated and passionate about learning and are on their way to developing the foundation for lifelong learning.

**Goal 4:** Students will achieve high academic standards and develop an ethic of excellence.

**Objectives:** Students will exceed the minimum proficiencies as outlined in the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards. Students will enhance their strengths and improve their skills as needed in all of the areas defined by multiple intelligence theory.

**Discussion of Progress:** Learning projects are built on the interests and self-direction of the learners using a Constructivist methodology. All students were assessed through age- and grade-appropriate rubrics and project portfolios. All students advanced in their ability through the novice-apprentice-expert range in the areas of self-motivation and discovery as they developed the skills on becoming artisans of the disciplines. The affective domains that this goal addresses are measured through Guide observations, debriefings during circle processes, thoughtful student responses and questioning during group critiques, answers in informal surveys and the passion demonstrated during students' presentations of their portfolios during the Celebration of Learning. Our observations indicate that most students are becoming self-motivated and passionate about learning and are on their way to developing the foundation for lifelong learning.

**Goal 5:** Students will develop and utilize critical thinking skills.

**Objective:** Students will successfully work through real-life problem-solving projects.

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Goal 6: Students will develop strong communication and collaboration skills.

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**Objective:** Students will be clear and confident in expressing themselves appropriately and in participating collaboratively in group projects and assignments.

**Discussion of Progress for goals 5 and 6:** Many of the projects this year included components where students advanced their abilities in the areas of problem-solving and critical thinking. Other elements that the projects incorporated included students working collaboratively in groups. These projects required the students to improve in the areas of self-expression including eye contact, using a clear and projected voice, and articulation of ideas that are clear and concise. This year our students also began a new Math series where critical thinking was part of every lesson. This series focuses on the process, not the answer.

**Non-Academic Goals and Objectives: Assessment Results**

**Assessment Results and Discussion of Progress.**

**Measurable Outcomes: Parent/Guardian/Community Participation**

*1. The community will have input into planned programming and they will be active participants in the classroom and with field experiences with the goal of 50% parental participation in the first year of operation.*

Prior to participating in the classroom and with field experiences, parents/guardians/family members and interested community members were required to attend Volunteer Training to be fully prepared for their RVCS experience and to be most effective in their participation. According to our Volunteer Sign-Up sheets, which all volunteers are asked to sign when they are on campus, we had over one thousand parent or guardian volunteer experiences throughout the school year. These experiences included in-class projects and support, weekly hikes and chaperoning off-campus field trips, campus beautification, gardening, one-on-one tutors for students, musical and theatrical presentations and daily school assemblies. This year RVCS implemented Four Community Service Days. These were attended by over 30 families each time. These Saturdays were spread strategically throughout the school year and provided RVCS with four full days of family volunteerism that completed a plethora of projects. Projects included: Buildings shelves and putting up bulletin boards, organizing cabinets and sheds, painting, weeding, copying, binding books, laminating, and helping to categorize materials in classroom libraries.

*2. The school will offer parent education programs and/or materials to enhance the knowledge about child health, development and parenting skills with the goal of 30% parental participation in the first year of operation.*

We offer many opportunities for parents to improve their skills in a variety of settings and activities. Being on campus, being trained as a volunteer, attending a school assembly or community workshop are opportunities to learn and enhance their knowledge about child health, development and parenting.

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*3. The school will help families create home environments that support learning.*

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Our weekly newsletter home to the parents includes articles and references to materials on sustainability, Earth literacy, conflict resolutions, learning styles and skills and overall support of the mission and learning process at Ridge and Valley Charter School. In addition, we regularly distribute via email helpful information on issues such as non-commercialism, nutrition and other issues related to our mission.

*4. The school will include parents in decisions and give them opportunities for leadership.*

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In July of 2009, as we enter our sixth year of operation, we have eight voting trustees, all of whom are parents, and five non-voting trustees, employees of the school, two of whom are parents. In addition, many school families are active on school committees, including the Math Curriculum Advisory Committee, the PEACE Core, and the Hiring Committee.

*5. The school will develop a service-learning program to utilize community resources.*

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- Grades 3-8 had overnight trips to Princeton-Blairstown Center where they practiced team building and performed community service for the center.
- Grades 3-8 had overnight camping trips at local state and national parks.
- Several grades also had overnight trips at the Appalachian Mountain Club center located in Blairstown NJ.
- All classes visited Genesis Farm to work with the farmers in the Community Supported Garden.
- During the 2008-2009 school year; 40 students assisted at a women's shelter doing various projects.
- Students visited local Millbrook Historical Village for a daylong immersion experience about Native Americans and Frontier people from their own geographic region
- Middle school students participated in a place-based project researching where their daily snack came from and how it got to their local grocery store.

*6. The school will collaborate with community resources to enhance the facility, faculty development and the educational program.*

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The Ridge and Valley Charter School has brought in several guests from the community to collaborate on the educational program, including personnel from Genesis Farm, Peer Spirit, The Alliance for New Jersey Environmental Educators, Princeton Blairstown Center, Project U.S.E., Tipping Point Solutions. In addition, many parents and community members participated in classes, ran assembly programs and volunteered on field trips, in the gardens and with field work.

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This was done in cooperation with individual guides sharing skills and abilities on projects including bioregional studies, musical performance, gardening, running the library, advising on the

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yearbook, and competing in the Junior Solar Sprints. This year several guides also participated in Wilderness and First Responder Training, CPR, First Aid Training and life guard training. RVCS also has a program and mission goal to buy supplies from local suppliers in our Ridge and Valley bio-region and be a "good neighbor" throughout the community.

**Measurable Outcomes: Conflict Incidence and Severity Reduction**

1. Establish clear expectations of behavior, conduct thorough training on these expectations, and actively use them to develop a normative culture.

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In the fifth year of operation the overarching theme of Awareness, Respect and Community and our Core Values of respect, responsibility, honesty, humility, equality and fairness, harmony, open communication and enthusiasm and positive attitude, which are displayed in every class and building, continued as the basis for each class to develop guidelines for appropriate behavior based on Positive Behavioral Intervention System processes. Using the class guidelines and Circle governance processes, in which all staff and students received instruction and practice, we focused attention on inappropriate behaviors through collaborative enforcement of guidelines by each guide and/or peer involvement. If these processes did not remedy the situation, a formal peer mediation program was used.

The school's Behavior Rubric was further refined and utilized to give all members of the community a clear idea of expected and inappropriate behaviors and their consequences. This system worked effectively. In some cases, underlying mental health issues or ineffective parent support complicated our efforts. At the debriefing held after school was over for the year, the Coordinators' and Guides' Circles collaboratively discussed what changes were needed to improve our systems and then began the work of refining our Behavior Rubric. At this time we also solicited the help from a group of parent volunteers. Together, this team became known as the PEACE Core.

2. Faculty and staff will utilize a positive discipline approach when mediating conflict.

A positive discipline approach based on the Positive Behavioral Intervention Systems approach developed at the University of Oregon and supported by the Federal Department of Education has been the foundation for all systems. This has been combined with our use of Circle Governance processes to create an effective discipline approach. Staff members received training on language, peer mediation, and circle governance techniques and usage.

3. Faculty and staff will know each child by name (sight recognition) and use active listening skills when communicating with students, parents and each other, within two months of the start of the school year.

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Faculty and staff know each child in the school by name by the end of September and consistently use active listening skills when communicating with students, parents and each other. Because of our multi-age groupings for our Interest Groups and through other opportunities, every staff

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member had innumerable opportunities to not just learn each child's name but also have in-depth knowledge of each student's learning styles, strengths and areas for growth.

4. The facility will provide clean and comfortable spaces for student learning.

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In addition to our paid staff member who cleans and maintains the buildings and site, parent volunteers play an integral role in maintaining the safety and comfort of the facility. Volunteers have assisted in the configuration and maintenance of our community room and library, resource room, and 14-acre campus. They also work with the guides to assist in classrooms. The students are responsible for maintaining their personal space in the classroom, for general maintenance tasks in their classes (organizing, sweeping, etc.), and for maintenance of the storage sheds and outdoor garden spaces throughout the school campus

**Measurable Outcomes: Health and Attendance**

1. Personal development goals will be established for each child.

The Whole Student Report at most grade levels contains a section where each student defines and rates performance on meeting personal development goals in the cognitive and affective domains. There were varying degrees of understanding and acceptance based on the developmental level, prior knowledge and experience of each student. Students will continue to collaborate in the assessment process and develop their metacognitive abilities.

In 2008-09 we had a new attendance policy which improved our overall attendance and tardiness by 100 %. All families with excessive attendance and tardiness in previous school years showed improvement during the 2008-2009 school year.

2. Each child will discover their best learning styles and apply these to the process of learning.

3. Each child will discover what is personally meaningful and apply this to the learning process.

This process is an evolving one which entails the guide being alert to, and then helping each student recognize and incorporate his or her best learning styles. Differentiating instruction is one of the key curricular approaches utilized by the staff at RVCS and it is developmental in nature. Each year students attend school will further refine their ability to apply their personal styles to their process of learning. Teaching students to find what is personally meaningful, to be self-directed and self-regulated is a core theme that runs through every activity at RVCS.

4. Each child will discover what self care practices allow them to feel their best, with respect to diet, bodily care, sleep requirements and physical activities.

Teaching our students about, and helping them discover, healthy self care practices which allow them to feel their best is an ongoing and vital aspect of how RVCS views educating the whole child. Staff are expected to model appropriate behavior with respect to diet, bodily care, sleep requirements and physical activities. The trustees provide support by helping educate the

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community about healthy lifestyles and providing guidelines for the community through policies  
such as the Water at School policy.

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**1. REVIEW OF STATE AND LOCAL ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT RESULTS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SCHOOL'S GOALS AND REQUIRED NCLB ADEQUATE YEARLY PROGRESS**

Measurable Outcomes: Community Service Participation and School Recycling Levels

1. All students will learn to use "I statements" and negotiate their own conflicts 80% of the time. Teaching children to use "I" statements takes place at all levels at RVCS. The main method is modeling by staff and the direct instruction of students. Students are expected to be accountable for their own actions, with the support and guidance of the Positive Behavioral Intervention Systems, ARC (Awareness, Respect and Community), Core Values, peer mediation program, and Circle Governance training and practice. The ability to handle conflict positively is an ongoing and developmental process continuously reinforced.

2. All students will be involved in community service activities. Virtually all students during the 2008-09 were involved in community service activities. These services included projects on campus and in the community. The projects included site beautification and improvement, collecting food for and assisting at food banks, helping at a women's shelter, Appalachian Trail maintenance, recycling projects, biome improvement, volunteering with other member groups of the Ridge and Valley Alliance, our own Permaculture Action Network and other programs both individually and in groups.

3. All students will be involved in environmental awareness and ecological examination programs. RVCS is intent on educating students for a sustainable future. The natural world is the integrating context for learning and supports the development of advocacy skills necessary for a sustainable future. It is easy to state that 100% of our students were involved in environmental awareness and ecological examination programs during the entire school year. Kindergarten children take daily "Wonder Walks". The local bioregion and our 14-acre campus are our classrooms. All children participate in overnight camping trips and Earth Olympics, and each student is immersed in environmental awareness, sustainability and ecological examination every day.

**Measurable Outcomes: Faculty/Parent/Guardian/Community Participation**

1. Staff meetings will be forums for sharing ideas and resources across the school.

Weekly meetings on Wednesday afternoons (1-3:30 pm) are regularly devoted to collaboration and curriculum discussions and development. This allows for ongoing, extended collaborative sessions in which staff share lessons, ideas, and resources and coordinate their curricula with the grades above and below their own. The staff also has been proactive in meeting in their teams and developing committees to collaborate, share ideas and resources, and create actionable processes and plans to improve performance. In 2009-10, RVCS will work with the "College of Teachers" model, common to Waldorf education, for collaborative teaching, learning, and professional development.

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2. Community resources will be centrally located and easily attainable.

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We continue to develop and refining a database which includes all of our resources, including books, curriculum materials, musical instruments, scientific instruments, parent/guardian skills,

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July 2008 SEAP

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**1. REVIEW OF STATE AND LOCAL ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT RESULTS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SCHOOL'S GOALS AND REQUIRED NCLB ADEQUATE YEARLY PROGRESS**

local community experts, and other resources. We also have an extensive library of resources in the community room for families in addition to our school library as a resource. We provide a collection of relevant information in the main office on subject matter related to the mission of our school as well as the RVCS Charter and other NJ DOE materials.

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3. Faculty and staff will work in partnership with parents cooperatively to define and solve problems.

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Parents are always welcome to request meetings with faculty and staff to discuss student and school issues. Procedures include requesting a meeting via email, note, by phone or in person and to meet at an agreed upon time. Guides have instituted twice-monthly communication to all parents: some weekly. In addition, the weekly Communication Circle facilitates the flow of information between parents and the school. This year some of the Guides created class websites, class newsletters and other vehicles to improve communication and problem solving among the Guide and Parent Circles. We also implemented an "open door" day for every Guide where parents were welcome to come into their child's classroom weekly for informal contact with the guide. RVCS is determined to continue improvement in all areas of communication, transparency and conflict resolution using our collaborative, consensus circle governance as a primary model.

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4. Students, parents and teachers will establish goals and evaluate them cooperatively.

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We continue to develop the skills necessary for all members of the learning team (student, staff, and parent) to participate in the students' Individual Learning Plans. Families are very involved in discussing, creating and evaluating goals and achievement.

**Measurable Outcomes: Personal Improvement Plan Achievement**

1. Teachers will improve their understanding of the academic, social, emotional and physical needs of each learner and ensure that educators use appropriate teaching skills to enable students to meet or exceed their goals.

Each guide is expected to develop a personal relationship with students and their parents/guardians to help improve understanding of each child's needs. The mission focus of teaching the whole child and the use of the curriculum framework of differentiation provides the guidelines to help each child achieve. Professional Development activities and each guide's Professional Improvement Plans are geared to helping each child succeed in the cognitive and affective domains.

2. Teachers will be trained in the methods of Constructivism and Instructional Theory into Practice (ITIP).

Constructivist methodologies are reinforced during observations, staff meetings, professional development activities, curricular focus and materials. Guides work to improve their use of Constructivist pedagogies through professional development, feedback from the Differentiated

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Learning Coordinator, reading and math curriculum resources, and peer observation through the  
Critical Friends Group model.

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**1. REVIEW OF STATE AND LOCAL ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT RESULTS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SCHOOL'S GOALS AND REQUIRED NCLB ADEQUATE YEARLY PROGRESS**

3. Teachers will understand and utilize the best available interpretations of relevant knowledge, including empirical research and the consensus of professional opinion, in teaching, learning and leadership.

All guides are expected to be scholar practitioners who reflect daily on their own and each student's performance. Coordinators provide guides with relevant empirical research findings, the best interpretations of relevant knowledge and the consensus progressive and constructivist thought as reported by the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development, the Association of Experiential Education, the Association of Environmental Education, , NJ Principals and Supervisors Association, the National Education Association and other relevant educational organizations.

4. Teachers will develop a wide variety of assessment skills.

All guides are provided with multiple assessment programs and training to better facilitate student evaluation and guide teaching methods and lessons. Guides also are encouraged to research, locate or develop assessments that are relevant to their class environment. Standardized Assessment tools were utilized this year for all students and each Guide received hands-on training and coaching in the proper use of these tools.

5. Teachers will be assessed periodically to review their teaching practices and/or influence student learning.

All non-tenured guides were assessed three times a year and tenured guides were assessed once.

6. With the administration, teachers will jointly develop a Professional Improvement Plan (PIP), which will highlight goals for professional development experience during the school year with 80% of the goals achieved by the end of each year.

Each guide developed a PIP and was encouraged to achieve 80% or more of these goals during the school year. The Guide's experiences are documented and counted towards meeting the 100 hours requirement over five years. The goals in the PIP are targeted to improving each Guide's performance based on their specific developmental needs cross-referenced with the identified student needs as derived from the assessment vehicles.

**2. REVIEW OF PROGRESS: INCORPORATING THE NJCCCS, DELIVERING AN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM LEADING TO HIGH ACHIEVEMENT FOR ALL STUDENTS AND PROVIDING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT FOR TEACHERS**

**INCORPORATION OF THE NEW JERSEY CORE CURRICULUM CONTENT STANDARDS**

**Summary of Curriculum Development Progress**

All staff members are involved in the curriculum development process. During the school year this collaboration takes place informally as well as formally during weekly meeting/collaborative time (Wed, 1-3:30), individual curriculum collaboration, planning and writing/documentation times as well as during staff in-service time. Guides continue this work informally, ~~and when and possible~~ formally, over the summer as they articulate and document the learning experiences from the past year and plan new ones for the upcoming year. The Curriculum Coordinator focuses yearlong on the development and refinement of the K-8 curriculum framework, continued refinement of our mission “standards,” yearly interdisciplinary Lenses, Key Learning Experiences, Enduring Understandings and Essential Questions, and the further development of our custom-made database.

Unlike the traditional approach of finding a textbook series that addresses the standards, the staff has been tasked to blend the NJCCCS with our Mission standards and then explore various textbooks, curricula, Internet ~~and personal~~ resources and their own creativity and skill base to implement, revise and develop units and projects which meet each students’ needs and developmental stage. Additionally, an ad hoc Curriculum Committee (comprised of staff, parents, trustees and community members) supports the staff, when needed, through input and review of resources and/or curriculum with recommendations to the Guides and/or Trustees.

We are still in the process of refining our curriculum guides which are organized into 3 age/grade “teams” - K-2; 3-5; 6-8 – within an overarching K-8 framework containing yearly interdisciplinary Lenses, Key Learning Experiences and seasonal trimesters. Each curriculum guide contains the respective framework in which Enduring Understandings and Essential Questions, along with the NJCCCS, guide the projects/units to be taught throughout the rhythm of the year’s seasons. The specific projects/units are arranged in a 3 year loop that allows for independent, individual growth within and across our multi-age groupings. Close, consistent collaboration among guides assures continuity and depth without redundancy.

Our curriculum database has been critical for effectively documenting and articulating our project-based, experiential model. It allows us to input, track and monitor projects/units and lessons, our K-8 scope and sequence, and specific resources and materials. It also allows us to easily correlate the learning experiences to our mission- “standards” and NJCCCS. As we expand this database, it will include an assessment development tool for rubrics, a module for tracking staff information (Professional Development, mentoring, contact information, etc.) and the capability for multiple schools to collaborate on curriculum writing.

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2. REVIEW OF PROGRESS: INCORPORATING THE NJCCCS. DELIVERING AN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM LEADING TO HIGH ACHIEVEMENT FOR ALL STUDENTS AND PROVIDING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT FOR TEACHERS

**DELIVERY OF AN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM LEADING TO HIGH ACHIEVEMENT FOR ALL STUDENTS**

**Delivery of Services to At-Risk Students:**

Our Intervention and Referral Services Team, made up of the Differentiated Learning Coordinator, Special Education Guide, School Nurse and the Classroom Guide who refers the student, provides a system to rapidly identify students who are exhibiting at risk behaviors as defined in N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.1. This team meets on a monthly basis to identify any students needing help and to provide assistance in formulating remediation plans and interventions, including in-class and/or basic skills support. This team also refers students to the Child Study Team. Currently we have 14 students characterized as at-risk and in need of instructional and/or emotional support.

**Innovative Programs and Practices.**

**Curriculum Authorship:** One of the most innovative practices at RVCS is the creation of a unique, original ~~educational program~~ curriculum designed and implemented by our staff. The distinctive integration of the many aspects of our mission, especially the focus on bioregional studies, ~~precludes does not easily allow for~~ the universal adoption of any ~~other~~ ready-made curriculum program. We have many curriculum resources on hand that can be adapted to our needs, and so our staff carefully sift through them for activities that fit within our Lenses and Key Learning Experiences, ~~incorporate~~ include the specific environmental characteristics of our bioregion, extend lessons to include the integration of many subjects, tie the experience to the NJCCCS and our school's mission standards, and establish authentic assessments. This creates a motivating, productive atmosphere for staff to work collaboratively, resulting in a curriculum that is relevant, individualized, and dynamic. The creative energy generated through this process is inspirational for the staff, students, and community.

**Nature & Play:** We believe that quiet, contemplative time in nature, as well as ample opportunities for play, are key elements for healthy children. Our goal is for students to be outdoors as much as possible - experiencing guided and free play, learning "subject matter" with ~~the natural world~~ as the context, and working together to challenge themselves and develop their group relationships. ~~As such~~ Our staff and students frequently "learn their lessons" outdoors: ~~for example, by through~~ planning and tending the garden, identifying local flora and fauna while hiking on local trails, taking part in overnight campouts and multi-day backpacking ~~and~~ canoeing trips, and organizing and carrying out community service projects. Imbedded in these experiences are times for quiet reflection and assimilation/synthesis of what they have done, seen, heard, felt and learned. These holistic experiences allow for growth that is physical, social, emotional and academic.

**Personal Development:** Effective communication and personal responsibility are essential for the health of any community. We feel that it is important that these skills, necessary for successfully working with other people, are modeled and taught to our students. All groups within the school, from the students in the class to the Trustees, meet in circle. This manner of working together

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establishes trust and equality among members, as well as respect for others. By working in circle on a daily basis, students learn how to listen, reflect and express their feelings in a productive,

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**2. REVIEW OF PROGRESS: INCORPORATING THE NJCCCS, DELIVERING AN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM LEADING TO HIGH ACHIEVEMENT FOR ALL STUDENTS AND PROVIDING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT FOR TEACHERS**

respectful way. They are given an opportunity to be heard and feel ownership of decisions that come out of the group meetings.

**Use of Time.**

- Extended School Day – Not Applicable
- Extended Academic Year – Not Applicable
- Before- and After-School Programs – Not Applicable
- Tutorial Sessions – Not Applicable
- Other Time-Related Features – Not Applicable

### **3. REVIEW OF SCHOOL GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

Board of Trustees and School Administrators.

The Trustees' and School Administrators' major accomplishments over the past year include:

- **Successful Implementation of a Shared Leadership School Administration Structure**  
We restructured our school administration roles for 08-09 to include a shared leadership model. In the new model, four staff members shared and coordinated responsibilities that had been previously assigned to single staff members. The new structure more closely matched the original intention of our charter; it also improved the quality of administrative decisions as well as school-wide morale. The shared leadership team included Administrative Coordinator Nanci Dvorsky, Curriculum Coordinator Traci Pannullo, Differentiated Instruction Coordinator Rowena McNulty and Integration Coordinator Lisa Masi. The team worked very well together effectively to coordinate and support the performance of our teaching staff and respond promptly and professionally to student needs as well as parent inquiries.
- **Successful Financial Audit – No findings**
- **Professional Development Assessment and Consulting** We expanded our professional development offerings to staff, including focused training on two major curriculum components for Math and Reading fundamentals, key areas where we identified the need for improvement in 2007-2008
- **Monthly and Quarterly Full-circle Meetings** – We continued and enhanced regular meetings with all staff and rotating groups of trustees to improve communication, coordination, mission-focus and school-wide morale.
- **Solid Enrollment** – We continued to operate at or near our annual target for students, maintaining waiting lists for most age levels.
- **Continued progress on SEAP targets** – We transitioned to a shared leadership model, met Adequate Yearly Progress criteria, purchased the modular classrooms buildings and our solar panels, retained the majority of our guides, expanded the trustee circle, and maintained full enrollment with waiting lists.
- **Successfully Implemented New Math and Reading Programs** – We guided staff and students through a successful launch of new curricula in these two important academic areas, thereby boosting our students' basic skills and supporting our efforts to improve test scores, in accordance with recommendations from our Charter renewal process from the previous year.
- **Two new Trustees** – We welcomed two new trustees to the Board, bringing new and helpful perspectives to the ongoing work of the Board.
- **Peace CORE** –A special committee of staff, trustees and parents established last year held many meetings on topics focusing on student behavior and assisted us in reviewing and revising the school's behavior rubric and policies.
- **Successfully Implemented a More Stringent Attendance Policy-** After a special committee helped the board revise the attendance policy last year, we enjoyed improved attendance, resulting in a higher average instruction time per student.
- **Implemented a Charter School Dissemination Grant** – Our staff worked closely with Unity Charter School in Morristown, NJ, conducting many staff collaboration activities and cross- school visits and exchanges toward improving both schools' sustainability curricula.

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• International Intern – We completed the final months of year-long internship with a  
**3. REVIEW OF SCHOOL GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT  
ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- Japanese woman interested in our mission and school.
- Added staff to provide required Special Education services and to support additional basic skills among Special Education students as well as with non-classified students, in an effort to support children in need of intervention.
- Conducted four “whole school” community assemblies – based on specific themes geared toward community development and communication
- Presented community-wide volunteer training – to support volunteers in their work with students and guides.
- Community Service Days – We held three community service days, at which students, families, staff and trustees volunteered for a full day of effort to beautify the campus, create fund-raising products for sale, complete repairs and build a greater sense of community.
- Great Strides in Curriculum Development - We continued progress toward the development of a detailed and comprehensive scope and sequence across the school that supports the NJCCCS and embodies the school’s mission.
- Student Assessment and Documentation – We improved and systematized additional components of our student assessment and curriculum tracking systems.
- CAP – Progress on our Corrective Action Plan for Curriculum for 08-09 included embedded Professional Development in Understanding by Design, Authentic Assessment, Problem-based Learning and the Critical Friends model with follow-up collaboration, implementation and mentoring. The curriculum guides and documentation process continued through the refinement of the framework, loops, format for units and lessons, and evolution of our custom-designed database documentation software."
- Fundraising – We enhanced our connection to and operations of Ridge and Valley Learning Circles, our sister organization and primary fundraising entity. The school benefited financially from an “Annual Appeal,” an ongoing grocery store gift card fund raiser as well as a successful Spring Dance that featured an excellent band led by a school parent and which contained other school parents (as well as non-parents).
- Technology Upgrades – We upgraded our computer network, including the ongoing support of a volunteer parent who is a professional data center manager. We also secured another federal REAP grant to support technology upgrade costs for the 09-10 school year

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#### **4. DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES TO INVOLVE PARENTS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS AND OUTREACH ACTIVITIES**

##### **Parent and Community Involvement Activities and Outcomes**

RVCS parents are an integral part of the school and are valuable partners in its functioning. From helping develop policies and procedures to managing the school library, tutoring individual students, and providing music for school assemblies, parents play a central role in the RVCS community. Parent volunteers engage them selves in a countless of activities, both one-time events and on-going efforts. Such involvement helps provide a richer learning environment for the students. Listed below are some examples:

**Volunteer Training.** RVCS used a staff point person to work with four volunteer coordinators to reach out to the community for volunteer efforts. The coordinators handled aspects such as guide support, special events, community projects, and clerical/library duties. Every parent volunteer for the school participated in volunteer training and was given a volunteer handbook of guidelines. RVCS also holds periodic informational talks for parents on various mission- and community-related subjects and invites the public to attend outside programs relevant to the mission of the school.

**Community Service Days-** RVCS held ~~four~~<sup>three</sup> Community Service Days this year where families came to the school on a weekend day to work through any number of projects ranging from big to small. An average of 22 families have participated in these fun-filled, community building adventures each time. Volunteer efforts went toward clerical work and classroom materials preparation, library and building maintenance, land care, including the creation of new garden and educational stations about the campus, mulching, and planting of flowers, trees and shrubs.

**School Celebrations** – RVCS has a number of celebrations throughout the year. Parents and students participate in the organization and execution of these celebrations as coordinators, musicians, and participants. Some of the celebrations are our back to school pot luck picnic, Harvest Festival, Winter Solstice Celebration, Biennial Dance, Autumn Olive Festival, Celebration of Learning, and Commencement. Volunteers donated hundreds of hours to make these functions happen. In addition, the quarterly Whole School Assemblies include parent volunteers for planning, facilitation, and participation.

**Field Trips** - Parents assist guides in coordinating field trips, arranging car pooling, chaperoning, and providing food for overnight stays.

**Curriculum Support Team** - Volunteers are called on for curriculum support as needed at RVCS. Volunteers continue to dedicate time to researching and updating ability-leveling information for RVCS reading materials. Parents were involved in a parent math night event, culminating curriculum review regarding the choices made from the math curriculum review committee.

**2009 Community Survey-** This multi section survey is intended to refine ongoing assessment procedures and tools and invites responses from all members of the RVCS community regarding our expectations and efforts at RVCS. The sections include: Foundational Principles, Board of July 2008 SEAP

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Trustees, Leadership Team, Guides, Community, as well as a glossary of terms frequently used at  
RVCS and a personal self reflection section for each responder's private response and review.

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#### **4. DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES TO INVOLVE PARENTS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS AND OUTREACH ACTIVITIES**

##### **Parent Information.**

A *Family Handbook* is updated and mailed to all families in August of each year, outlining important policies and procedures, as well as information families need to know for a successful year at RVCS.

*Pre School Opening Orientation and Community Gathering-* Here families come together with one another to meet their new guides and community members, discuss information regarding school expectations and final preparedness. The event culminates with a community pot luck dinner.

*The RVCS Newsletter* With submissions by staff, students, and parents, this vital weekly communication tool is a vehicle by which all members of the community can provide updates on events, procedure changes, and information on learning taking place in each classroom. RVCS also has a website which provides detailed school information, a calendar, and houses important documents that parents can access 24/7. RVCS has an office driven information list and an informal family/staff chat-list for cyber-communication.

*Resource Directory-* This parent-inspired publication includes information on community members' professional skills and services, equipment they may have for borrowing as well as personal experiences, allurements, talents and, passions.

##### **Public Relations and Outreach Activities and Outcomes**

*Open House Events.* In 2008-09, we held three Open House events, purchased air time for radio ads, invested in print mailings, fliers and ads in newspapers to raise awareness of the school and its mission.

*Public Events and Festivals.* RVCS tabled and presented at the following events, thanks to staff, parent and student volunteers: Knowlton Riverfest, Hardwick Day, Blairstown 4<sup>th</sup> of July Celebration, Evolve 2012, Holistic Fairs, Sustainable Living Conference, AERO Conference, NJ Charter Public Schools Association Conference and The Alliance of New Jersey Experiential Educators.

*Summer Programs.* RVCS is providing space for two summer programs this year: a Little Ridge and Valley weeklong program for children ages 3-5 accompanied by an adult to experience some of the wonder and awe that inspires RVCS students, facilitated by one of our staff members; and a two week theater program facilitated by an RVCS alumna for students from 3<sup>rd</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> grades.

##### **Partnerships.**

RVCS has solid relationships with a number of local farms, participating in projects for educational and community service purposes.

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**4. DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES TO INVOLVE PARENTS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS AND OUTREACH ACTIVITIES**

RVCS service learning projects and education initiatives take students to welfare and wildlife shelters. Students worked with local geologists building habitat for endangered local species; supported a local bird refuge and a community play ground; cleaned up along the local river trail; created a medicine wheel garden at a local farm; and participated in the Great Backyard Bird Count with Cornell's laboratory of ornithology and the National Audubon Society.

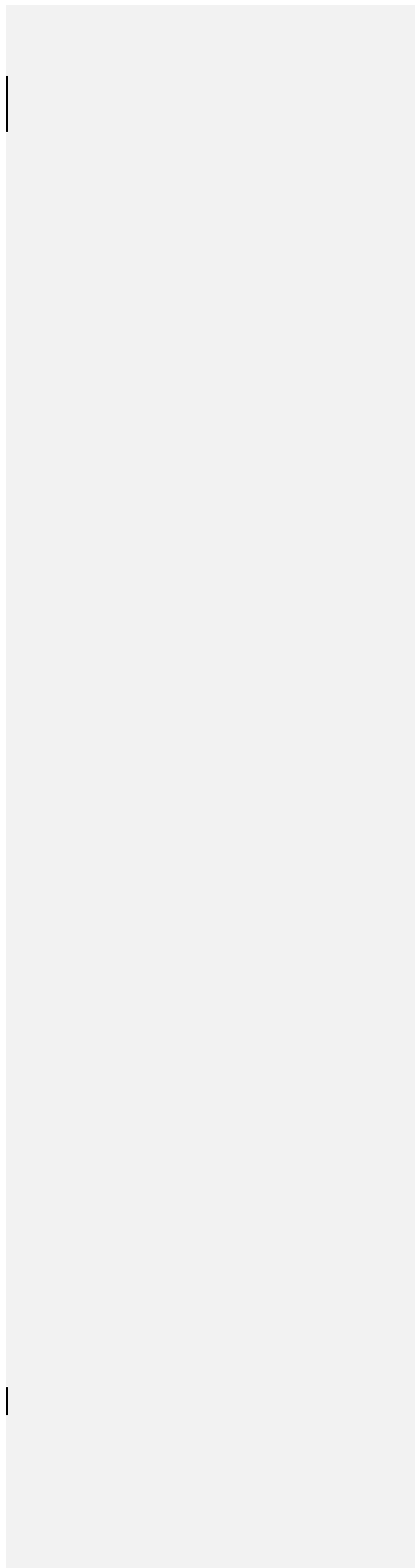
We also had a local Leni Lenape historian visit a class group several times to discuss the local Indian tribe. RVCS hosted a member of the Delaware Valley Raptor Center for education on the Great Horned Owl.

- **Memberships and Associations.** We are members of the NJ Public Charter School Association and interface with other charter schools on a regular basis. We are also a member of the Sustainable Ridge and Valley Alliance, a coalition of environmental/cultural organization in northwest NJ, the Association for Experiential Educators, and the NJ Association for Experiential Education.

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5. DESCRIPTION OF STUDENT AND STAFF RECRUITMENT ACTIVITIES

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**ADMISSIONS POLICIES**

**Admissions Timeline and Recruitment Activities:**

The school's admission timeline is ongoing throughout the year, with monthly application deadlines. In June 2008, the preliminary September 2008-09 enrollments were organized. All returning students from ~~the 2007-08 school year~~ received priority. They were accepted and assigned to the class rosters. Remaining class openings were filled from the current waiting lists and the new applications received to date. ~~Siblings and r~~Residents of the charter region ~~and siblings~~ have first placement, and out-of-region residents follow. The region of residence is the school districts of Blairstown, Frelinghuysen, Hardwick, Knowlton and North Warren Middle School in the North Warren Regional School Cluster.

In the event that a class was at maximum enrollment, incoming applications were held in chronological order and waiting lists established. Students were admitted throughout the school year as openings occurred, selected from the waiting lists. As new applications were received, they were placed on the respective waiting list.

The first student lottery was held at the public board meeting on November 20, 2008 and continued throughout the year ~~as needed when need occurred.~~ All applicants on the waiting list were notified of their status. It was not necessary that the applicant be present at the lottery, ~~to be subsequently enrolled.~~ We informed those present of the four-tiered lottery system of RVCS. The tiers are 1) in-district siblings, 2) out-of-district siblings, 3) in-district applicants, and 4) out-of-district applicants.

Enrollment figures were submitted to the NJDOE as required in October 2008 and at the end of the school year in June 2009.

Student recruitment was active throughout the school year. Many different venues were utilized to expand the public's awareness of our presence and participation within the community. Prospective parents were invited to all public Board of Trustees meetings, where the enrollment and lottery procedure was discussed and questions answered. These meetings were informational and interactive. The school brochure and applications were available at all meetings and at all times at the school and by request. The meetings were announced in advance in *The New Jersey Herald*.

Students and parents were invited to our open houses ~~that usually coincided with the Full School Assemblies~~ to observe part of a typical school day, meet ~~some~~ students and staff, and participate in ~~certain~~ daily activities followed by a Q&A period. Recruitment ads ~~were~~ continued this year, placed in local newspapers, the Sussex County Food Coop newsletter, and local children's publications, and emailed to prospective parents. Our website is [www.ridgeandvalley.org](http://www.ridgeandvalley.org) and was a viable part of our recruitment process. Ridge and Valley Note Cards and Bookmarks were designed and printed. They were used by the staff, families and friends to promote the school and

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its place in the community. The ~~trustees~~~~board~~, staff, students and ~~or~~ parents represented the school with our public display presentation at many local, regional and statewide events.

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5. DESCRIPTION OF STUDENT AND STAFF RECRUITMENT ACTIVITIES

Admissions Results.

~~As documented in the letter from Rochelle Hendricks, our~~ Our enrollment goal was 111 students, as per the Charter. Enrollment was maintained at or near 111 throughout the year. Approximately 25% of our students received Special Education services. We had 25 Special Education students enrolled in 2008-09, seventeen who were out of district placement. One of those students graduated.

The school's population is representative of the community in the fact that is a predominately Caucasian, middle to upper middle class, rural/suburban society. According to our submission dated 1/15/09 to the NJDOE, the majority of our students are white, with two Hispanics, one Asian, and one African American student. Our population is made up of 62 males and 50 females. Most of the diversity lies in areas of outdoor adaptation and earth-centered behaviors. There are no recipients of the reduced rate lunch program. There is ~~generally acceptable~~ parental support and involvement. There is widespread acceptance and support from the community after the initial concerns ~~over~~ opening a new public school. The interaction between the regional school districts has been friendly and cooperative.

Student Withdrawals and Exit Interviews.

Five students, three male and two females, withdrew from the school in 2008-09. One student withdrew due to discipline issues, two students withdrew from RVCS due to transportation issues, another student left because of a family issue and the final student withdrew because of dissatisfaction with placement. Our retention rate was 95%.

When a student withdraws, the family is interviewed in person or by phone by the Administrative Coordinator or ~~a trustee~~ ~~the Academic Coordinator~~. The purpose of the exit interview is to gain insight on the reason for withdrawal. The questions asked are:

- What is the primary reason for withdrawal?
- Is there any action we could take at this point to maintain the student?
- Does the family have any recommendations for RVCS?
- Whose decision was it for the student to withdraw?

Because it is our mission to build a learning community, ~~exit interviews are this is an~~ ~~important criterion in for~~ our self-assessment. ~~As much information as we can gather will help create a stable base.~~ RVCS continues to ~~pursue~~ ~~prefer~~ a personal conversation, as a written document ~~may is often~~ ~~be~~ ignored or a family may be reticent to respond in writing. The RVCS ~~representative~~ ~~staff~~ can respond to the parent more dynamically, ~~modeling.~~ ~~The staff is learning to role model~~ honest communication and active listening. Due to the small student body and small class sizes, we ~~were~~ ~~able to~~ ~~connected~~ closely with the families throughout the decision-making process, when possible. The child's health and welfare are most important, and our community attempts to act consistently in the best interest of the child.

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**STAFF RECRUITMENT**

**Recruitment Results.**

The hiring process for all 2008-09 incoming staff occurred throughout the spring and summer of 2008. By the end of June, after a needs analysis of present and future staffing requirements,

5. DESCRIPTION OF STUDENT AND STAFF RECRUITMENT ACTIVITIES

decisions were made to fill one classroom guide position, three support guide positions, an administrative support guide and a new basic skills/ foundation guide to meet the growing needs of the school for the 2008-09 year. A round of interviews for qualified individuals (20+) ensued with the hiring committee, which included three trustees, Administrative Coordinator, Curriculum Coordinator, a representative from the Guide Circle and a parent. Of the 18 2008-09 staff members, 16 are being retained for 2009-10.

**Exit Interview Procedures and Data**

The exit interview process has continued in the same format. As with the student exit interviews, a designated staff member or trustee conducts an in-person or telephone exit interview.

At the end of 2008-09, two staff members chose not to seek renewal but to pursue other opportunities. Both expressed positive reactions and satisfaction with their experience at RVCS.

6. REVIEW OF THE SCHOOL'S SELF-EVALUATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN (SEAP)

Ridge and Valley Charter School Self-Evaluation and Accountability Plan

August 2008 reviewed July 2009 see column F for review

Ridge and Valley Charter School Self-Evaluation and Accountability Plan: August 2008, reviewed July 2009

See Column F for July 2009 Review

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<u>A. Self-evaluation goals and objectives</u>	<u>B. Activity or activities required to achieve our goals and objectives</u>	<u>C. Timeline for each activity and/or completion date</u>	<u>D. Staff Responsible (Accountabilities for each activity)</u>	<u>E. Costs or resources required</u>	<u>f. Evaluation of Program July 2009</u>
<u>(1) Mission Standards, Goals and Objectives</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>Continue to review all activities in context of the school's mission of ecological sustainability</u></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>ongoing</u></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>trustees, all</u></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>various</u></li> </ul>	<p><u>Excellent progress in Curriculum Framework, behavior rubric, leadership team, in particular</u></p>
<u>1.1 positive communication</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>develop trustees and staff in positive, respectful, non-violent communication</u></li> <li>▪ <u>Sept 08, Nov 08, Jan 09, Mar 09, May 09 joint guide-trustee meetings scheduled.</u></li> <li>▪ <u>Proposed workshop on Collaborative Communication fall 08</u></li> <li>▪ <u>Trustee participation in monthly guide meetings</u></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>As noted</u></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>Trustees, guides</u></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>Volunteer time</u></li> <li>▪ <u>Staff time</u></li> </ul>	<p><u>Joint meetings resulted in improved communication and modeling.</u></p> <p><u>Workshop to be coordinated for 09-10.</u></p> <p><u>Trustee participation in monthly guide meetings a significant contribution to collaborative communication.</u></p>
<u>1.2 collaborative, non-hierarchical</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>develop trustees,</u></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>September guide-</u></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>September facilitator</u></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>Volunteer time</u></li> </ul>	<p><u>Fine progress. To</u></p>

<u>A. Self-evaluation goals and objectives</u>	<u>B. Activity or activities required to achieve our goals and objectives</u>	<u>C. Timeline for each activity and/or completion date</u>	<u>D. Staff Responsible (Accountabilities for each activity)</u>	<u>E. Costs or resources required</u>	<u>f. Evaluation of Program July 2009</u>
<u>governance</u>	<u>staff, students, and community in collaborative, non-hierarchical governance</u>	<u>trustee development</u> ▪ <u>community-wide training in PeerSpirit circle practice</u>	▪ <u>Fall 2008</u>	▪ <u>Staff time</u>	<u>culminate in PeerSpirit trainings August 2009.</u>
<u>1.3 project-based learning</u>	▪ <u>develop trustees and staff in project-based learning</u> ▪ <u>Phase II database development</u>	▪ <u>August staff development</u> ▪ <u>ongoing</u>	▪ <u>July facilitator</u>	▪ <u>Volunteer time</u> ▪ <u>Staff time</u>	<u>Database progressing well. Expanded use and detail support Key Learning Experiences</u>
<u>(2) Curriculum Development/Revision/Documentation</u>	▪ <u>Continue to develop and refine curriculum framework, scope and sequence for all grade levels</u> ▪ <u>Critical Friends Group model</u> ▪ <u>Phase II database development</u>	▪ <u>Ongoing</u> ▪ <u>August staff development, ongoing</u> ▪ <u>ongoing</u>	▪ <u>guides, coordinators, Curriculum Coordinator</u> ▪ <u>guides, consulting supervisor</u>	▪ <u>various</u>	<u>Excellent. See Appendix K</u>
<u>(3) Assessment (School-Based &amp; State NCLB AYP)</u>	▪ <u>Meet AYP on all indicators for 2007-08 and 08-09</u>	▪ <u>July 2008</u> ▪ <u>July 2009</u>	▪ <u>all</u>	▪ <u>various</u>	<u>Successful in 2009</u>
<u>(4) Professional Improvement and Development</u>	▪ <u>Target development to mutual needs of RVCS and staff</u> ▪ <u>Critical Friends Group model</u>	▪ <u>Staff initial evaluations, Fall 08</u>	▪ <u>Leadership Team, consulting supervisor</u>	▪ <u>Staff development budget</u>	<u>Excellent progress. School-based development with Dr. Susan Paynter very highly evaluated by staff and trustees.</u>
<u>(5) Staff &amp; Administrator Evaluation</u>					
<u>5.1 ongoing administrator review</u>	▪ <u>regular check-in on coordinator circle progress toward</u>	▪ <u>monthly review committee reports to trustees Sept -</u>	▪ <u>review committee, Leadership Team</u>	▪ <u>Staff time</u> ▪ <u>Volunteer time</u>	<u>Coordinators' annual review near completion.</u>

Ridge and Valley Charter School Annual Report 2009

<u>A. Self-evaluation goals and objectives</u>	<u>B. Activity or activities required to achieve our goals and objectives</u>	<u>C. Timeline for each activity and/or completion date</u>	<u>D. Staff Responsible (Accountabilities for each activity)</u>	<u>E. Costs or resources required</u>	<u>f. Evaluation of Program July 2009</u>
	<u>goals 1.1 – 1.3</u>	<u>June</u>			<u>Regular contact at trustee meetings indicate positive development</u>
<u>5.2 refinement of administrator review process</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>360° evaluation</u></li> <li>▪ <u>Solicit input from staff, community on process</u></li> </ul>	▪ <u>November 2008</u>	▪ <u>review committee, consulting supervisor</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>Volunteer time</u></li> <li>▪ <u>Staff time</u></li> </ul>	<u>360° input solicited through Community Survey Spring 2009</u>
<u>5.3 refinement of staff evaluation</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>trustees to review tool(s) and methodology for staff evaluation</u></li> <li>▪ <u>coordinator circle participation</u></li> <li>▪ <u>360° evaluation</u></li> </ul>	▪ <u>September public meeting</u>	▪ <u>Consulting supervisor</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>Evaluation supplies</u></li> <li>▪ <u>Staff time</u></li> <li>▪ <u>Volunteer time</u></li> </ul>	<u>All required evaluations completed satisfactorily. 16 of 18 staff retained.</u>
<u>(6) Community, Parent, Student &amp; Staff Participation in Activities</u>	▪ <u>continue to support</u>	▪ <u>ongoing</u>	▪ <u>all</u>	▪ <u>various</u>	<u>Trustee and staff representative participation in 100% of school-organized community activities</u>
<u>(7) Parent, Student &amp; Staff Perceptions</u>					
<u>7.1 improve communication of perceptions</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>refine annual survey(s)</u></li> <li>▪ <u>administer surveys</u></li> <li>▪ <u>invite, encourage communication</u></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>survey review November &amp; June</u></li> <li>▪ <u>try town meeting format in Assembly</u></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>communication committee</u></li> <li>▪ <u>School Assembly committee</u></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>survey supplies, postage</u></li> <li>▪ <u>volunteer time</u></li> </ul>	<u>Community Survey Spring 2009 revised, distributed, and collected.</u>
<u>7.2 offer development opportunities to families</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>Invite participation in trustee development as appropriate</u></li> <li>▪ <u>Publicize annual schedule</u></li> </ul>	▪ <u>Powers of the Universe and discussion to begin Fall '08</u>	▪ <u>Trustee co-coordinator</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>informational mailing to families</u></li> <li>▪ <u>volunteer time</u></li> </ul>	<u>Printed materials (Trustee Tracks) substituted for video discussion this year. Video series under consideration for 09-10</u>
<u>(8) Community Involvement/Partners</u>	▪ <u>continue to support</u>	▪ <u>ongoing</u>	▪ <u>all</u>	▪ <u>various</u>	<u>Excellent. Continued</u>

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					<u>participation and representation at local community events</u>
<u>(9) Student Recruitment/Enrollment/Retention</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>maintain capacity</u></li> <li>▪ <u>maintain waiting lists</u></li> </ul>	▪ <u>ongoing</u>	▪ <u>trustees, staff</u>	▪ <u>various</u>	<u>Successful in 2008-09</u>
<u>(10) Student Discipline/ Positive Behavioral Intervention Systems/Mediation Program</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>See goals 1.1 and 1.2</u></li> <li>▪ <u>refinement of Behavior Rubric</u></li> <li>▪ <u>behavior expectation policy</u></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>ongoing</u></li> <li>▪ <u>revised behavior rubric approval September</u></li> <li>▪ <u>policy approval September</u></li> </ul>	▪ <u>trustees, staff, Differentiated Learning Coordinator, Peace Core</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>informational mailing to families</u></li> <li>▪ <u>staff time, volunteer time</u></li> </ul>	<u>Adequate progress. revision by staff team underway</u>
<u>(11) Staff Recruitment/Retention</u>	See goal 21.3				
<u>(12) Board Composition/ Duties/Policies/Development</u>					
<u>12.1 refinement of trustee review process</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>360° evaluation</u></li> <li>▪ <u>Solicit input from staff, community on process</u></li> </ul>	▪ <u>November 2008</u>	▪ <u>Trustee co-coordinators</u>	▪ <u>Volunteer time</u>	<u>360° evaluation input solicited in Community Survey Spring 2009</u>
<u>12.2 development of trustee handbook/orientation</u>	▪ <u>Prepare handbook</u>	▪ <u>October 2008</u>	▪ <u>Trustee co-coordinators</u>	▪ <u>Volunteer time</u>	<u>Continue to 2009-10 - priority</u>
<u>(13) Fiscal Functions &amp; Reporting</u>	▪ <u>continue to meet all fiscal and reporting requirements of NJDOE and independent auditor</u>	▪ <u>ongoing</u>	▪ <u>School Business Administrator, Administrative Coordinator, finance committee, trustees</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <u>staff time</u></li> <li>▪ <u>volunteer time</u></li> </ul>	<u>Successful in 2009</u>
<u>(14) Special Education Implementation and Compliance</u>	▪ <u>Continue to develop appropriate IEPs to address individual learning needs</u>	▪ <u>ongoing</u>	▪ <u>Coordinator of Differentiated Learning, Child Study Team, differentiated learning support</u>	▪ <u>Staff time</u>	<u>Successful in 2008-09, continue 2009-10</u>

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	<u>while incorporating all children into the school's integrated course of study</u>		<u>guide, staff</u>		
<u>(15) Report(s) Preparation (e.g., Annual Report)</u>	<u>▪ continue to meet all deadlines for submission of required reports</u>	<u>▪ various</u>	<u>▪ Leadership Team, consulting supervisor, all</u>	<u>▪ Staff time</u> <u>▪ Volunteer time</u>	<u>Successful in 2008-09, continue 2009-10</u>
<u>(16) At-Risk and Intervention and Referral Student Programs</u>	<u>▪ Continue to follow NJDOE guidelines for at-risk intervention and referral student programs</u>	<u>▪ Offer as needed</u>	<u>▪ Leadership Team, IR&amp;S Team</u>	<u>▪ Staff time</u>	<u>Successful in 2008-09, continue 2009-10</u>
<u>(17) LEP Student Programs</u>	<u>▪ Continue to follow NJDOE guidelines for Limited English Proficient student programs</u>	<u>▪ Offer as needed</u>	<u>▪ Leadership Team</u>	<u>▪ Staff time</u>	<u>Successful in 2008-09, continue 2009-10</u>
<u>(18) Technology and Technology Curriculum Implementation</u>	<u>▪ Continue to follow approved Technology plan</u> <u>▪ Maintain optimum resources for technology use and support</u>	<u>▪ Investigate options for in-school technical support</u>	<u>▪ Technology committee</u>	<u>▪ Volunteer time</u>	<u>Numerous upgrades and improvements, continuing to 2009-10</u>
<u>(19) Advisory Grievance Committee and Mediation Program Implementation</u>	<u>▪ Continue to implement the Advisory Grievance Committee and Mediation</u>	<u>▪ ongoing</u> <u>▪ Fall/Winter 2008</u>	<u>▪ Trustee development committee</u>	<u>▪ Volunteer time</u>	<u>Successful in 2008-09, continue 2009-10</u> <u>Committee advised one family and trustees in spring 2009</u>

<u>A. Self-evaluation goals and objectives</u>	<u>B. Activity or activities required to achieve our goals and objectives</u>	<u>C. Timeline for each activity and/or completion date</u>	<u>D. Staff Responsible (Accountabilities for each activity)</u>	<u>E. Costs or resources required</u>	<u>f. Evaluation of Program July 2009</u>
	<u>Program</u> ▪ <u>Investigate options for in-school training by an NVC consultant</u>				
<u>(20) Self-Evaluation Plan Implementation</u>	▪ <u>Use the 2008-09 SEAP formatively</u>	▪ <u>Quarterly review of 2008-09 SEAP</u>	▪ <u>Leadership Team, trustee co-coordinators</u>	▪ <u>Staff time</u> ▪ <u>volunteer time</u>	<u>Successful in 2008-09, continue 2009-10</u>
<u>(21) Strategic Plan and/or Annual Milestone Goals</u>					
<u>21.1 improve long-term stability: facility</u>	▪ <u>Purchase modular units</u>	▪ <u>August 2008</u>	▪ <u>Finance committee</u>	▪ <u>Volunteer time</u> ▪ <u>~\$500,000</u>	<u>Successful in 2008-09</u>
<u>21.2 improve long-term stability: faculty and staff</u>	▪ <u>Improve interaction among staff and trustee team</u> ▪ <u>Retain faculty</u> ▪ <u>Retain administration</u> ▪ <u>Improve benefits for all staff</u>	▪ <u>ongoing</u> ▪ <u>Formative written evaluations and proactive professional development Fall 2008</u> ▪ <u>Formative written evaluations and proactive professional development Summer, Fall 2008</u> ▪ <u>Continue to investigate insurance options and costs, ongoing</u>	▪ <u>Leadership Team, consulting supervisor, trustees, all</u> ▪ <u>Leadership Team, consulting supervisor</u> ▪ <u>Review committee</u> ▪ <u>Administrative Coordinator</u>	▪ <u>Staff time</u> ▪ <u>Volunteer time</u>	<u>Successful in 2008-09, continue 2009-10</u>
<u>21.4 Improve long-term stability: community</u>	See goals 7.1, 7.2 and 19				
<u>21.5 move toward maximum charter-approved enrollment of 134</u>	▪ <u>Expand facility</u>	▪ <u>Fall/Winter 2008-09</u>	▪ <u>Finance committee, Administrative Coordinator, all</u>	▪ <u>Staff time</u> ▪ <u>volunteer time</u> ▪ <u>~\$250,000</u>	<u>On hold at present for review</u>

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<u>A. Self-evaluation goals and objectives</u>	<u>B. Activity or activities required to achieve our goals and objectives</u>	<u>C. Timeline for each activity and/or completion date</u>	<u>D. Staff Responsible (Accountabilities for each activity)</u>	<u>E. Costs or resources required</u>	<u>f. Evaluation of Program July 2009</u>
<u>21.6 Collaborate with Ridge and Valley Learning Circles, Inc</u>	▪ <u>Complete two collaborative projects (ex: calendar)</u>	▪ <u>School year 2008-09</u>	▪ <u>Interested staff, trustees, RVLC</u>	▪ <u>Staff time</u> ▪ <u>volunteer time</u>	<u>Successful in 2008-09, continue 2009-10</u>
<u>21.6 Exceed 2007-08 Annual Appeal donations</u>	▪ <u>Annual Appeal</u>	▪ <u>Nov 2008</u>	▪ <u>Annual appeal committee</u>	▪ <u>Volunteer time, supplies</u>	<u>Successful in 2008-09, continue 2009-10</u>

6. REVIEW OF THE SCHOOL'S SELF-EVALUATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN (SEAP)

Description of Major Areas of Self-Evaluation

Major areas of self-evaluation for 2008-09 under review were (1) Mission Standards, Goals and Objectives, 1.1 positive communication, 1.2 collaborative, non-hierarchical governance, (2) Curriculum Development/Revision/Documentation, (3) Assessment (School-Based & State NCLB AYP), (5) Staff Evaluation, 5.1 ongoing staff review, 5.2 refinement of staff evaluation, (7) Parent, Student & Staff Perceptions, 7.1 improve communication of educational philosophy, 7.2 offer development opportunities to families, (9) Student Recruitment/Enrollment/Retention, (10) Student Discipline/ Positive Behavioral Intervention Systems/Mediation Program, (12) Board Composition/ Duties/Policies/Development, 12.1 development of trustee handbook/orientation, (13) Fiscal Functions & Reporting, (14) Special Education Implementation and Compliance, (15) Report(s) Preparation (e.g., Annual Report), (20) Self-Evaluation Plan Implementation, (21) Strategic Plan and/or Annual Milestone Goals, 21.4 Improve long-term stability: community, 21.6 Exceed 2008-09 Annual Appeal donations.

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Current and/or Proposed Changes to the SEAP

In 2008-09, increasing the number of students was reconsidered. Mission, curriculum, and community and trustee development are priorities for 2009-10. See Appendix H for details.

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Summary of Progress in Achieving Strategic Improvement Plans and Milestone Goals

In 2008-09 the school was remarkably successful in achieving strategic improvement and milestone goals. The Curriculum Framework in Appendix K is a testament to collaborative effort and careful preparation and reflection. We purchased the formerly-leased modular buildings, purchased our formerly-leased solar panels and have been benefitting from the collection of Solar Energy Credits. Sixteen of eighteen staff were retained for 2009-10, including all of the Leadership Team. 2008-09 was characterized by full enrollment and waiting lists in each grade. The annual audit had no findings or recommendations.

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Ridge and Valley Charter School Annual Report 2009

Appendix A: Copy of Board Resolution Approving the 2008-2009 Annual Report

**Ridge & Valley Charter School Board of Trustees**

**DATE: July 16, 2009**

**RESOLUTION: 07.16.09.h**

**Resolved by the Board of Trustees, Ridge & Valley Charter School:**

**To approve the 2008-2009 Annual Report.**

**Passed by consensus:**

<u>Kerry Barnett</u>	<u>yes</u>	<u>no</u>	<u>abstain</u>	<u>absent</u>
<u>Donna Best</u>	<u>yes</u>	<u>no</u>	<u>abstain</u>	<u>absent</u>
<u>Andy Marancik</u>	<u>yes</u>	<u>no</u>	<u>abstain</u>	<u>absent</u>
<u>Dave McNulty</u>	<u>yes</u>	<u>no</u>	<u>abstain</u>	<u>absent</u>
<u>Dave Paulson</u>	<u>yes</u>	<u>no</u>	<u>abstain</u>	<u>absent</u>
<u>Tom Kelleher</u>	<u>yes</u>	<u>no</u>	<u>abstain</u>	<u>absent</u>
<u>Pati Uzar</u>	<u>yes</u>	<u>no</u>	<u>abstain</u>	<u>absent</u>

**Signed: \_\_\_\_\_**

**Board Secretary**

Ridge and Valley Charter School Annual Report 2009

B: Copy of Board Resolution Naming the Lead Person of the Charter School

**Ridge & Valley Charter School Board of Trustees**

**DATE: July 16, 2009**

**RESOLUTION: 07.16.09.i**

**Resolved by the Board of Trustees, Ridge & Valley Charter School:**

**To approve Nanci Dvorsky as lead administrative coordinator for the 2009-2010 school year for purposes of the New Jersey Department of Education requirements.**

**Passed by consensus:**

<u>Kerry Barnett</u>	<u>yes</u>	<u>no</u>	<u>abstain</u>	<u>absent</u>
<u>Donna Best</u>	<u>yes</u>	<u>no</u>	<u>abstain</u>	<u>absent</u>
<u>Andy Marancik</u>	<u>yes</u>	<u>no</u>	<u>abstain</u>	<u>absent</u>
<u>Dave McNulty</u>	<u>yes</u>	<u>no</u>	<u>abstain</u>	<u>absent</u>
<u>Dave Paulson</u>	<u>yes</u>	<u>no</u>	<u>abstain</u>	<u>absent</u>
<u>Tom Kelleher</u>	<u>yes</u>	<u>no</u>	<u>abstain</u>	<u>absent</u>
<u>Pati Uzar</u>	<u>yes</u>	<u>no</u>	<u>abstain</u>	<u>absent</u>

**Signed: \_\_\_\_\_**

**Board Secretary**

**ACADEMIC GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

- Developing students who understand, analyze and challenge traditional assumptions about the universe
- Developing the innate creativity and imagination inherent within each child
- Developing students who are motivated to excel academically and who have a passion for wondering, questioning, and learning.
- Developing integrative thinking, resulting in exceptional problem-solving skills
- Developing strong communication and collaboration skills

The following broad academic goals for Ridge and Valley Charter School promote high academic achievement:

**Goal 1:** Students will analyze and challenge traditional assumptions about the universe and propose carefully considered, well-researched alternatives.

**Objective:** Students will understand issues and diverse viewpoints by examining and researching complex ethical and ecological issues.

**Goal 2:** Students will openly exhibit high levels of creative expression.

**Objective:** Students will discover individually meaningful media for artistic expression, will enjoy expressing themselves through these media, and will share their work in class, throughout the school and in their portfolios.

**Goal 3:** Students will be self-motivated and passionate about questioning and learning.

**Objectives:** Students will develop the foundation for life-long learning.

**Goal 4:** Students will achieve high academic standards and develop an ethic of excellence.

**Objectives:** Students will exceed the minimum proficiencies as outlined in the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards. Students will enhance their strengths and improve their skills as needed in all of the areas defined by multiple intelligence theory.

**Goal 5:** Students will develop and utilize critical thinking skills.

**Objective:** Students will successfully work through real-life problem-solving projects.

**Goal 6:** Students will develop strong communication and collaboration skills.

**Objective:** Students will be clear and confident in expressing themselves appropriately and in participating collaboratively in group projects and assignments.

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Appendix C: Copy of Academic and Non-Academic Goals and Objectives

**Non-Academic Goals and Objectives**

**Parent/Guardian/Community Participation**

1. The community will have input into planned programming and they will be active participants in the classroom and with field experiences with the goal of 50% parental participation in the first year of operation.
2. The school will offer parent education programs and/or materials to enhance the knowledge about child health, development and parenting skills with the goal of 30% parental participation in the first year of operation.
3. The school will help families create home environments that support learning.
4. The school will include parents in decisions and give them opportunities for leadership.
5. The school will develop a service-learning program to utilize community resources.
6. The school will collaborate with community resources to enhance the facility, faculty development and the educational program.

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**Conflict Incidence and Severity Reduction**

1. Establish clear expectations of behavior, conduct thorough training on these expectations, and actively use them to develop a normative culture.
2. Faculty and staff will utilize a positive discipline approach when mediating conflict.
3. Faculty and staff will know each child by name (sight recognition) and use active listening skills when communicating with students, parents and each other, within two months of the start of the school year.
4. The facility will provide clean and comfortable spaces for student learning.

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**Health and Attendance**

1. Personal development goals will be established for each child.
2. Each child will discover their best learning styles and apply these to the process of learning.
3. Each child will discover what is personally meaningful and apply this to the learning process.
4. Each child will discover what self care practices allow them to feel their best, with respect to diet, bodily care, sleep requirements and physical activities.

**Community Service Participation and School Recycling Levels**

1. All students will learn to use "I statements" and negotiate their own conflicts 80% of the time.
2. All students will be involved in community service activities.

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Ridge and Valley Charter School Annual Report 2009

3. All students will be involved in environmental awareness and ecological examination programs.

**Faculty/Parent/Guardian/Community Participation**

1. Staff meetings will be forums for sharing ideas and resources across the school.

2. Community resources will be centrally located and easily attainable.

3. Faculty and staff will work in partnership with parents cooperatively to define and solve problems.

4. Students, parents and teachers will establish goals and evaluate them cooperatively.

**Personal Improvement Plan Achievement**

1. Teachers will improve their understanding of the academic, social, emotional and physical needs of each learner and ensure that educators use appropriate teaching skills to enable students to meet or exceed their goals.

2. Teachers will be trained in the methods of Constructivism and Instructional Theory into Practice (ITIP).

3. Teachers will understand and utilize the best available interpretations of relevant knowledge, including empirical research and the consensus of professional opinion, in teaching, learning and leadership.

4. Teachers will develop a wide variety of assessment skills.

5. Teachers will be assessed periodically to review their teaching practices and/or influence student learning.

6. With the administration, teachers will jointly develop a Professional Improvement Plan (PIP), which will highlight goals for professional development experience during the school year with 80% of the goals achieved by the end of each year.

PROCEDURE FOR ADMISSION TO RIDGE AND VALLEY CHARTER SCHOOL

Ridge and Valley Charter School is a public charter school and as such will accept an application from any student who is a K-8 student and who resides in the state of New Jersey. Applications will be accepted on a monthly basis throughout the school year with the initial application period for the subsequent year to begin in October of the preceding year. Students will be recruited by advertising, events, and website listings year round. Students are accepted for enrollment on a space available basis and those applying that are unable to enroll are placed on a waiting list for their age group until the end of the school year. At that time the waiting list is removed and the new waiting list is considered to be in effect for the upcoming year. If more applications are received than there is space available in any given month then a lottery shall be held at the next public board meeting in order to give placement to students for enrollment or for waiting list status.

Procedure for Enrollment

Prior to a student being accepted for enrollment at Ridge and Valley Charter School they must be properly registered in their local district school. Subsequently a Transfer Card must be received from the local district school at which time a letter signed by the parent shall be mailed from Ridge and Valley Charter School to said district requesting transfer of student records.

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## **Ridge and Valley Charter School**

1234 State Route 94 Blairstown NJ 07825  
(908) 362-1114 (908) 362-6680 fax  
email: [office@ridgeandvalley.org](mailto:office@ridgeandvalley.org) [www.ridgeandvalley.org](http://www.ridgeandvalley.org)

### **Student Enrollment Application 2009-2010**

#### **A Different Kind of Public School**

**Ridge and Valley Charter School is based on several assumptions, and it is important that all applicants understand its unique focus.**

- 1) Human beings are merely a thread in the miraculous web of life supported by this living universe. We have a profound responsibility to respect the Earth. Hence, the school's primary focus is on ecological literacy and sustainability; in other words, children will learn to construct lives that promote the long-term health of the planet.
- 2) The curriculum will use the universe as a context for learning. The program will be highly experiential, allowing children to learn by doing, often out-of-doors, and in multi-aged groups. They will be encouraged to develop critical thinking skills, to challenge traditional assumptions about consumer culture and to derive new models for honoring the world around them.
- 3) Using this experiential approach, the school will meet the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards set by the state Department of Education. Beyond all mandated state tests, learner assessment will primarily consist of projects, work portfolios and rubrics, rather than traditional letter grades.
- 4) Each and every child will be cherished and respected, and his or her creativity and potential nurtured and supported. Children will be encouraged to cherish each other as well, and to respect and honor differences and boundaries. Conflict resolution will be an integral part of the program.

The school will encourage active participation of all students and parents in shaping the educational experience and will strive to build a stronger community both inside the school and beyond school walls.

#### **Application Process**

Ridge and Valley Charter School opened in September 2004 with learners in grades K-8. As a public school, the charter school must accept every New Jersey resident who applies, as long as there is space. Preference

Ridge and Valley Charter School Annual Report 2009

is given, however, to those from the region of residence: the school districts of Blairstown, Frelinghuysen, Hardwick, Knowlton and North Warren Regional Middle School. If more applications are received than there are places available, a lottery is held after each application deadline. Once a student has been accepted, the student remains enrolled for subsequent school years. Siblings of enrolled students receive preferential placement in the student enrollment process.

The first application period is October 1<sup>st</sup> through the 31<sup>st</sup> and the deadline for grades K-8 (2009-2010 school year) is November 1, 2008, with subsequent deadlines on the first day of every month thereafter. Please provide a self-addressed envelope with your application. You will be notified by letter within three weeks of the applicable deadline regarding the status of your application.

**Thank you for your interest in the Ridge and Valley Charter School**

**Ridge and Valley Charter School Mission**

Ridge and Valley Charter School will use the environment as the context for learning. At Ridge and Valley Charter School, environment is defined as the world around us—our home, our classroom, our town, our bio-region, our country, our world, our universe. Subjects will be experienced, and will not be segmented as separate, unrelated areas of study. Children will learn that mathematics is an integral part of science, that history is the basis for social studies, and that reading, writing and research skills unlock knowledge of all kinds. Using the environment as a context for learning, children will learn to really see the world around them. They will learn to question, to wonder, to think creatively. They will learn to be citizens of the world, and to honor the responsibility that comes with that charge. They will learn respect for the earth and for all living things. They will learn and practice everyday habits of living that reflect sustainable lifestyles. They will learn to resolve differences, dissolve boundaries and share common goals in a real-world setting. Our children will learn how to think. The result of a Ridge and Valley Charter School education will be children who grow into adults who love the earth and who are passionate about its ability not only to survive, but to thrive. They will provide leadership that has a clear vision of the world and how to make it better.

## Foundation Principles

### Foundation Principles

1. Subjects will be experienced, not taught, and will not be segmented as separate, unrelated areas of study.
2. All subjects will be experienced with Earth Literacy as the primary focus.
3. Assessment will be ongoing through exhibitions, portfolios, and project-based rubrics rather than through conventional grades. Ongoing assessment will include evaluation and self-evaluation, based on criteria and standards developed collaboratively by teachers and students.
4. Students will receive ongoing preparation to succeed on all state-mandated standardized tests reflecting mastery of the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards.
5. Students can expect to spend at least 25% of their learning time outdoors.
6. Teaching methods will be modeled primarily on experiential education methods. Experiential education values the interests, attractions and natural abilities of students as the basis for their learning.
7. Students will be encouraged to use sustainable lifestyle practices at school and at home.
8. Children will work with younger and older schoolmates in multiple and flexible group arrangements. This develops interpersonal skills

appropriate to the various roles of team member, mentor, guide, teacher and learner.

9. Students will participate with teachers in designing and adapting academic activities. This reflects their personal goals and develops their multifaceted talents.
10. Students will learn conflict resolution techniques as part of a formal conflict resolution program. All discipline problems that are not in the category of causing physical harm or property damage will be handled through the mediation process.
11. Students will participate in establishing the rules of their classroom.
12. Students will develop problem-solving skills through their participation in community real-world projects individually and with classroom groups.
13. Students will have opportunities to spend a large portion of their day working collaboratively with other students. Teacher-directed learning will encompass no more than 25% of the school day.
14. Students will ask more questions than teachers.
15. Teachers will identify learning styles and specific interests of their students and guide learning accordingly.
16. Students will have access to all of the teachers on the staff as resources and advisors.
17. Grammar will be integrated into the process of writing, not taught as a separate subject.
18. Inventive spelling will be encouraged prior to third grade.
19. A balanced literacy approach will be implemented and will include whole language and phonics based on student readiness and ability. Students will be encouraged to read every evening.

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## RVCS Student Application 2009 - 2010

### **Student Information (please return pages 3 and 4 only)**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Sex \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_ (must be 5 before October 1, 2009 for kindergarten)

Postal Address \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ County \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

### **Previous Schooling**

#### **Grade currently in:**

K  1  2  3  4  5  6  7

#### **Type of school**

Public school  Homeschool  Private school (please complete school information)

#### **School District of residence**

- Blairstown Elementary
- Frelinghuysen Elementary
- Hardwick School District
- Knowlton Elementary
- North Warren Regional
- Other (please complete school information below)

School district of residence \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

School name \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone (      ) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Please note: if the student homeschools or attends private school, it is still required to indicate the district of residence above (funding follows the child from the school district of residence).**

Previous Schooling

### **Parent Information**

Parent name \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to student \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Daytime phone (      ) \_\_\_\_\_ Evening phone (      ) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Parent name \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to student \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Daytime phone (      ) \_\_\_\_\_ Evening phone (      ) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Student lives with    Both parents      Mother      Father      Guardian      Other

\_\_\_\_\_

**How did you learn about Ridge and Valley Charter School?**

Please include a self-addressed stamped envelope so we can acknowledge receipt of this application. Send completed applications to:

**Ridge and Valley Charter School**

**1234 State Route 94**

**Blairstown, NJ 07825**

I have read the mission and the foundation principles of the Ridge and Valley Charter School.

**Parent Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Printed on recycled paper**

Appendix E: Copy of Board resolutions Naming the Affirmative Action Officer, The Section 504 Officer, and the Title IX Coordinator

**Ridge & Valley Charter School Board of Trustees**

**DATE: June 18, 2009**

**RESOLUTION: 06.18.09.i**

**Resolved by the Board of Trustees, Ridge & Valley Charter School:**

**To approve Katharine Errico as Affirmative Action Officer, Rowena McNulty as Section 504 Officer, and Cathy Conner as Title 9 Officer for the 2009-2010 school year.**

**Passed by consensus:**

<u>Kerry Barnett</u>	<u>yes</u>	<u>no</u>	<u>abstain</u>	<u>absent</u>
<u>Donna Best</u>	<u>yes</u>	<u>no</u>	<u>abstain</u>	<u>absent</u>
<u>Tom Kelleher</u>	<u>yes</u>	<u>no</u>	<u>abstain</u>	<u>absent</u>
<u>Dave McNulty</u>	<u>yes</u>	<u>no</u>	<u>abstain</u>	<u>absent</u>
<u>Dave Paulson</u>	<u>yes</u>	<u>no</u>	<u>abstain</u>	<u>absent</u>
<u>Andy Marancik</u>	<u>yes</u>	<u>no</u>	<u>abstain</u>	<u>absent</u>
<u>Pati Uzar</u>	<u>yes</u>	<u>no</u>	<u>abstain</u>	<u>absent</u>

**Signed:**

**Board Secretary**

Ridge and Valley Charter School Annual Report 2009  
Appendix F: Copy of the School Student Recruitment Plan

Student recruitment was active throughout the school year. Many different venues were utilized to expand the public's awareness of our presence and participation within the community. Prospective parents were invited to all public Board of Trustees meetings, where the enrollment and lottery procedure was discussed and questions answered. These meetings were informational and interactive. The school brochure and applications were available at all meetings and at all times at the school and by request. The meetings were announced in advance in *The New Jersey Herald*.

Students and parents were invited to our open houses to observe part of a typical school day, meet students and staff, and participate in daily activities followed by a Q&A period. Recruitment ads continued this year, placed in local newspapers, the Sussex County Food Coop newsletter, and local children's publications, and emailed to prospective parents. Our website is [www.ridgeandvalley.org](http://www.ridgeandvalley.org) and was a viable part of our recruitment process. Ridge and Valley Note Cards and Bookmarks were designed and printed. They were used by the staff, families and friends to promote the school and its place in the community. The trustees, staff, students and parents represented the school with our public display presentation at many local, regional and statewide events.

**STAFF RECRUITMENT**

The hiring process for all 2008-09 incoming staff occurred throughout the spring and summer of 2008. By the end of June, after a needs analysis of present and future staffing requirements, decisions were made to fill one classroom guide position, three support guide positions, an administrative support guide and a new basic skills/ foundation guide to meet the growing needs of the school for the 2008-09 year.

Notices were posted on local electronic lists, in relevant publications, and shared by word of mouth.

A round of interviews for qualified individuals (20+) ensued with the hiring committee, which included three trustees, Administrative Coordinator, Curriculum Coordinator, a representative from the Guide Circle and a parent. Of the 18 2008-09 staff members, 16 are being retained for 2009-10.

Appendix H: Copy of the School Self-Evaluation and Accountability Plan  
Table 5: Ridge and Valley Charter School Self-Evaluation and Accountability Plan July 2009

<u>A. Self-evaluation goals and objectives</u>	<u>B. Activity or activities required to achieve our goals and objectives</u>	<u>C. Timeline for each activity and/or completion date</u>	<u>D. Staff Responsible (Accountabilities for each activity)</u>	<u>E. Costs or resources required</u>	<u>f. Evaluation of Program and Next Steps</u>
<u>(1) Mission Standards, Goals and Objectives</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Continue to review all activities in context of the school's mission of ecological sustainability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ ongoing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ trustees, leadership team, all staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ various</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ continuous, ongoing, annual formal review by trustees</li> </ul>
<u>1.1 positive communication</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ develop trustees and staff in positive, respectful, non-violent communication</li> <li>▪ Sept 09, Nov 09, Jan 10, 10 joint guide-trustee meetings scheduled.</li> <li>▪ workshop on Collaborative Communication winter2009</li> <li>▪ Trustee participation in monthly guide meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ As noted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Trustees, guides</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Volunteer time</li> <li>▪ Staff time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Action items from meetings</li> </ul>
<u>1.2 collaborative, non-hierarchical governance</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ develop trustees, staff, students, and community in collaborative, non-hierarchical governance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ September guide-trustee development</li> <li>▪ community-wide training in PeerSpirit circle practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ September facilitator</li> <li>▪ Fall 2009</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Volunteer time</li> <li>▪ Staff time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Action items from September meeting</li> <li>▪ Evaluations of training</li> </ul>
<u>(2) Curriculum Development/Revision/Documentation</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Continue to develop and refine curriculum framework, scope and sequence for</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ongoing</li> <li>▪ August staff development, ongoing</li> <li>▪ ongoing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ guides, coordinators, Curriculum Coordinator</li> <li>▪ guides, consulting supervisor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ various</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ ongoing, with annual review by guides, coordinators, and trustees</li> </ul>

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Ridge and Valley Charter School Annual Report 2009

<u>A. Self-evaluation goals and objectives</u>	<u>B. Activity or activities required to achieve our goals and objectives</u>	<u>C. Timeline for each activity and/or completion date</u>	<u>D. Staff Responsible (Accountabilities for each activity)</u>	<u>E. Costs or resources required</u>	<u>f. Evaluation of Program and Next Steps</u>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>all grade levels</li> <li>Phase II database development</li> </ul>				
<u>(3) Assessment (School-Based &amp; State NCLB AYP)</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meet AYP on all indicators for 08-09 and 2009-10</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>July 2009</li> <li>July 2010</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>all</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>various</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>annual review by NJDOE</li> </ul>
<u>(5) Staff Evaluation</u>					
<u>5.1 ongoing staff review</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>regular check-in on coordinator circle progress toward goals 1.1 – 1.3</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>monthly review committee reports to trustees Sept - June</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>review committee, Leadership Team</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff time</li> <li>Volunteer time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinators annual review spring 2010, contracts 2010-11</li> </ul>
<u>5.2 refinement of staff evaluation</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>trustees to review tool(s) and methodology for staff evaluation</li> <li>coordinator circle participation</li> <li>360° evaluation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>September public meeting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consulting supervisor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluation supplies</li> <li>Staff time</li> <li>Volunteer time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>September meeting minutes, further action as needed</li> </ul>
<u>(7) Parent, Student &amp; Staff Perceptions</u>					
<u>7.1 improve communication of educational philosophy</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>refine annual survey(s)</li> <li>administer surveys</li> <li>invite, encourage communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>survey review November &amp; June</li> <li>try town meeting format in Assembly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>communication committee</li> <li>Ecozoic Community Education committee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>survey supplies, postage</li> <li>volunteer time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>November and June results</li> </ul>
<u>7.2 offer development opportunities to families</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>establish Ecozoic Community Education Committee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>three community education events in 2009-10</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trustee co-coordinator, committee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>informational mailing to families</li> <li>volunteer time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>publicity and agenda of three events</li> </ul>
<u>(9) Student Recruitment/Enrollment/Retention</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>maintain capacity</li> <li>maintain waiting lists</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ongoing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communications/Enrollment committee</li> <li>Administrative Coordinator</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>various</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ongoing, annual review by trustees</li> </ul>
<u>(10) Student Discipline/ Positive Behavioral Intervention Systems/Mediation Program</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>refinement of Behavior Rubric</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>revised behavior rubric approval by September</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>behavior rubric staff committee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>informational mailing to families</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>minutes from September meeting, rubric</li> </ul>

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Ridge and Valley Charter School Annual Report 2009

<u>A. Self-evaluation goals and objectives</u>	<u>B. Activity or activities required to achieve our goals and objectives</u>	<u>C. Timeline for each activity and/or completion date</u>	<u>D. Staff Responsible (Accountabilities for each activity)</u>	<u>E. Costs or resources required</u>	<u>f. Evaluation of Program and Next Steps</u>
				▪ staff time, volunteer time	
<u>(12) Board Composition/ Duties/Policies/Development</u>					
<u>12.1 development of trustee handbook/orientation</u>	▪ Prepare handbook	▪ October 2009	▪ Trustee committee	▪ Volunteer time	▪ Handbook October 2009
<u>(13) Fiscal Functions &amp; Reporting</u>	▪ continue to meet all fiscal and reporting requirements of NJDOE and independent auditor	▪ ongoing	▪ School Business Administrator, Administrative Coordinator, finance committee, trustees	▪ staff time ▪ volunteer time	▪ Ongoing review by NJDOE
<u>(14) Special Education Implementation and Compliance</u>	▪ shift to in-house Child Study Team ▪ Continue to develop appropriate IEPs to address individual learning needs while incorporating all children into the school's integrated course of study	▪ July 2009 ▪ ongoing	▪ Coordinator of Differentiated Learning, Child Study Team, differentiated learning support guide, staff	▪ salaries and benefits for Child Study Team ▪ Staff time	▪ Ongoing review by RVCS staff ▪ Ongoing review by NJDOE
<u>(15) Report(s) Preparation (e.g., Annual Report)</u>	▪ continue to meet all deadlines for submission of required reports	▪ various	▪ Leadership Team, consulting supervisor, all	▪ Staff time ▪ Volunteer time	▪ Ongoing review by NJDOE
<u>(20) Self-Evaluation Plan Implementation</u>	▪ Use the 2009-10 SEAP formatively	▪ Quarterly review of SEAP	▪ Leadership Team, trustee co-coordinators	▪ Staff time ▪ volunteer time	▪ Annual review by trustees
<u>(21) Strategic Plan and/or Annual Milestone Goals</u>					
<u>21.4 Improve long-term stability; community</u>	See goals 7.1, 7.2 and 19				
<u>21.6 Exceed 2008-09 Annual Appeal donations</u>	▪ Annual Appeal	▪ Nov 2009	▪ Annual appeal committee	▪ Volunteer time, supplies	▪ Receipts January 2010

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Ridge and Valley Charter School Annual Report 2009

Appendix I: Receipts from Districts of Residence

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July 2008 SEAP

Appendix J: Copy of 2009 Spring Community Survey

**Ridge and Valley Charter School Community Survey 2009**

The trustees are engaged in annual Ridge and Valley Charter School review and assessment and request your participation. We appreciate your anonymous response to this multi-section survey, with comments of any length. Please add pages as necessary. Members of the trustee review committee (trustees Kerry Barnett, Andy Marancik, and Pati Uzar) will collate the results and create summary reports for the trustees, staff, community, and the August 2009 Annual Report submitted to the New Jersey Department of Education. Responses will be shared in summarized aggregate form only. Please return the completed forms to the trustee review committee at your earliest convenience and definitely by the end of the Celebration of Learning **May 29, 2009**. Forms can be left in the box in the office or sent by email to [trusteereviewcommittee09@ridgeandvalley.org](mailto:trusteereviewcommittee09@ridgeandvalley.org). For complete anonymity, please submit a paper copy. Constructive suggestions are particularly welcome!

Our intention is to refine ongoing assessment procedures and tools that will invite response from all members of the RVCS community, providing opportunities for everyone to reflect on our expectations and efforts. As the process develops, we will continue to explore means to include opportunities for 360° feedback for the people who serve our school. Our philosophy of assessment is that it is formative, relevant, and continuous, supporting ongoing efforts for improvement.

Thank you very much for participating. We value your contributions to the continuing development of Ridge and Valley Charter School. Please email completed forms to [trusteereviewcommittee09@ridgeandvalley.org](mailto:trusteereviewcommittee09@ridgeandvalley.org), or leave them in the designated box in the office by **May 29, 2009** (sooner is great). If you have any questions, please contact us by phone c/o Kerry Barnett: (908) 362-7244 or email [trusteereviewcommittee09@ridgeandvalley.org](mailto:trusteereviewcommittee09@ridgeandvalley.org)

**Please check all that apply.**

I am:  RVCS student  RVCS parent  RVCS staff member  RVCS volunteer  RVCS trustee  
 other \_\_\_\_\_

**Section One: Foundational Principles with glossary**

Please review the following Ridge and Valley Charter School Foundation Principles. Based on your own experience in 2008-2009 only, please select the response that best matches your perception. The results will be used to analyze the entire school, rather than individual guides or staff. Summaries of the anonymous responses will be shared with the trustees, leadership team, staff, and community and will contribute to ongoing school, community, and professional development. A glossary of underlined terms and related explanations is included at the end of the survey.

Ridge and Valley Charter School Annual Report 2009

1. Earth Literacy Focus

- All subjects will be experienced with earth literacy as the primary focus
- Students will expect to spend 25% of their learning time outdoors
- Students will be encouraged to use sustainable lifestyle practices at school and at home

This principle is consistently and thoroughly demonstrated:

strongly agree      agree      neither agree nor disagree      disagree  
strongly disagree  
no basis for judgment at this time

Comments:

2. Experiential Learning

- Subjects will be experienced, not taught, and will not be segmented as separate unrelated areas of study
- Teaching methods will be modeled primarily on experiential education methods. Experiential education values the interests, attractions, and natural abilities of the students as the basis for their learning
- Students will develop problem solving skills through their participation in community real-world projects individually and with classroom groups
- Teacher directed learning will encompass no more than 25% of the school day
- Students will ask more questions than teachers

This principle is consistently and thoroughly demonstrated:

strongly agree      agree      neither agree nor disagree      disagree  
strongly disagree  
no basis for judgment at this time

Comments:

3. Learning will be personalized to meet the needs of individuals

- Teachers will identify learning styles and specific interests of their students and guide learning accordingly
- Students will participate with teachers in designing and adapting academic activities. This reflects their personal goals and develops their multifaceted talents.

This principle is consistently and thoroughly demonstrated:

strongly agree      agree      neither agree nor disagree      disagree  
strongly disagree

July 2008 SEAP

no basis for judgment at this time

Comments:

4. A Balanced literacy approach will be implemented

- A balanced literacy approach will be implemented and will include whole language and phonics based on student readiness and ability
- Students will be encouraged to read every night
- Grammar will be integrated into the process of writing, not taught as a separate subject
- Inventive spelling will be encouraged prior to third grade

This principle is consistently and thoroughly demonstrated:

strongly agree      agree      neither agree nor disagree      disagree  
strongly disagree  
no basis for judgment at this time

Comments:

5. A positive discipline approach will be used

- Students will learn conflict resolution techniques as part of a formal conflict resolution program. All discipline problems that are not in the category of causing physical harm or property damage will be handled through the mediation process
- Students will participate in establishing rules of their classroom

This principle is consistently and thoroughly demonstrated:

strongly agree      agree      neither agree nor disagree      disagree  
strongly disagree  
no basis for judgment at this time

Comments:

6. Learning will be collaborative in flexible groups

- Children will work with younger and older schoolmates in multiple and flexible group arrangements. This develops personal skills appropriate to the various roles of team member, mentor, guide, teacher and learner.

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- Students will have opportunities to spend a large portion of their day working collaboratively with other students.

This principle is consistently and thoroughly demonstrated:

strongly agree      agree      neither agree nor disagree      disagree  
strongly disagree  
no basis for judgment at this time

Comments:

7. Authentic assessment

- Assessment will be ongoing through exhibitions, portfolios, and project based rubrics, rather than conventional grades.
- Ongoing assessment will include evaluation and self evaluation based on criteria and standards developed collaboratively by teachers and students

This principle is consistently and thoroughly demonstrated:

strongly agree      agree      neither agree nor disagree      disagree  
strongly disagree  
no basis for judgment at this time

Comments:

8. Core Curriculum Content Standards

- Students will receive ongoing preparation to succeed on all state-mandated standardized tests reflecting mastery of the NJ Core Curriculum Content Standards

This principle is consistently and thoroughly demonstrated:

strongly agree      agree      neither agree nor disagree      disagree  
strongly disagree  
no basis for judgment at this time

Comments:

9. Community

- Students will have access to all of the teachers on the staff as resources and advisors

This principle is consistently and thoroughly demonstrated:

strongly agree      agree      neither agree nor disagree      disagree  
strongly disagree  
no basis for judgment at this time

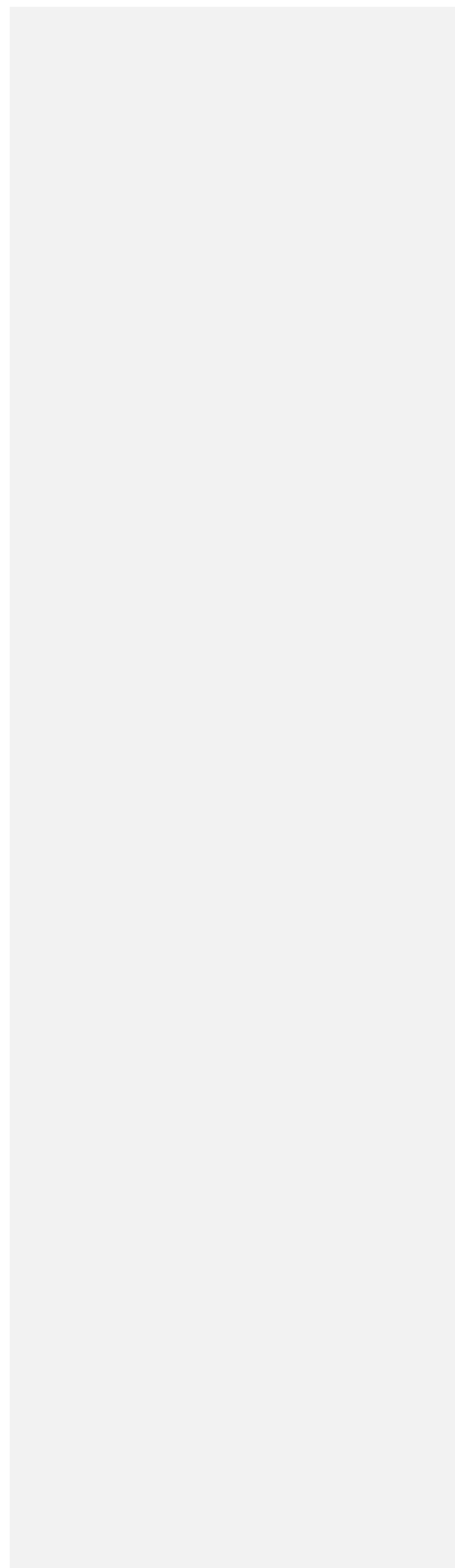
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**Section Two: Trustees**

We appreciate your input on trustees' work in 2008-2009 only. The definition of the role of trustees from the 2001 Charter Application is summarized below. Based on your own experience in 2008-2009 only, please select the response that best matches your perception. Summaries of the anonymous responses will be shared with the trustees, leadership team, staff, and community and will contribute to ongoing school, community, and professional development.

**The Board of Trustees:**

effectively ensures that the charter school remains true to its mission

strongly agree          agree          neither agree nor disagree          disagree  
strongly disagree  
no basis for judgment at this time

Comments:

effectively exercises the authority to decide matters related to the operations of the school subject to the school's charter, including budgeting, curriculum, and operating procedures

strongly agree          agree          neither agree nor disagree          disagree  
strongly disagree  
no basis for judgment at this time

Comments:

effectively provides for appropriate insurance against any loss or damage to its property or any liability resulting from the use of its property and provide for appropriate insurance against any liability from the acts or omissions of its officers and employees

strongly agree          agree          neither agree nor disagree          disagree  
strongly disagree  
no basis for judgment at this time

Comments:

effectively exercises the authority to employ, discharge, and contract with necessary teachers, and licensed and non-licensed employees

strongly agree          agree          neither agree nor disagree          disagree  
strongly disagree  
no basis for judgment at this time

Comments:

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effectively creates policy.

strongly agree      agree      neither agree nor disagree      disagree  
strongly disagree  
no basis for judgment at this time

Comments:

effectively receives and approves recommendations from leadership team and, through them, staff regarding Ridge and Valley Charter School's personnel, operations, and fiscal accountability.

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strongly agree      agree      neither agree nor disagree      disagree  
strongly disagree  
no basis for judgment at this time

Comments:

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effectively develops and approves reports for the State Department of Education

strongly agree      agree      neither agree nor disagree      disagree  
strongly disagree  
no basis for judgment at this time

Comments:

effectively facilitates successful operations of the Ridge and Valley Charter School.

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strongly agree      agree      neither agree nor disagree      disagree  
strongly disagree  
no basis for judgment at this time

Comments:

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effectively complies with the Open Public Meetings Act and appropriately advertises to the public sufficiently in advance of each board meeting, all meetings (except executive sessions where confidential matters such as personnel, ongoing negotiations, or pending litigation are discussed) are open to the public and meeting notices and approved meeting minutes are sent to the Warren County Superintendent of Schools.

strongly agree      agree      neither agree nor disagree      disagree  
strongly disagree  
no basis for judgment at this time

Comments:

effectively operates in full compliance with the School Ethics Act, including the submission of Financial and Personal/Relative Disclosure Statements annually, and complete training requirements of the NJ Department of Education

strongly agree      agree      neither agree nor disagree      disagree  
strongly disagree  
no basis for judgment at this time

Comments:

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**Section Three: Leadership Team**

We appreciate your input on the work of the Leadership Team (2008-2009: Nanci Dvorsky, Lisa Masi, Traci Pannullo and Rowena McNulty). Based on your own experiences in 2008-2009 only, please respond to the following statements. Summaries of the anonymous responses will be shared with the trustees, leadership team, staff, and community and will contribute to ongoing school, community, and professional development.

**The Leadership Team:**

effectively ensures, in cooperation with trustees and staff, that the charter school remains true to its mission

strongly agree      agree      neither agree nor disagree      disagree  
strongly disagree  
no basis for judgment at this time

Comments:

effectively coordinates finances, facility, and main office functions

strongly agree      agree      neither agree nor disagree      disagree  
strongly disagree  
no basis for judgment at this time

Comments:

effectively supports guides in instruction, integration, and development of resources

strongly agree      agree      neither agree nor disagree      disagree  
strongly disagree  
no basis for judgment at this time

Comments:

effectively supports development, refinement, correlation, and communication of the educational program and Phase II of the RVCS curriculum database

strongly agree      agree      neither agree nor disagree      disagree  
strongly disagree  
no basis for judgment at this time

Comments:

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effectively coordinates Special Education, the Intervention and Referral Services Team, assessments, mentorship in differentiated learning

strongly agree      agree      neither agree nor disagree      disagree  
strongly disagree  
no basis for judgment at this time

Comments:

effectively focuses on behavior, communication, and volunteers

strongly agree      agree      neither agree nor disagree      disagree  
strongly disagree  
no basis for judgment at this time

Comments:

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**Section Four: Guides**

Based on your own experiences in 2008-2009 only, please respond to the following statements with regard to the guides who work most closely with your student(s) this year. Summaries of the anonymous responses will be shared with the trustees, leadership team, staff, and community and will contribute to ongoing school, community, and professional development. For staff and for families with multiple students, please use the comment space to differentiate your responses as needed.

**Actualizing the Mission of RVCS**

**My student's/students' guides:**

effectively ensure, in cooperation with trustees and leadership team, that the charter school remains true to its mission

- educate families through communication and modeling.
- prioritize outdoor experiences in an integrated program of study.
- support student initiative, questioning, and challenging of common cultural assumptions.

Actualizing the mission of RVCS is consistently and thoroughly demonstrated by my student's/students' guides.

	<u>strongly agree</u>	<u>agree</u>	<u>neither agree nor disagree</u>	<u>disagree</u>	<u>strongly disagree</u>	<u>no basis for judgment at this time</u>
<u>Student 1</u>						
<u>Student 2</u>						
<u>Student 3</u>						
<u>Student 4</u>						

Comments:

**Planning and Preparation**

**My student's/students' guides:**

- demonstrate knowledge of content and teaching practices.
- demonstrate knowledge of students.
- select valuable and suitable learning goals.
- demonstrate knowledge of resources.
- design coherent instruction.
- assess student learning in alignment with instructional goals and set clear criteria and standards.

Planning and preparation is consistently and thoroughly demonstrated by my student's/students' guides

	<u>strongly agree</u>	<u>agree</u>	<u>neither agree nor disagree</u>	<u>disagree</u>	<u>strongly disagree</u>	<u>no basis for judgment at this time</u>

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<u>Student 1</u>						
<u>Student 2</u>						
<u>Student 3</u>						
<u>Student 4</u>						

Comments:

**The Learning Environment**

**My student's/students' guides:**

- create an environment of respect and rapport.
- establish a culture for learning.
- manage class procedures that function smoothly.
- manage student behavior in ways that are appropriate and respectful to students.
- organize the physical space to support learning activities.

Creating the Learning Environment is consistently and thoroughly demonstrated by my student's/students' guides

	<u>strongly agree</u>	<u>agree</u>	<u>neither agree nor disagree</u>	<u>disagree</u>	<u>strongly disagree</u>	<u>no basis for judgment at this time</u>
<u>Student 1</u>						
<u>Student 2</u>						
<u>Student 3</u>						
<u>Student 4</u>						

Comments:

**Instruction**

**My student's/students' guides:**

- communicate clearly and accurately to students, orally and in writing.
- use questioning and discussion techniques.
- engage students in learning.
- use assessment for instruction.
- demonstrate flexibility and responsiveness to students.

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Effective instruction is consistently and thoroughly demonstrated by my student's students' guides

	<u>strongly agree</u>	<u>agree</u>	<u>neither agree nor disagree</u>	<u>disagree</u>	<u>strongly disagree</u>	<u>no basis for judgment at this time</u>
<u>Student 1</u>						
<u>Student 2</u>						
<u>Student 3</u>						
<u>Student 4</u>						

Comments:

**Professional Responsibilities**

**My student's/students' guides:**

- reflect on teaching.
- maintain accurate records.
- communicate with families.
- contribute to the school by participating actively and maintaining positive and productive relationships with colleagues.
- pursue professional development.
- demonstrate professionalism.

Professional responsibilities are consistently and thoroughly demonstrated by my student's/students' guides

	<u>strongly agree</u>	<u>agree</u>	<u>neither agree nor disagree</u>	<u>disagree</u>	<u>strongly disagree</u>	<u>no basis for judgment at this time</u>
<u>Student 1</u>						
<u>Student 2</u>						
<u>Student 3</u>						
<u>Student 4</u>						

Comments:

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**Section Five: Community**

Results of this section may be used to recognize and thank community members for their service to the school. Summaries of the anonymous responses will be shared with the trustees, leadership team, staff, and community and will contribute to ongoing school, community, and professional development.

Which member(s) of the RVCS community would you like to see honored for service in 2008-2009 and why?

What topics would you be interested in exploring in 2009-2010 community education workshops? Please check all that apply.

- Compassionate communication
- Earth literacy/ecological literacy
- Conflict resolution
- PeerSpirit circle practice
- Other

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**Section One Glossary (please keep the glossary for your use)**

**Authentic assessment:** Assessment that measures realistically the knowledge and skills needed for success in adult life. The term is often used as the equivalent of performance assessment, which, rather than asking students to choose a response to a multiple-choice test item, involves having students perform a task, such as serving a volleyball, solving a particular type of mathematics problem, or writing a short business letter. There is a distinction, however.

Specifically, authentic assessments are performance assessments that are not artificial or contrived. Most school tests are necessarily contrived. Writing a letter to an imaginary company only to demonstrate to the teacher that you know how to do it is different from writing a letter to a real person or company in order to achieve a real purpose. One way to make an assessment more authentic is to have students choose the particular task they will use to demonstrate what they have learned. For example, a student might choose to demonstrate her understanding of a unit in chemistry by developing a model that illustrates the problems associated with oil spills.

**Balanced literacy approach:** A curricular methodology that integrates various modalities of reading and writing instruction, with assessment-based planning at the core. The approach is characterized by explicit skill instruction and the use of authentic texts. A comprehensive literacy program reflects a gradual release of control, whereby centrality and responsibility is gradually shifted from the teacher to the students. The overall purpose of balanced literacy instruction is to provide students with a differentiated instructional program which will support the reading and writing skill development of each individual.

**Conflict resolution:** The process of attempting to resolve a dispute or a conflict. Successful conflict resolution occurs by listening to and providing opportunities to meet each side's needs, and adequately address their interests so that they are each satisfied with the outcome. Conflict Practitioners talk about finding the win-win outcome for parties involved, vs. the win-lose dynamic found in most conflicts. While Conflict resolution engages conflict once it has already started conflict prevention aims to end conflicts before they start or lead to verbal, physical, or legal fighting or violence.

**Core Curriculum Content Standards:** Includes standards for the seven academic areas adopted by the State Board of Ed. These standards communicate the common expectations for student achievement throughout the 13 years of public education. The current New Jersey Department of Education Core Curriculum Content Standards are available at <http://www.state.nj.us/education/cccs/>

**Differentiated instruction:** Instruction that seeks to maximize each student's growth by meeting each student where she is and helping the student to progress. In practice, it involves offering several different learning experiences in response to students' varied needs. Learning activities and materials may be varied by difficulty to challenge students at different

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readiness levels, by topic in response to students' interests, and by students' preferred ways of learning or expressing themselves.

**Earth Literacy, ecological literacy:** Earth Literacy or ecological literacy is a field of study that explores the unity and relationships binding Earth and the totality of life under the conditions out of which Earth has emerged within a single, unfolding Universe.

Ecological literacy is the ability to understand the natural systems that make life on earth possible. To be ecoliterate means understanding the principles of organization of ecological communities (i.e. ecosystems) and using those principles for creating sustainable human communities. An ecologically literate society is a sustainable society which does not destroy the natural environment on which they depend. Ecological literacy creates a foundation for an integrated approach to environmental problems based on concepts of holism, systematic thinking, sustainability, and complexity.

Ecological literacy concerns understanding the principles of organization of ecosystems, and their potential application to understanding how to build sustainable human society. It combines the sciences of systems and ecology in drawing together elements required to foster learning processes toward a deep appreciation of nature and our role in it. Systems thinking is the recognition of the world as an integrated whole rather than a collection of individual elements. Within systems thinking, basic principles of organization become more important than the analysis of various components of the system in isolation. Ecological literacy and systems thinking implies recognition of the manner in which all phenomenon are part of networks that define the way that element functions. Systems thinking is necessary to understand complex interdependence of ecological systems, social systems and other systems on all levels.

Earth literacy education, therefore, includes not only learning and instruction in attitudes, skills and knowledge in respect to our planet, but also the development of a perspective or worldview that tells the story of the universe, of Earth, life, and the human species centering on the Earth and life as the focus, not the human species.

**Experiential Learning:** Experiential learning is learning undertaken by students who are given a chance to acquire and apply knowledge, skills and feelings in an immediate and relevant setting. Experiential learning involves a direct encounter with the phenomena being studied rather than merely thinking. It is learning that is achieved through reflection upon experience and is the way that most of us do our learning.

Experiential learning occurs when students are placed in a situation where they think and interact, learn in and from a real-world environment. While traditional teaching and learning is typically teacher-directed, content-driven, text-oriented and classroom-based, experiential learning involves active participation of the student in planning, development and execution of learning activities, is shaped by the problems and pressures arising from the real-world situation and occurs most effectively outside the classroom. For experiential learning to

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occur within the classroom, the instructor must use strategies that simulate or incorporate real-world situations.

**Experiential Education:** Experiential education is a philosophy and methodology in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills and clarify values. (Association for Experiential Education)

The principles of experiential education practice are:

- Experiential learning occurs when carefully chosen experiences are supported by reflection, critical analysis and synthesis.
- Experiences are structured to require the learner to take initiative, make decisions and be accountable for results.
- Throughout the experiential learning process, the learner is actively engaged in posing questions, investigating, experimenting, being curious, solving problems, assuming responsibility, being creative, and constructing meaning.
- Learners are engaged intellectually, emotionally, socially, soulfully and/or physically. This involvement produces a perception that the learning task is authentic.
- The results of the learning are personal and form the basis for future experience and learning.
- Relationships are developed and nurtured: learner to self, learner to others and learner to the world at large.
- The educator and learner may experience success, failure, adventure, risk-taking and uncertainty, because the outcomes of experience cannot totally be predicted.
- Opportunities are nurtured for learners and educators to explore and examine their own values.
- The educator's primary roles include setting suitable experiences, posing problems, setting boundaries, supporting learners, insuring physical and emotional safety, and facilitating the learning process.
- The educator recognizes and encourages spontaneous opportunities for learning.
- Educators strive to be aware of their biases, judgments and pre-conceptions, and how these influence the learner.
- The design of the learning experience includes the possibility to learn from natural consequences, mistakes and successes.

(Association for Experiential Education: <http://www.aee.org/about/whatIsEE>)

**Integrated curriculum:** A way of teaching and learning that does not depend on the usual division of knowledge into separate subjects. Topics are studied because they are considered interesting and valuable by the teachers and students concerned, not necessarily because they appear in a required course of study. Both integrated curriculum and interdisciplinary curriculum are intended to help students see connections, but unlike an integrated curriculum, an interdisciplinary curriculum draws its content from two or more identifiable disciplines.

**Interdisciplinary curriculum:** A way of organizing an educational program in which content is drawn from two or more subject areas to focus on a particular topic or theme. Rather than studying literature and social studies separately, for example, a class might study a unit called The Sea, reading poems and stories about people who spend their lives on or near the ocean, learning about the geography of coastal areas, and investigating why coastal and inland populations have different livelihoods. Effective interdisciplinary studies have the following elements:

- A topic that lends itself to study from several points of view.
- One or more themes (or essential questions) the teacher wants the students to explore.

Activities intended to further students' understanding by establishing relationships among knowledge from more than one discipline or school subject.

Interdisciplinary curriculum, which draws content from particular disciplines that are ordinarily taught separately, is different from integrated curriculum, which involves investigation of topics without regard to where, or even whether, they appear in the typical school curriculum at all.

**Inventive spelling:** Non-conventional spelling of a word by novice readers and writers. Spelling based on the sound of a word (e.g., “brij” for “bridge”), recognizing that associating sounds with letters (conventional spelling or not) is a step in phonics learning.

**Learning Styles:** Differences in the way students learn more readily. Scholars have devised numerous ways of classifying style differences, including cognitive style (the way a person tends to think about a learning situation), tendency to use particular senses (seeing, hearing, touching), and other characteristics, such as whether the person prefers to work independently or with others. Advocates interpret research as showing that teaching underachievers in ways that complement their strengths can significantly increase their scores on standardized tests. For example, strongly auditory students learn and recall information when they hear it, whereas kinesthetic youngsters learn best through activities such as role playing or floor games.

**Performance assessment:** A form of assessment that is designed to assess what students know through their ability to perform certain tasks. For example, a performance assessment might require a student to serve a volleyball, solve a particular type of mathematics problem, or write a short business letter to inquire about a product as a way of demonstrating that they have acquired new knowledge and skills. Advocates believe such assessments-sometimes called performance-based assessments-provide a more accurate indication of what students can do than traditional assessments, which might require a student to fill in the blank, indicate whether a statement is true or false, or select a right answer from multiple given choices.

Evaluating students through task performance can be more time-consuming and therefore more expensive. Most large-scale assessments (such as state testing programs) use this form

of assessment sparingly, if at all. But many educators believe it is worth the extra cost because it provides a more accurate and realistic picture of student learning.

**Phonics:** A method for teaching speakers of English to read and write that language. Phonics involves teaching how to connect the sounds of spoken English with letters or groups of letters (e.g., that the sound /k/ can be represented by c, k or ck spellings) and teaching them to blend the sounds of letters together to produce approximate pronunciations of unknown words. Phonics instruction requires the teacher to provide students with a core body of information about phonics rules, or patterns.

**Problem-based learning:** An approach to curriculum and teaching that involves students in solution of real-life problems rather than conventional study of terms and information. Developed in leading medical schools, problem-based learning begins with a real problem that connects to the student's world, such as how to upgrade a local waste treatment plant. Student teams organize their methods and procedures around specifics of the problem, not around subject matter as such. Students explore various avenues before arriving at a solution to present to the class. Teachers report that students using problem-based learning become more interested in their studies, more motivated to explore in-depth, and more likely to see the value of the lesson. Problems are chosen for their appropriateness and power to illuminate core concepts in the curriculum. They must be carefully selected to ensure that students learn the intended content.

**Rubric:** Specific descriptions of performance of a given task at several different levels of quality. Teachers use rubrics to evaluate student performance on performance tasks. Students are often given the rubric, or may even help develop it, so they know in advance what they are expected to do. For example, the content of an oral presentation might be evaluated using the following rubric:

Level 4-The main idea is well developed, using important details and anecdotes. The information is accurate and highly descriptive. The topic is thoroughly developed within time constraints.

Level 3-The main idea is reasonably clear and supporting details are adequate and relevant. The information is accurate. The topic is adequately developed within time constraints but is not complete.

Level 2-The main idea is not clearly indicated. Some information is inaccurate. The topic is supported with few details and is sketchy and incomplete.

Level 1-A main idea is not evident. The information has many inaccuracies. The topic is not supported with details

**Whole language:** A literacy instructional philosophy which emphasizes that children should focus on meaning in studies of reading and writing. Approaches in whole language include focus on creating meaning in reading and expressing meaning in writing; constructivist approaches to knowledge creation, emphasizing students' interpretations of text and free expression of ideas in writing (often through daily journal entries); emphasis on high-quality

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and culturally-diverse literature; integrating literacy skills into other areas of the curriculum, especially math, science, and social studies; frequent reading with, to, and by students, focus on motivational aspects of literacy, emphasizing the love of books and level-appropriate student materials; meaning-based word recognition instruction

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**Optional Section Six: Self**

**Please do not return this section to the committee.**

I consistently model the behavior I want to see in others.

strongly agree      agree      neither agree nor disagree      disagree  
strongly disagree  
no basis for judgment at this time at this time

Comments:

I consistently assume good intention on the part of others.

strongly agree      agree      neither agree nor disagree      disagree  
strongly disagree  
no basis for judgment at this time at this time

Comments:

I consistently respect and follow the policies and procedures of RVCS.

strongly agree      agree      neither agree nor disagree      disagree  
strongly disagree  
no basis for judgment at this time at this time

Comments:

I consistently direct my energy and involvement toward positive change at RVCS.

strongly agree      agree      neither agree nor disagree      disagree  
strongly disagree  
no basis for judgment at this time at this time

Comments:

I/my student consistently demonstrate respect by being on time and prepared with appropriate gear, etc.

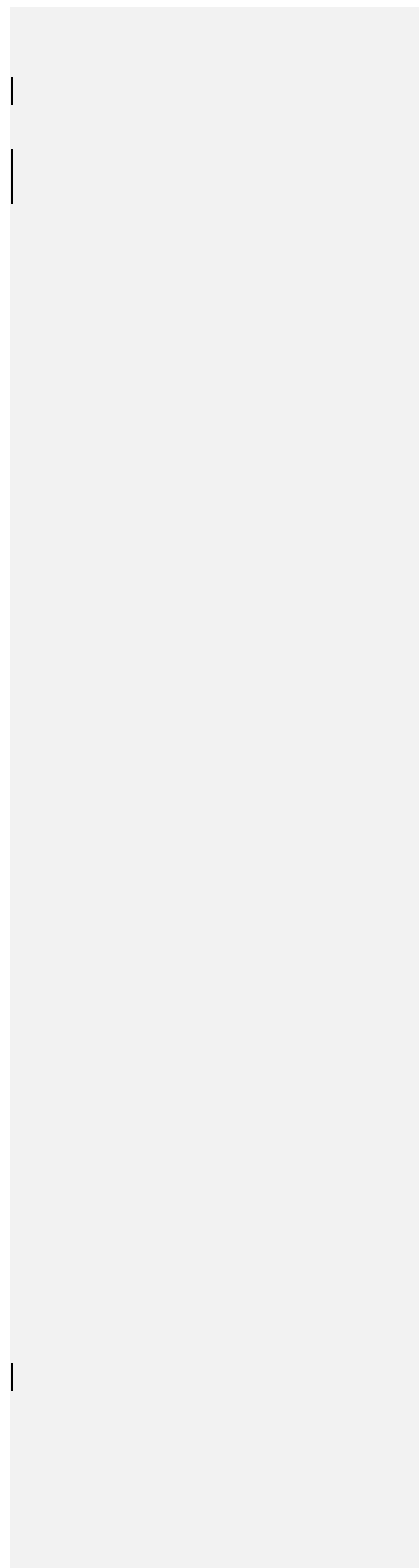
strongly agree      agree      neither agree nor disagree      disagree  
strongly disagree  
no basis for judgment at this time at this time

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Comments:

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# Ridge and Valley Charter School



## Curriculum Framework

“And besides the very unborn nature of the future, we must also deal with the inadequacies of our present forms of consciousness. For even if the future were determined, its complexity would be beyond our capacity to articulate it. We will find our way only with a deep and prolonged process of groping – considering with care a great variety of interpretations, weighing evidence from a spectrum of perspectives, attending with great patience to the inchoate, barely discernible glimmers that visit us in our more

contemplative moments. Out of this welter will slowly emerge  
our way to the star.”  
(The Universe Story, Swimme & Berry)

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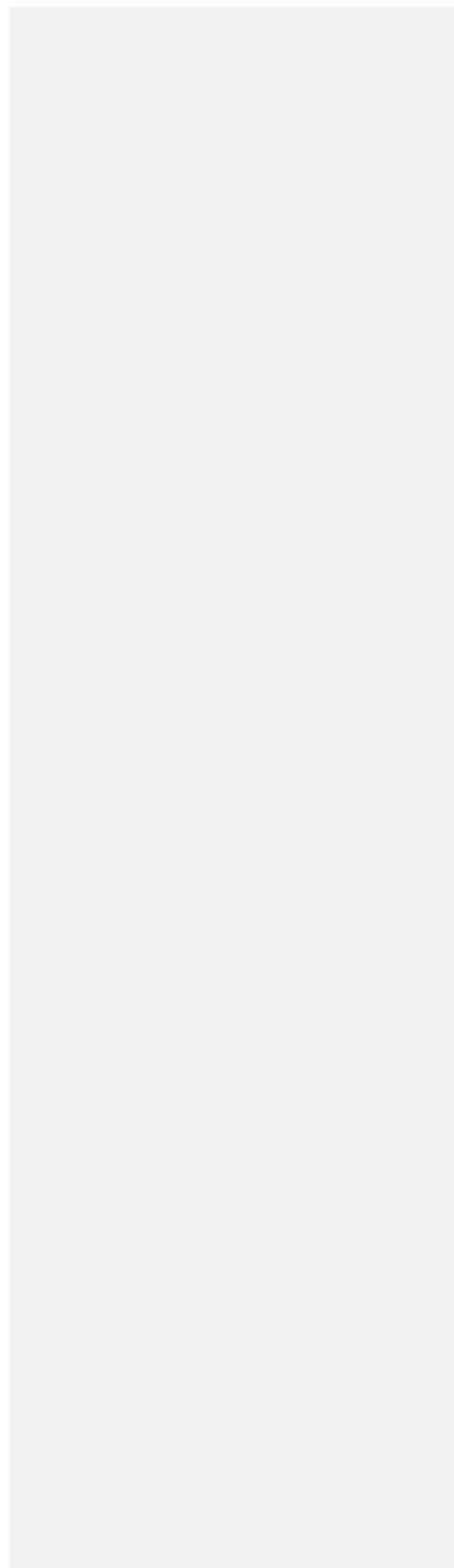
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## **Introduction & Premise**

The mission of the Ridge and Valley Charter School is to educate for a hopeful sustainable future. We believe that in order for this to occur humans must experience a profound shift in their understanding of and relationship with the earth, universe and each other. Part of this shift has to do with what we study, but most of the shift has to do with changing the lens, angle or perspective from which we view the world and our stories of it. The current scientific, mechanistic and anthropocentric approach to understanding things has led to a disconnection from relationships and the corresponding wide-ranging impact of our choices. We seek to move into a more system-based, ecocentric view of the world in which learning and understanding occur within a larger, holistic context.

This holistic understanding of the impact of choices within any system, combined with immersion in the natural world, stirs a deep wonder, awe, respect and responsibility for our planet and universe. Our intention is for students to see themselves not as separate from the intricate tapestry of the universe and the world around them but rather as a thread in the greater whole. Utilizing experiential education practices whenever possible, we seek to cultivate in students the practical skills and knowledge necessary for becoming confident and articulate as well as self-regulating, self-disciplined and self-motivated individuals. Our intention is to support individual students within the context of the whole so that they can continually transform themselves on their life journeys into being rich, important and effective agents and models for sustainable living and change.

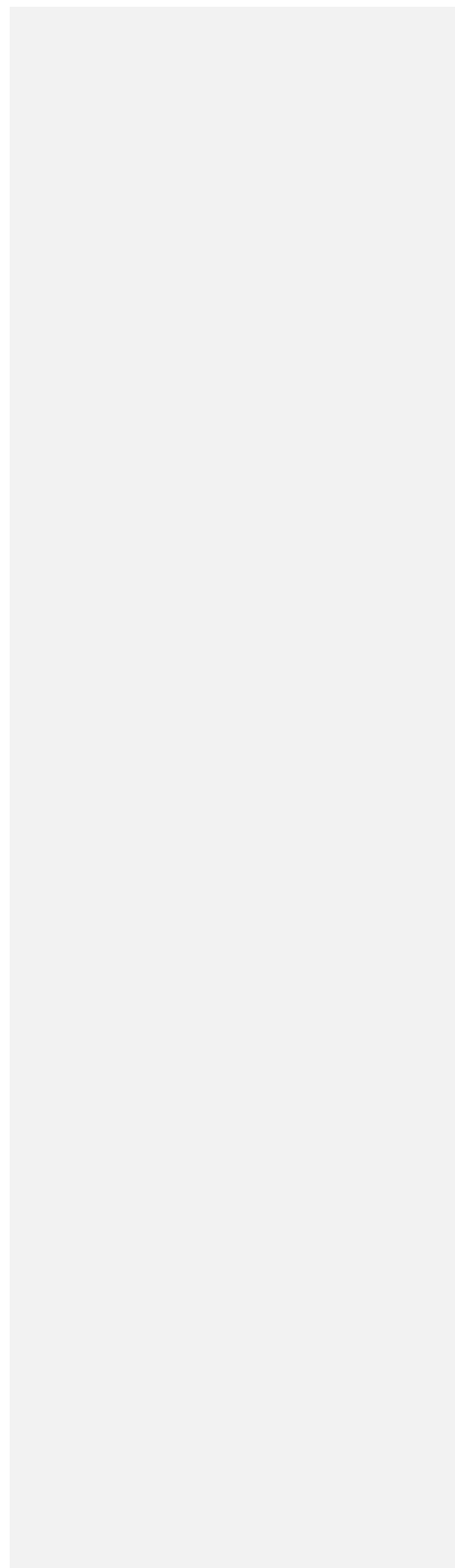
In order to facilitate learning experiences that will provide students with the awareness and tools they need, we organize our curriculum framework within the following three layers: Yearly Integrating Lenses, Key Learning Experiences and Seasonally-based Trimesters. All content, including the NJ Core Curriculum Content Standards, is woven into this structure to create relevant, meaningful and tangible understandings that are integral to our students' success as leaders, now and in the future.



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## **Multi-Age Structure and Curriculum Loops**

Humans are complex, multi-faceted beings who, regardless of their age and at any given moment in time, can be in many different places on the developmental spectrum – socially, emotionally, physically, academically and spiritually. The organization of children in traditional school settings into groups based only on their physical age assumes two things: that children develop at the same rate, and that learning is a linear sequence of steps to be achieved within a proscribed timeframe to reach an externally defined ‘norm’. In reality, humans develop at different rates along a continuum even within different aspects of their lives. Choosing to create flexible, multi-age groupings, as we do at RVCS, facilitates learning in a more individualized, holistic manner. Taking time to nurture the individual and group relationships and dynamics within the class groups and school community allows for a more familial experience as well as a natural, enthusiastic unfolding of each person’s gifts.

Our children spend a large portion of their time in learning groups, based broadly upon general, holistic understandings of child development, that span 2-4 years of age\*: 4-5 year olds; 5-7 year olds; 7-10 year olds; and 10-13 year olds. Each learning group has the flexibility to not only create multiple, changing groupings from within the learning group, but also to arrange with other learning groups to allow for an even greater variety of ages and abilities. These arrangements celebrate diversity, create multiple opportunities for mentoring and being mentored, support various needs and interests and more closely mimic “real world” groups and experiences. Our choice to organize ourselves in this way directly supports our move towards a more systemic and holistic view of the world and the humans in it.

In order to support this type of arrangement our curriculum is organized into 1-3 year loops. Each loop has an overarching, integrating lens through which all content is experienced. All students within a learning group focus on the same lens within the same year and will have experienced all loops within a 2-3 year timeframe, although in a different order based upon when they enter the learning group.

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\*Note: Our Kindergarten group, which is composed of all incoming 4-5 year olds, spends the year primarily as a separate unit with its own, one year lens to allow for an easier, more successful transition from home & family to school.

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## **Yearly Integrating Lenses**

The interdisciplinary content, multi-age groupings and system thinking aspects of learning at RVCS lend themselves to experiences viewed through wide, yearlong lenses that loop over a period of 1-3 years. These integrating lenses, explained in more detail below, are intended to highlight the relationships among seemingly unrelated elements for a more holistic awareness of the larger, interrelated and interdependent systems that comprise the natural and human-made worlds. Each lens represents a biological process and/or relationship with the intention that, by studying all content areas and historical perspectives through this lens, students will come to see the correlations and analogies between the human and natural world experiences, therefore deepening their compassion for, understanding of, and connection to our planet and the entire Universe.

Allurement: (Learning Group: 4-5 year olds; 1 year loop)

Infants and very young children are born with an innate connection to all things. They do not perceive a distinct separation between themselves and their environment. They are sensual beings - exploring the world through all their senses. Their inherent bond with, and attraction to, all things dominates their early experiences. This same allurement permeates all of us and everything. It has led to the emergence of stars and planets, water, rocks, air and life itself. This basic binding energy is evident in the human emotions of friendship, compassion and love as well as in the chemical, gravitational and electromagnetic interactions among and between atoms, organisms, planets and galaxies. Children this age are still deeply connected to and immersed in allurement - the joy and intuitive fascination that exists everywhere in reality. They live in the moment, in their bodies, and are captivated by the world around them. By gently and thoughtfully guiding their dynamic attraction to and love of all energies and beings we can begin to help them gain fundamental understandings as well as draw intentional connections. During this year, children will explore the natural world and local foods as well as develop personal responsibility and individual/group relationships. We desire to cultivate their sense of wonder and awe and hope that they will maintain this open awareness into adulthood so they can always appreciate the magnificence of the universe and themselves.

Possible Essential Questions:

- ~How does the earth speak to the organisms and elements so they know what to do and how and when to do them? (i.e. hibernate, migrate, build nests)
- ~How is everything connected? How am I connected?
- ~How do things unfold?
- ~What is meant by the saying, "You are stardust"?

Niche: (Learning Group: 5-7 year olds; part of 2 year loop with Rhythm)

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What and where is one's place in the universe? What role do we play in the human, earth and star stories? What is our relationship with and responsibility to the natural world and all our neighbors? Niche is defined as the relational position of an individual and/or group within and to the whole. This lens considers the impact of and relationships between the whole and the parts, between the microcosm and macrocosm within any given system. Through this lens students will explore family, community, anatomical, ecological, solar, language and other systems. They will discover connections across systems such as how letters make words, sounds make music and language, organs make up their body, a wide variety of organisms make up an ecosystem, families

make a community, stories and traditions make a culture and so on. By drawing awareness to the universal relationships and dynamics within the multitude of overlapping systems that are present in the cosmos, students will see themselves as an important strand in the larger unfolding web of the universe.

Possible Essential Questions:

- ~How is everything connected?
- ~How is the universe like a family?
- ~Where is my place and what is my role in the universe?
- ~What is a home?
- ~What is a family?
- ~What is the impact of the availability (or lack thereof) of different materials and/or organisms within an ecosystem?
- ~How can we live in harmony (or be in alignment) with the natural world?
- ~What are our stories, why are they important to us and how do they impact our traditions and choices?

Rhythm: (Learning Group: 5-7 year olds; part of 2 year loop with Niche)

Listen to your heart beat. Listen to the sparrow's song. Attune yourself to the bee's hum, the approaching rainstorm, the crash of the ocean waves. Feel the changing sensations in your body in response to the subtle shift of the earth's seasons. Witness the bud, bloom, decline and decay of the flower or human. All of these are rhythms – examples of cycles and/or repeating patterns. Rhythms, be they auditory, biological, gravitational or cultural, to name a few, are fundamental to all beings. They shape us, limit us, provide reassurance and move us to dance. They remind us of the greater mystery of which we are a part. While looking through this lens students will explore the rhythms of the water, life, weather, seasonal, musical, physiological, rock and solar/lunar cycles. By observing and identifying different qualities and characteristics students will recognize, predict and be able to continue repeating patterns found in nature, art, music, movement, language, stories and so forth. What are the rhythms that you see, hear, feel, smell, taste and intuit?

Possible Essential Questions:

- ~How does the earth change throughout the year?
- ~What is a cycle?
- ~How do things unfold?
- ~What is the rhythm/story of this place – the water, weather, seasons, rocks, soil, plants, organisms?
- ~What is the rhythm of the sun, earth, moon and stars?

Abundance: (Learning Group: 7-10 year olds; part of 3 year loop with Symbiosis & Homeostasis)

Abundance vs. scarcity, needs vs. wants, wealth vs. poverty, have vs. have-nots. This lens examines the potential for shifting the current human paradigm from scarcity and limits, which creates economic, political, environmental and social

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conditions in which some have and many go without, to the perspective of abundance, biodiversity and quality of life. By recognizing the sheer profusion and inherent significance of the energy, matter, complexity and diversity present in the universe, humans can make the choices necessary to live a fulfilled life in harmony with the natural world. Through this lens, students will study the composition, physical characteristics and changing dynamic of matter and energy, the interactions and implications of Earth's dynamic

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systems (geosphere, hydrosphere, atmosphere, and biosphere), and the economic, environmental, political, social and cultural stories that are the basis for human's understanding and experience of abundance and/or scarcity. They will be encouraged to take on projects that work for change, celebrate the abundance of the universe and promote social, environmental and economic justice.

Possible Essential Questions:

- ~What systems sustain/impact life on Earth and in what way?
- ~What do we need and do we need all that we have?
- ~How do matter and energy flow through the Universe?
- ~How were the Universe and Earth formed?
- ~How has humans awareness, understanding and explanation of the universe, world and their local bioregion impacted their use of the natural world, their cultural understandings and their expansion upon the Earth?
- ~How is the sun integral to the story of the Earth?
- ~Is our story changing the Universe/Earth and/or is the Universe/Earth changing our story?
- ~How do organisms align themselves with the powers and laws of nature in order to benefit from them?
- ~What is the concept of "Cradle-to-Cradle"?

Symbiosis: (Learning Group: 7-10 year olds; part of 3 year loop with Abundance & Homeostasis)

"In the very first instant when the primitive particles rushed forth, every one of them was connected to every other one in the entire universe. At no time in the future existence of the universe would they ever arrive at a point of disconnection...

Nothing is itself without everything else." (The Universe Story, Swimme & Berry)

Humans, like every other particle of matter and form of energy, emerged from the creativity of the Universe. To say that we are in relationship with the Universe and Earth and all their manifestations would be an understatement. We are completely dependent upon them for our existence and survival. We are them and they are us. The current anthropocentric view eschews our reliance on and responsibility to the natural world, denying its importance for our continued existence, yet the interdependence of all living and non-living things is an undeniable reality. This lens focuses on this kinship and the agreements, principles and natural laws that are the foundation for these relationships. How do organisms (and how can humans) live in a mutually enhancing relationship within the systems of nature to sustainably nourish themselves, the earth and all its inhabitants? In exploring this concept students will study the organization of and interrelationships within biological, celestial, political and social systems. They will investigate food webs, organ systems, lunar phases, constellations, human culture and civics as examples of the analogous interconnectivity of all things.

Possible Essential Questions:

- ~Is diversity necessary for sustaining any given system?

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- ~What do sustainable relationships, buildings, designs, agriculture, etc. look like?
- ~Are there correlations between the emergence, success and decline of human cultures and that of other organisms/ecosystems?
- ~What is permaculture?
- ~How does our understanding of the human story over time shaped our assumptions about the world, choices and relationship with the earth and other beings?

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~Is the human story changing the earth and/or is the earth changing our human story?

Homeostasis: (Learning Group: 7-10 year olds; part of 3 year loop with Symbiosis & Abundance)

Why does a snake sun itself on a rock? Why do we like certain foods? Because it feels 'good' or 'right'? What does that mean? Organisms are complex systems living within larger complex systems in which they are continuously seeking a 'feel good' state of equilibrium. Internal and external factors indicate what items are needed to perpetuate this state by filling the organism's needs – be they physical, emotional or cultural, innate or learned. Homeostasis, or this state of equilibrium, is the dynamic regulation of the components of a system, in response to change, in an effort to maintain a constant, stable condition. The snake sunning itself on a rock, the pancreas' release of insulin to regulate blood glucose, the geological discharge of pressure through plate tectonics and earthquakes, the impact of the carrying capacity of an ecosystem on the populations of predators and prey, a cell's intake of nutrients and release of waste, the environmental effects of and responses to global warming, the political and cultural changes caused by a shift in leadership, as well as the 'rising up' of a group with a focus on change (biological, political, cultural, etc.) and the resulting return to balance are all examples of the dynamic nature of homeostasis.

Change is inevitable and often uncomfortable. Most change occurs on a biological and/or physiological level requiring no cognitive thought or intention but rather relying on the wisdom of the living system for resolution. Other changes result from instinctive and/or conscious choices made by an organism within a given circumstance. Either way, the fundamental tendency of homeostatic regulation exists on all levels of systems and guides their unfolding as they seek to achieve internal and external stability. Through this lens, students will explore the cycles of conflict, change/growth/choice and resolution/homeostasis within different systems by examining things such as the following: the complex interactions within and between the systems of the human body; the impact of natural laws and principles as they apply to motion, force and energy transformation; the geological and geographical evolution of their bioregion (Big Bang to current day) and its corresponding effects on, and opportunities created for, local populations (including humans); and the dynamic equilibrium evident within the unfolding of the universe, the earth, bioregional ecosystems and individual organisms.

Possible Essential Question:

~How do the organizing systems, rhythms and relationships of the earth, and all its elements, demonstrate the principles and powers of the universe?

~How was the universe formed?

~What is our current understanding of the universe?

~What systems sustain/impact life on earth and how have they shaped the earth's features?

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~How do/have geological systems inform geographical boundaries and impact local ecosystems (including humans)?  
~Do natural 'disasters' replenish the earth's health?  
~Why and how are all organisms present within an ecosystem important to the balance and harmony of that ecosystem?

Emergence: (Learning Group: 10-13 year olds; part of 3 year loop with Reciprocity & Transformation)

How is it that a single cell can become a complex human being? How does a bee colony

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function as a community? What is the process by which new words are created and become part of a language? Each of these examples demonstrates emergence – the self-organization that takes place as a result of a multiplicity of relatively simple, sometime seemingly unrelated, interactions which leads in turn to the creation of complex adaptive systems. Within any emergent system the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts. By exploring the components of multicellular organisms, the geological and weather processes that act to shape the earth and tell it's story, the appearance of color from light, the characteristics and transformation of energy in its many forms, the parallels between the birth and evolution of the universe and the birth and evolution of humans (2.6 million years ago until 3000BCE (through the Neolithic period)), and the self-organizing properties of different human systems such as the Internet, stock market and grassroots organizations, as well as those of biological and geographical systems, students will understand the complexity inherent in and continually arising from emergent systems. This exploration is intended to cultivate not only a sense of wonder and awe for the intrinsic intelligence of the universe, but also a deep understanding of the impact of humans on the earth and a corollary sense of responsibility for one's choices.

Possible Essential Questions:

~How do random variables come together through creative possibility to form new and unanticipated properties, organisms, etc.?

~How is self-organization demonstrated?

~What is creativity?

~What is life/living?

~

Transformation: (Learning Group: 10-13 year olds; part of 3 year loop with Reciprocity & Emergence)

“Many of the inventions of the natural world arose out of beings meeting the constraints of the universe with creative responses.” (The Universe Story, Swimme & Berry)

As humans grow and develop they become more aware of their power to transform – themselves, their environment, their relationships, their community, country and the world. The realization that even small shifts in behavior and choices can have larger, systemic consequences results in individuals who know that they can make a difference on both a personal and a global scale. Understanding the proliferation of transformations that has occurred from the beginning of the universe up to this point and whose sequence created all that is today, as well as those occurring on both micro and macro levels at any given moment, the limitations and opportunities caused by such, and that the students themselves are only one instance of such change, gives students the perspective necessary for responsible, respectful decision-making.

This lens explores this continual, ever-changing unfolding of the universe, earth and human through the study of chemical reactions; the concepts of biodiversity, genetics, adaptation, evolution and extinction; the immense influence  
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of the invention of writing; the use, and evolution, of mapmaking as a way to represent and perceive the earth and the subsequent effects on human migration, exploration, trade and 'usage' of the earth; as well as the systemic view of human and planetary history during the period of classical human civilizations (3500 BCE to 1500CE).

Possible Essential Questions:

~What traits, skills and abilities do I need in order to lead humanity into a sustainable future?

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Reciprocity: (Learning Group: 10-13 year olds; part of 3 year loop with Transformation & Emergence)

Interdependence. Give and take. Justice. Ethics. Morality. All of these ideas are integral to reciprocal relationships, whether they are between beings of the same or of different species. A social phenomenon that allows for the existence of systems and organizations, reciprocity refers to the interrelationships, commitment and energetic dynamics between the members of any system, be they ecological, political, solar, physiological, cultural, etc.

Through this lens students will study the interactions and relationships of atoms, molecules, elements, matter and energy; the global human story from 1500 CE to current day (Rise of Nations), specifically in terms of political and cultural systems; the mutually supporting cycle of respiration and photosynthesis; the individual characteristics of, and interrelationships between, the members of our solar system as well as the Milky Way's place within the universe and its story; the transformational impact of certain scientific discoveries and theories on human's story, understanding and treatment of the earth; the give and take of economic systems.

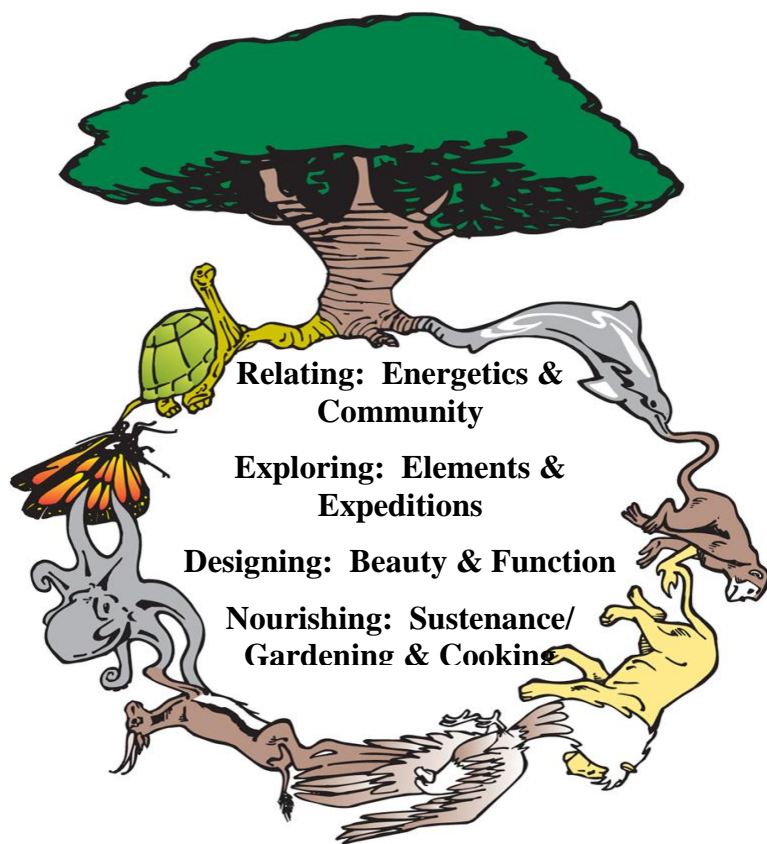
Possible Essential Questions:

~What is the relationship between respect for self and respect for the environment?

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## Key Learning Experiences

In addition to focused study in the fundamental skills of reading, writing and math, we have chosen to organize our instruction into interdisciplinary Key Learning Experiences, instead of separate content areas. Our intention is to articulate a curriculum that will cultivate Earth Literacy and sustainable living practices through practical applications of knowledge and skills within hands-on experiences in a larger, systems-thinking context. Our four Key Learning Experiences (KLE) – Relating: Energetics & Community; Exploring: Elements & Expeditions; Designing: Beauty & Function; and Nourishing: Sustenance/Gardening & Cooking – offer students opportunities to develop critical knowledge, skills and problem-solving capabilities within practical, empowering, real-world experiences. Although the focus of the content changes each year as defined by the integrating lens, the Key Learning Experiences remain constant as the means for exploring all content, K-8.



## **Relating: Energetics & Community:**

The Relating: Energetics & Community Key Learning Experience focuses on the dynamic interplay between time, space, matter and energy that results in light, sound, movement, expression, communication (both verbal and non-verbal) and group/community dynamics and systems. Through this KLE, using the natural laws and principles of the universe as the guiding force, students will understand:

- ~all organisms are constantly sensing, and in communication with, their internal/external environments and each other via non-verbal and verbal means;
- ~the energy that was created/released at the birth of our universe is constantly recycled within the system of the universe. Organisms (food intake & storage – energy expended) are an intimate part of this cycle;
- ~all organisms react to the communications they receive with immediate impulse responses as well as learned responses;
- ~communication is a constant cycle of sending and receiving information, oftentimes with choices made each step of the way;
- ~non-verbal communication includes heat, light, chemicals, images, sound, movement/gestures, etc.;
- ~verbal communication includes written symbols/words, sounds and spoken language. How this is expressed varies by species and/or culture;
- ~all forms of communication can express feelings and thoughts, cause responses in others and cause physiological/psychological changes;
- ~some organisms use storytelling to create meaning and/or a context, and to share information and experiences;
- ~organisms communicate for individual and/or community protection, reproduction and survival;
- ~different organisms systematize their communities in a variety of ways based on needs, environment and other factors;
- ~organism communities rely on certain systemic roles, assumptions and structures (and the proper communication of them) for homeostasis and self-perpetuation;
- ~a failure of an element within a community system can cause the adaptation and/or collapse of that community.

Student will explore these concepts/understandings through a variety of experiences such as: how sound evolved into music and language; verbal and non-verbal communication and its impact on group dynamics; the evolution of language – written and spoken; Greek and Latin language roots; the study of communities (insect, animal, human, etc); the study of human governmental systems (historical place, similarities/differences, reasons for success/failure, etc.); tracking; yoga; dance; and eurythmy.

## Exploring: Elements & Expeditions

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The Exploring: Elements & Expeditions Key Learning Experience focuses on reconnecting with, and immersion in, the natural world in a way that is fun, safe and respectful. This KLE teaches environmental awareness, responsibility and ethics as well as skills for living in an outdoor environment comfortably, safely and with little or no impact. Through this KLE students will learn/understand:

- ~basic first aid and safety;
- ~how to identify and avoid environmental hazards (physical landscape, animals, etc.);
- ~components of the biosphere (Gaia hypothesis);
- ~astronomy - the origin, evolution and structure of the universe;
- ~minimum-impact camping;
- ~knot tying;
- ~trip preparation and planning (gear, transportation, budget, etc.);
- ~food preparation and storage;
- ~map and compass reading (orienteeing);
- ~the landscape and forces that inform and affect the many different bioregions of the earth;
- ~how to anticipate, be prepared for and respond to changes in the weather;
- ~shelter building;
- ~safe fire making and tending;
- ~the importance and availability of, as well as the human impact on, safe drinking water;
- ~how to find and/or filter safe (potable) water;
- ~tool/knife making;
- ~a deeper awareness of place;
- ~tracking skills...

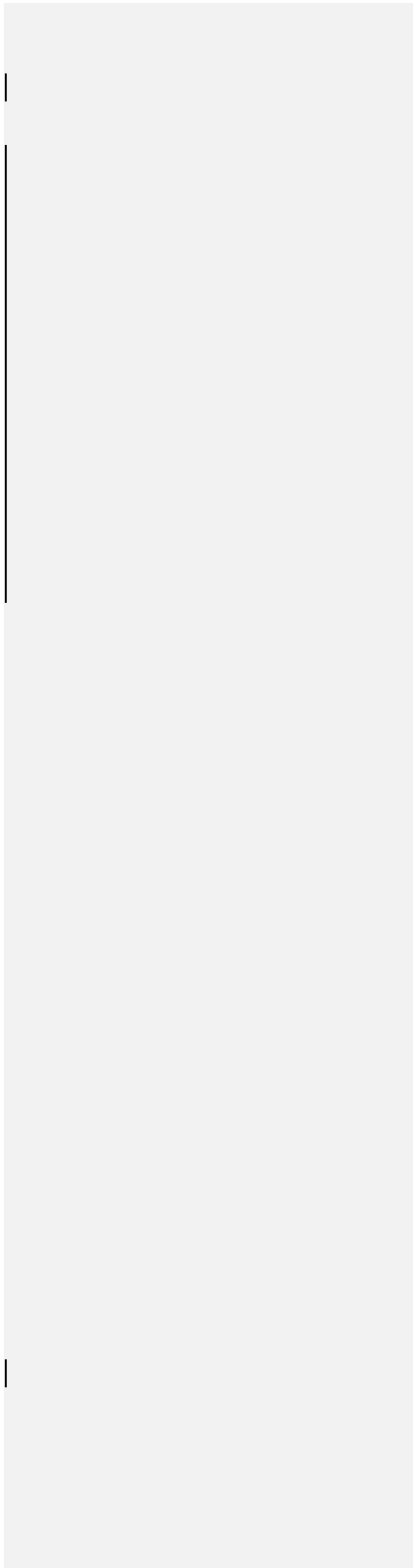
As a means of exploring these concepts students will engage in many experiences including short-term and extended low/no-impact hiking, camping and expeditions; quiet, individual immersion in, and observations of, nature including the night sky; teambuilding and personal challenge experiences; and culminating experiences such as Earth Olympics and multi-day expeditions.

## **Designing: Beauty & Function:**

The Designing: Beauty & Function Key Learning Experience focuses on the impulse for creative expression that arises through the design and construction of functional and/or beautiful (and ideally sustainable!) tools, art, structures and systems. In the course of exploring this impulse students will understand:

- ~many different species make and use tools;
- ~tools, art, structures and systems are made of available natural and/or manmade materials;
- ~tool, art, structure and system design reflect the time, place and culture of their creation;
- ~some designs are intended to be purely functional while others unite function and beauty;
- ~design is informed by the natural laws and principles of the universe and the designer's understanding of them;
- ~the most sustainable, and aesthetically pleasing(???), designs mimic those found in nature;

Student will explore these concepts/understandings through a variety of experiences such as: designing simple tools from common objects; learning the safe use and care of tools; making different knots for different purposes; carving & whittling; finger knitting; weaving, papermaking; sewing; knitting; woodworking; felting; spinning; throwing pottery; using natural dyeing techniques; applying the principles of permaculture; applying sustainable design and construction methods (Jr. Solar Sprints, cradle to cradle, strawbale, etc.); painting; collage work; printmaking; observing and drawing as meditation (seeing vs. looking); and gesture drawings.



## **Nourishing: Sustenance/Gardening & Cooking**

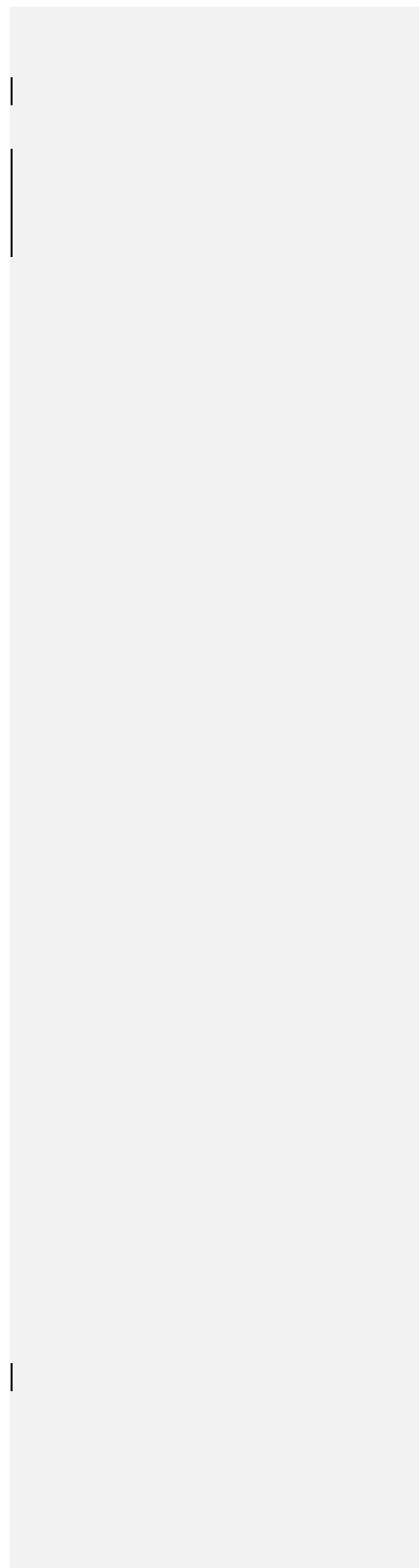
The Nourishing: Sustenance/Gardening & Cooking Key Learning Experience focuses on an element fundamental to all organisms' survival – food. This KLE explores the primal relationship between life and food. As a result of this KLE students will understand:

- ~seasons, weather, bioregional ecosystems and food webs;
- ~the principles of diversity, supply, demand, abundance, scarcity and carrying

capacity;

- ~the essentials and chemistry of nutritional needs (food as fuel);
- ~the impact of 'place' on dietary adaptations and culture;
- ~foraging and the history of agriculture;
- ~the far-reaching effects of distance vs. local foods;
- ~the technologizing of food through the use of pesticides, hormones,  
antibiotics, genetically modified organisms and the factory model;
- ~the politics of food...

As a means of exploring these concepts students will engage in many activities including gardening and cooking. They will follow the seasons as they plan, prepare, till, sow and maintain the garden as well as when they gather, prepare, preserve and consume its harvest.



## **Seasonally Based Trimesters**

In an effort to support our innate awareness of and connection to the natural rhythms of the earth and ultimately encourage sustainable human behaviors we have divided our school year into 3 trimesters, which correspond with the 3 seasons of the year during which school occurs – Fall, Winter and Spring. The educational experiences offered during these times draw inspiration from the seasonal elements and seek to further the learner’s sense of connection. Additionally, since life and learning never take a vacation, we recognize Summer as an important time for individual and family growth and have many families who continue involvement in the school during that time through volunteer projects such as tending our organic school garden.