

PART III - SUMMARY

A Frontier for Learning – a phrase mounted physically at the school’s entrance and taken literally and figuratively in classroom instruction and activities -- forms the foundation of Moreland Ridge Middle School in Blue Springs, Missouri. Moreland Ridge, a suburban school in the Blue Springs R-IV School District, is located 20 miles east of Kansas City, serving grades six, seven, and eight since 1996 in a beautiful, well-maintained facility. Designed specifically to meet the needs of young adolescents and their families, the facility is a one-story brick building, looking and feeling new largely due to the pride of ownership shared by all stakeholders, including an outstanding custodial staff who keeps the building and grounds clean and well-maintained.

Despite a current population of nearly 1000 students, MRMS maintains a “small-school feel” by utilizing the building design to divide all students into grade level learning communities, each with its own commons area for socialization activities necessary for adolescents. To further personalize instruction, grade levels subdivide into teams comprised of no more than 125 students and 5 teachers. Through these teams, students experience the *Frontier for Learning*, receiving core instruction and opportunities for personal development in a caring, family-like atmosphere. The MRMS culture emphasizes positive character development. Respect, for self and others, is an expectation of everyone – students and adults.

The Moreland Ridge culture and climate flourish under the leadership of its original principal, who sets the intellectual and interpersonal tone of the school and shapes the organizational structure for the school. A site-based Faculty Leadership committee shares this leadership role by making decisions and leading the school in collaboration. Collegiality, professional development, and the development of leaders are hallmarks of Moreland Ridge. Leadership-building skills also extend to students as MRMS student leaders begin each school year by hosting a district-wide, middle-level leadership conference for student colleagues across the city.

With Moreland Ridge faculty and students united behind the husky mascot and the school colors of forest green, silver, black, and white, the staff separates the *Frontier for Learning* theme into three specific learning regions – Northern Exposure, Sea Quest, and Space: The Final Frontier – each providing the building focus for one year of a three-year rotation. In each frontier, students incorporate team names, literature units, and building competitions related to these annual themes.

District middle school boundary changes in 1998 created the school’s most significant milestone. That spring, MRMS staff welcomed 13 new staff members and began laying the groundwork to assimilate 300 additional students to MRMS that fall. One of the critical challenges accomplished by the staff that year was easing the transition for such a large number of new staff and students, enabling all to feel at home as Moreland Ridge Huskies.

Moreland Ridge met another milestone by completing its five-year technology plan. Through this systematic plan and in-house fundraising efforts totaling approximately \$100,000, MRMS teachers and students now have access to a fully equipped writing lab and a multimedia station in each classroom. A new long-term plan secures Moreland Ridge’s position at the forefront of technology.

An on-going challenge faced by the MRMS staff has been to provide appropriate and rigorous coursework for students with special needs. In 1999, district changes in services for disabled students increased the special education population at Moreland Ridge. MRMS met this challenge through persistently acquiring paraprofessional aides who provide one-on-one assistance for students with handicapping conditions such as visual/hearing impairment and autism. In-service training for the entire staff further facilitates these mainstreamed, special needs students.

The Moreland Ridge Library Media Center (LMC) is the heart of the school, both physically and metaphorically. Well-equipped with technological and print resources, adolescent literature, periodicals, professional literature, and a parenting library, the LMC is utilized extensively before, during, and after school hours. This spacious, carpeted room, furnished with oak tables and chairs upholstered in Moreland Ridge green, provides a beautiful and serene setting for classes and special activities. These activities include medieval feasts, spelling bees, guest speakers, culminating programs for cross-curricular units

like the Dickens Day tea, and TLC (Tutoring, Library, and Computers), a Tuesday evening study program for students and families.

Moreland Ridge offers students an abundance of co-curricular activities. Approximately 70% of the student body participates in at least one club or school team. The MRMS faculty commitment to these activities is exemplary with 84% of the staff sponsoring and/or coaching co-curricular activities. Students and community organizations use MRMS from early morning until late evening nearly every day of the week.

MRMS teachers and administrators value parental involvement. Recognizing the transition from elementary to middle school can be an adjustment for parents as well as for students, MRMS staff members invite students and their parents to a social time in a local park before the school year begins. Hundreds of parents attend PTSA programs, and 100% of the parents receive a personal invitation to attend parent/teacher conferences every year. Parents fill the bleachers for athletic events and concerts. Parent volunteers help regularly with various MRMS services and activities. Newsletters, monthly calendars, and other school-to-home communication keep parents involved in their student's education. Moreland Ridge's commitment to family relationships includes annual participation in Blue Springs Family Week activities. Last year, a Moreland Ridge family, nominated by the staff, received the city's top Family of the Year honors.

Moreland Ridge staff and students uphold a reputation for excellence. Many other school districts send representatives to visit MRMS, glean insights about climate, culture, and successful implementation of middle school philosophy and programs. Various awards, such as the University of Missouri Partnership *Outstanding School Award*, the National Middle School Association's *Teams That Make A Difference Award*, and the Missouri Middle School Association's *Team Teaching Award*, earned by Moreland Ridge staff members, recognize the staff's dedication to quality education. Through an Adopt-a-School partnership with a local McDonald's franchise owner, MRMS students also gain recognition for excellence in academics and outstanding Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) test performance.

The MRMS mission states: *Moreland Ridge Middle School builds a cooperative and collaborative partnership with families and the community to establish a frontier for learning for its students. Through this partnership, students are nurtured, encouraged, challenged, and inspired as they develop the knowledge and leadership skills necessary to become educated, responsible citizens.* This mission reflects not only the vision of the MRMS staff, but also the expectations of the surrounding Blue Springs community. Our students represent a variety of different backgrounds, but all MRMS parents appreciate the high standards upheld by the Moreland Ridge staff.

Moreland Ridge is a young school that is quickly developing traditions, creating a reputation of excellence, and building an educational community focused on high expectations for all students and staff. At Moreland Ridge, we take an active role in preparing students for their futures. The highest level of student learning is our purpose.

PART IV – VISION/MISSION STATEMENT

Moreland Ridge Middle School builds a cooperative and collaborative partnership with families and the community to establish a frontier for learning for its students. Through this partnership, students are nurtured, encouraged, challenged, and inspired as they develop the knowledge and leadership skills necessary to become educated, responsible citizens.

The Moreland Ridge Middle School mission, in conjunction with specific school goals written and reviewed annually, forms the foundation for all decisions regarding curriculum and instruction at MRMS. School goals, known as the School Improvement Plan (SIP), parallel the Blue Springs R-IV School District's Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP) that, in turn, addresses the Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP).

This year's district-level (CSIP) goals are to improve student achievement, reduce the dropout rate, and improve vocational placement. Moreland Ridge goals (SIP), in keeping with the MRMS vision/mission, further define student achievement, relating it to knowledge acquisition and student performance on the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) tests. To instill the skills of educated, responsible citizenry, MRMS SIP goals include an emphasis on good and faithful attendance, a service for students who demonstrate at-risk behaviors, and opportunities for career exploration. School climate expectations, through which teachers nurture, encourage, challenge, and inspire students, outline the collaborative vision of Moreland Ridge in the areas of academic, physical, organizational, and social climate.

Moreland Ridge is a welcoming, comfortable, and fun place with clearly defined goals and mission. This mission statement, attractively displayed in all classrooms, leads all MRMS teachers to establish a *Frontier for Learning* in each classroom.

PART V – LEARNING-CENTERED SCHOOLS CRITERIA

A. Student Focus and Support

A1. How is the school’s population best described? What are the students’ needs? How does the school assure that the needs of all students are met?

When Moreland Ridge Middle School opened its doors in 1996, it welcomed approximately 600 sixth, seventh, and eighth graders. Reconfiguring district boundaries in 1998 increased enrollment by an additional 300 students. MRMS now educates 985 students, making it the largest of four middle schools in the Blue Springs R-IV School District, a suburban district located east of Kansas City, Missouri. The MRMS student population is approximately 92% Caucasian, 4% African American, 3% Hispanic, 1% Asian, and less than 1% American Indian. Low socioeconomic students, as measured by the number of free/reduced lunches, compose only 7% of the student body.

MRMS staff determines student needs through the analysis of assessment data, student and parent surveys, and educational research. Curriculum addresses needs indicated by formal and informal assessments, such as Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) results (H1) and daily student work. Student and parent surveys provide feedback about the effectiveness of programs and practices in meeting student needs. MRMS staff designs and implements curriculum that incorporates current information about learning styles, multiple intelligences, and brain-based research (D1). For example, teachers utilize research on kinesthetic learning by incorporating hands-on experiences and simulations across the curriculum. The daily schedule provides the routine and structure that research finds necessary for academic success. Lessons about friendship skills provide the basis for meeting the students’ changing social/emotional needs. To accommodate the students’ growing needs for independence, staff provides opportunities for students to develop effective organizational and personal management skills. School clubs further nurture this independence by providing an atmosphere conducive to the development of leadership skills.

Student placement, both on heterogeneous academic teams and in special learning environments, further illustrates Moreland Ridge’s vision to nurture, encourage, challenge, and inspire all students. MRMS students with learning disabilities receive services through an Individual Educational Program (IEP) that emphasizes instruction in the regular core classroom, minimizing academic segregation and preserving student egos. Students with autism and severe language disorders receive services in both the core classrooms and a cross-categorical classroom designed to meet individual student needs. The English as a Second Language program supports culturally diverse students by providing additional help in using English socially and academically. STRETCH, the gifted/talented program at MRMS, provides enrichment opportunities to challenge students with high proficiencies in math and communication arts (C2, C3). In addition to addressing the academic needs of all students, a comprehensive counseling program meets the diverse social and emotional needs of students. This program includes an at-risk and student referral program (A2).

Through a comprehensive system of needs analysis, all students at MRMS succeed in an environment that nurtures, encourages, challenges, and inspires students to develop the knowledge and leadership skills to become educated, responsible citizens.

A2. What nonacademic services and programs are available to support students, and how do they relate to the student needs and school goals identified?

Moreland Ridge’s comprehensive support services and programs meet a full range of student needs. From advisory to counseling support groups, these non-academic programs, woven throughout the school structure, form a valued complement to the MRMS academic curriculum. All are available to all MRMS students, regardless of disability or special needs.

All Moreland Ridge Huskies begin and end each day in PACK (Programs, Activities, and Communicating with Kids), the school’s advisory program. In the same way that husky dogs receive support from the pack while exploring frontiers, this student support group incorporates both the school’s mascot and the ongoing MRMS theme, *A Frontier for Learning*. In addition to traditional homeroom

duties, PACK provides students with numerous opportunities for personal and social growth. Age-appropriate PACK activities teach interpersonal relationship building and organizational strategies to maximize student academic success. PACK teachers bond with students, forming friendships and serving as the liaison between home and school.

MRMS takes a proactive approach to student health, screening all students for scoliosis and providing other health-related services (G3), such as seventh grade vision screening and free Hepatitis B immunizations. This year 54% of the sixth graders took advantage of this service. Growth and development presentations, coordinated annually with district personnel, service 99% of sixth graders. In addition to these services, a full-time health aide treats sick and injured students, administers asthma treatments, monitors blood sugar, and dispenses prescription medication. These services promote good health and maximize student attendance.

The CLEEO (Campus Law Enforcement Education Officer) program (B4) offers another non-academic resource for student support. A cooperative venture between the school district and the Youth Outreach Unit of the local police department, CLEEO integrates health, safety, and legal issues to all students (C1) while establishing rapport between students and local police.

Another effective nonacademic service offered to MRMS students is Choices, a program that currently meets the needs of 135 students (14%), identified by observable behaviors that may prevent academic and/or social success. Upon reviewing student referrals, the Choices committee often recommends additional monitoring or connections to staff members through the Buddy Program. Relationships fostered through this program raise student self-esteem and trust in adults, increasing both academic and social success in school. Activities, such as the monthly Buddy Breakfast, are successful because teachers care about students and donate time to serve as positive role models for students.

Three MRMS full-time counselors meet with students throughout the day, providing nonacademic assistance to individuals/small groups. By design, each counselor services only one grade, moving with students through middle school. This model fosters close counselor-student relationships and enables support staff to stay in touch with student needs and to monitor success from one grade level to the next (A3). To benefit at-risk students, MRMS counselors also offer nonacademic assistance by facilitating small support groups focused on topics such as families in transition, grief/loss, school success, substance abuse, anger management, and self esteem. Last year, 8% participated in one or more of these programs. Finally, counselors train students to help others through such organizations as Peer Tutors and First Friends, an organization formed to help new students feel at home (A3). Last year, 60 students (7%) were peer tutors. First Friends, new to MRMS this year, is currently forming.

PACK, health services, CLEEO, Choices, and the various counseling programs integrated throughout the total school program contribute to the physical and emotional health of MRMS students while building collaborative and cooperative partnerships with families and the community, further establishing MRMS as a *Frontier for Learning*.

A3. How does the school determine and address the developmental needs of students as they move from grade to grade?

Central to the middle school concept is the philosophy that educators respond to unique needs of students in transition. MRMS staff embraces this concept and seeks to meet developmental needs of students through a three-fold process. First, teachers from all grade levels align content-area curricula (C4), ensuring that foundation of prerequisite knowledge/skills is in place. Collaboration Days (E2), funded by MRMS Professional Development Committee (E1), illustrate building support of this concept. Next, teachers routinely assess student progress, using data to identify individual student strengths and weaknesses as well as areas where curricular and instructional changes are appropriate. Finally, staff stays current with the latest educational research through graduate classes, professional journals and conferences, articles, and brochures, such as Master Teacher™, shared by administrators and peers.

The transition to MRMS begins in fifth grade when the counselor working with this group for the next three years visits each feeder elementary school in late winter, presenting a multimedia presentation that answers questions about sixth grade at MRMS. A few weeks later, these fifth graders come to

MRMS for lunch, a building tour, and a panel discussion facilitated by staff and students. New sixth graders receive additional care and attention during the first few weeks of school as MRMS staff helps these students acclimate to the new environment by introducing team and school expectations, refining organizational strategies, conducting building tours, and teaching students to open lockers.

Before the school year begins, orientation presentations welcome incoming sixth graders and all new students to MRMS. Both new and returning students and parents meet the core teaching teams at informal gatherings held at a local park. Last summer, over 50% of the students and parents attended one of these Socials in the Park. This year, MRMS also offers all new students a chance to join First Friends, a group that pairs new students with “veteran” students. To meet the needs of students with unique disabilities, the special education team conducts individual tours for students in the cross-categorical class (C3). Shortly after school begins each fall, all grade levels host Open House nights to initiate communication with parents and to provide team information. This year, parents representing over 73% of MRMS students attended Open House nights.

Numerous activities assist eighth graders in the transition from middle school to high school. Students begin transitioning in the fall of eighth grade with career education units and a visit to vocational technology facilities that encourage students to focus on a career pathway. Later in the year, high school students as well as the Freshmen Center principal and counselors conduct forums to review expectations and address questions about high school. Because Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) test results affect high school course availability, upperclassmen visit with eighth graders, emphasizing the importance of performing well on these tests. An evening informational meeting, held at the Freshmen Center, further eases this transition for students and parents. Members of the MRMS special education team coordinate information about students on IEP’s with Freshmen Center counselors and offer an enrollment help session for parents, facilitating transition for learning disabled students.

A4. What co-curricular activities are available for students and how do those activities extend the academic curriculum?

Research shows a strong correlation between academic success and participation in extra-curricular activities. To foster this involvement in school activities and to accommodate the diverse skills and interests of the student population, MRMS offers a wide variety of co-curricular activities at no cost to all students. These activities enable students to gather socially with others who share common interests and talents in athletics, music, service, and other special interest areas. Currently, 64% of male and 74% of female students participate in these activities.

The Missouri State High School Activities Association limits participation in interscholastic sports to eighth grade; however, all intramural sports are open to every MRMS student. All eighth grade students with an interest in competitive athletics are encouraged to participate in the interscholastic sports of football, volleyball, cross-country, basketball, and track. Intramural sports include softball, flag football, volleyball, cheerleading, basketball, wrestling, and soccer.

Instrumental and vocal music groups allow students with musical aspirations and abilities to explore and refine these talents. Instrumental groups, including Jazz Band, Ridge Ringers and two additional handbell choirs, plus vocal groups, such as Honors Choir and Music Makers, perform at school concerts and community events, receiving numerous performance awards over the years.

Service clubs, such as Peer Mediators and Peer Tutors, develop students’ interpersonal skills while providing valuable service to others. Circle of Friends, unique to MRMS, pairs interested regular education students with peers from the cross-categorical class (C2, C3), giving both groups opportunities for positive interaction and friendship building through activities such as bowling and baking cookies.

Many academic-based teams and clubs include Scholar Bowl, Science Olympiad, Science Club, Science Fair Club, Math Club, Ridge Readers, Computer Club, and Strategizers, a team which competes with other schools in multicultural strategy games such as chess. Student writers and photographers contribute to the school newspaper and yearbook, while actors practice theatrical arts, preparing for forensics competitions and school plays.

While both teachers and students promote these organizations, students actively direct many club activities. For example, student surveys completed by the MRMS Ridge Readers formed the basis for this year's activities. Staff also utilizes community feedback to evaluate co-curricular offerings, such as the addition of wrestling intramurals in response to parent requests. Currently, 70% of MRMS students participate in various co-curricular programs. High participation rates reflect the enthusiasm of sponsors and the wide variety of programs offered to meet student needs.

A5. How does the school address the accessibility of its facilities to students and others with disabilities?

Moreland Ridge architects created a modern facility that conforms to all requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The facility is a one-level building, equipped with handicapped-accessible restrooms, water fountains, and lockers, with optional push-button locks. Wide front doors and hallways exist to facilitate wheelchair movement. Braille signage, located at each door and hallway, assists visually impaired students. Ramps and rails, leading from the building to the athletic field, and parking lots with modified curbs and designated handicapped parking spaces make the facility accessible to all students, parents, and community members with disabilities.

MRMS provides many support programs, paraprofessional staff members, and technological aids to maximize the achievement of students with disabilities. Programs, such as speech/language, occupational therapy, adaptive physical education, and hearing and visually impaired instruction, provide individual or small group assistance to students with special needs. Eleven paraprofessionals supply academic and emotional support in regular and special classes. Assistive technologies, such as audio books, screen reading software, and Braille machinery, encourage visually impaired students to be more independent, while an Augmentative Communication Device allows nonverbal users to communicate through synthesized speech. Additionally, AlphaSmarts™, portable word processors, allow students with fine motor difficulties to type written work before uploading the document onto a computer for editing and printing. These programs and the support from special education teachers and other support staff enable disabled students to fully benefit from academic and nonacademic opportunities at MRMS.

B. School Organization and Culture

B1. How does the culture of your school support the learning of all its members and foster a caring community?

High academic expectations within a caring, safe, and nurturing community define the culture of Moreland Ridge Middle School. Not only do teachers and parents expect students to excel, but students also have high expectations for academic success and make responsible decisions about learning. MRMS is indeed *A Frontier for Learning*. In 2001, staff, parents, and friends honored 51% of the student population at academic achievement ceremonies recognizing students maintaining a 3.5 GPA or better. Students confirm that MRMS is a place where learning, safety, and civility are valued and supported.

The staff believes that school climate significantly affects student achievement. MRMS Faculty Leadership (F1) revisits and revises school climate expectations annually. These expectations fall into four categories: academic, physical, organizational, and social. Academic climate expectations begin by identifying student learning as the top priority. Others establish an environment where expectations are high but reasonable, achievements acknowledged and rewarded, instructional time valued, and professional development encouraged. To meet academic climate expectations, teachers work collaboratively, meeting the needs of diverse learners by applying learning to real life experiences. Physical climate expectations create an environment that is safe, secure, and conducive to learning while emphasizing the importance of physical aspects such as building maintenance and availability of current resources and technology. Organizational climate expectations state that school rules are reasonable, clear, and widely communicated. These rules follow guidelines about middle school philosophy outlined by the National Middle School Association. The organizational structure, valued and supported by the administration, empowers teachers and students to actively participate in the decision-making process. Social climate expectations create an aura of respect and trust that permeates the school. MRMS is a

welcoming, comfortable, and fun place where diversity is valued and student needs are recognized and met through classroom activities and an abundance of extracurricular activities (A4). MRMS staff enjoys young adolescents, and the students enjoy coming to MRMS.

Administration communicates these expectations to new (E3) and existing staff at the beginning of each year. The principal also presents these expectations to the students through the “Civility Speech” in September grade level assemblies. This speech, delivered with great passion and conviction, addresses appropriate school behavior, vocabulary, and attire while challenging students to “be kind, be proud, treat others as you want to be treated, and help Moreland Ridge be the school with a reputation for civility.” This year’s speech, ironically delivered three times on the morning of September 11, serves as a benchmark of behavior, especially during this time of national crisis.

The culture established by the principal and other stakeholders creates a climate where shared visions become reality (F1). An assessment of this climate occurred in the spring of 2000 through an organizational health survey administered by an out-of-state consulting firm. This survey measured the ability of the MRMS staff to function effectively, to cope adequately, to change appropriately, and to grow from within. The indicators studied were goal focus, communications, power equalization, resource utilization, cohesiveness, morale, innovativeness, autonomy, adaptation, and problem solving adequacy. Significant results validated the school’s culture, indicating that the MRMS staff collectively embraces inquiry, reflection, and decision-making. The consultant, when reviewing nearly perfect scores (99% in all areas but one, which was 98%), told the principal, “We see a school with this kind of data only once every few years. Your only challenge is to maintain.” The staff, having chosen to improve rather than to maintain, teaches students to do the same. Within the classroom, teachers emphasize the importance of ownership in the learning process, designing lessons to teach decision-making skills and encouraging students to regularly set learning goals and monitor progress.

Other districts also recognize MRMS strengths, regularly sending teachers to experience the school culture in action. In Sept. 2001, teachers representing three area districts visited MRMS, gleaning information about academics, organization, professional development, and teaming, while witnessing the high levels of trust and respect existing among staff, students, and parents. Stakeholders often state, “It is the way we are. It’s what makes MRMS different.” Focused on student achievement but still sensitive to student needs, administration empowers teachers who, in turn, empower students to strive for excellence. MRMS is a caring environment, highly conducive to teaching, learning, and student achievement.

B2. What opportunities do students have to build sustained and caring relationships with teachers and other adults? How does the school promote a healthy peer climate among the students?

The positive school climate at MRMS creates a caring and respectful culture (B1). Age- and grade-level appropriate programs, services, and curriculum give MRMS “a small-school feel” despite an enrollment of almost 1000 students. The teaming structure divides these students into nine teams (three per grade level), each led by four/five teachers who provide all core instruction while forming family atmospheres that foster positive interaction and respect. Core teachers serve as PACK (A2, C1) advisors for groups of 25 students, providing a comfortable and healthy climate. Nine autonomous teams with a shared vision and spirit thrive under one roof. Outside the team structure, counselors and many exploratory teachers work with the same students for three consecutive years, developing long-term caring relationships, thus enhancing the students’ middle school experiences.

Respect is a positive attribute that staff and students value highly. When interviewing teaching applicants, the principal stresses that not only do students respect adults at MRMS, but also MRMS staff members respect students. Teachers empathize with student experiences by listening and sharing personal stories where appropriate. Students know teachers care about them, and this relationship starts “at the curb.” As buses unload each morning, several staff members line the curb and greet students, calling many by name. More staff members, standing in the halls and commons areas, welcome students with “Good morning!” before the first bell sends students to PACK. Students receive an equal amount of caring and concern at the end of each day when boarding the buses to go home.

Outside the school day, 84% of teachers sponsor co-curricular activities (A4), providing additional opportunities to form bonds that last beyond the students' years at MRMS. For example, high school football players return to assist coaches at summer football camps as a reflection of the positive relationships formed with these coaches during middle school. Jazz band students return for counsel and advice from the band teacher. Through these co-curricular activities, students develop citizenship skills and form friendships with peers and adults.

Through Choices (A2), teachers mentor at-risk students in formal and informal settings, sharing, counseling, and having fun through group and "buddy" activities. In addition, counselors promote a healthy peer climate with student support groups, peer mediation, and First Friends (A2), providing caring support for students at Moreland Ridge Middle School.

The Citizens of the Month program allows two outstanding citizens from each team to gather monthly for lunch with the principal, adding to the healthy peer climate at MRMS. Classroom instructional design, including group projects and service learning activities, create opportunities for positive interaction.

Perhaps the greatest example of the emphasis staff places on respect is the *Walk a Mile In My Shoes* unit (F4), developed by teachers to introduce students to the various disabilities served at MRMS. The simulations in this unit increase the students' levels of empathy for peers with disabilities. A student with Treacher's-Collins Syndrome, a disability causing major facial deformity, stated, "No one has ever acknowledged my disability before. They have just stared. Now everyone understands."

B3. How are teachers hired in the school? How are teacher assignments made?

Moreland Ridge Middle School boasts of having an outstanding faculty, doing everything possible to hire only those individuals truly committed to the school goals, objectives, mission (B1), and most importantly, to the needs of students. MRMS coordinates teacher recruitment efforts with the district human resources department, identifying the best possible teacher candidates. District-level personnel screen all applicants by running background checks and verifying certification, then send acceptable applications to MRMS where a collaborative process, involving administration and teachers, begins with a review of the files. In-district transfer requests and outstanding student teachers from within the district receive special consideration in the hiring process, with the most qualified individuals advancing to the interview stage.

During the initial interview process, the principal conducts a standard interview, determining baseline data regarding expertise, education, and experience. Successful applicants, asked to return for a second interview, respond to the concepts outlined by the MRMS School Climate Expectations (B1) and meet current staff members. The interview continues until all stakeholders have a clear understanding of the applicant's commitment to the importance of collegiality, teaming, and enjoying young adolescents, within a rigorous and rich academic environment. Since student learning is the most important academic climate expectation, only teachers who demonstrate a commitment to student learning and possess the knowledge and skill to meet student needs join the MRMS teaching community. Although many may participate in the hiring process, the principal makes the final decision, hiring educators that are student advocates committed to young adolescents and student learning.

The principal then forms teaching teams, matching personalities, certification, and expertise to maximize team strengths. Team assignments change as needed to best benefit the students. Within the past two years, in an effort to keep teams balanced and fluid, the principal reorganized every core teaching team, promoting growth and developing new collaborative relationships among staff members. The principal upholds the philosophy that students learn best when all teaching teams mirror one another in expertise, years of experience, gender when possible, and teaching styles. Building highly effective teaching teams is a major strength of the building principal as demonstrated by student performance (H4) and overall student success and happiness.

B4. What is the school’s plan for school safety, discipline, and drug prevention? What is the record for the past five years?

Moreland Ridge administrators, teachers, and counselors work regularly with local law enforcement agencies, addressing and revising school safety procedures, discipline policies, and drug prevention programs to provide a safe and orderly learning environment at MRMS.

To ensure student and staff safety, MRMS follows several simple, yet significant, security measures. Only one entrance remains unlocked during school hours, securing the building from unsupervised entry. Designated traffic patterns maximize safe travel between classes in staff-monitored hallways. All staff members wear building identification badges, and all guests wear visitor badges. Students needing to leave the room during class carry hall passes. Students store backpacks and coats in lockers to eliminate opportunities to carry unsafe items around the building. Nine staff members wear two-way radios to facilitate immediate communication when necessary. The building is clean and free of clutter, enabling teachers to sight potentially harmful objects. Nine fire, two tornado, and two lock down drills, practiced annually, prepare students and staff for emergencies. A crisis management plan, reviewed annually by the MRMS Crisis Management Team, outlines procedures for other emergencies.

The Blue Springs Youth Outreach Unit (Y.O.U.) provides many services for staff, students, and parents seeking assistance with physical and psychological safety. MRMS administration utilizes Y.O.U. services by referring at-risk students to Y.O.U. programs before major incidents occur and, when necessary, before incidents require legal consideration. Last year, Y.O.U. data document that MRMS submitted the most referrals to the unit (105), yet reported the fewest number of incidents requiring legal action (4), illustrating the success of the proactive approach and support for at-risk students.

The Campus Law Enforcement Education Officer (CLEEO), a major component of Y.O.U., plays a significant role in securing school safety and in providing realistic and grade-level specific drug awareness education to the students. From the squad car in the driveway to the proactive approach involving law enforcement, the presence of a caring police officer in the building enhances the feeling of safety and security. In addition to teaching lessons on safety, legal issues, and drug prevention to 100% of the students, the CLEEO officer also visits with students during lunch shifts, counsels students with disciplinary referrals, and investigates major disciplinary infractions with the assistant principal. In 2001, the Moreland Ridge CLEEO officer received the Greater Kansas City School Counselor Advocate Award, given to people outside the counseling profession whose caring and personal relationships with students and families support school counseling goals and objectives.

Staff, students, and parents work jointly in support of a safety, discipline, and drug prevention plan that is cohesive, workable, and fair. The plan, which aligns with the Missouri Safe Schools Act, includes both district and building policies regarding drug abuse and major disciplinary infractions for staff/students. Parents and students annually review these policies, printed in a Student/Parent Handbook, then sign a Standard of Conduct form which is returned to MRMS and kept on file. PTSA (Parent Teacher Student Association) members also support Red Ribbon Week each October, uniting with staff to remind students about the negative effects of drug use and helping MRMS stay a drug free school with zero tolerance for substance use/abuse.

The district disciplinary scope and sequence categorizes behavioral infractions, establishing consequences for each offense. While the Board of Education handles major legal violations, MRMS administrators review lesser infractions, determining appropriate action based on this scope and sequence. The table below illustrates MRMS data for the past five years:

<u>Type of Offense</u>	96-97	97-98	98-99	99-00	00-01
Tobacco	1.2%		1.0%	0.8%	0.7%
Drugs/Alcohol		0.6%		0.6%	1.0%
Fighting	13.3%	7.7%	1.0%	1.8%	2.2%
Physical Assault		3.1%	1.4%	1.0%	0.3%
Oral Assault		0.6%	2.9%	1.4%	1.2%

In 1998-99, responding to changes in state law mandating that all school fights be reported to local law enforcement, MRMS reclassified fighting, physical assault, and oral assault into separate categories and educated students about the new law, resulting in a significant decrease in referrals for fighting. The discipline scope and sequence leaves room for grade-appropriate discipline policies, enabling classroom teachers to handle minor infractions, such as excessive talking, without office referrals. Tailored to meet students' developmental needs, these policies outline classroom expectations and consequences to minimize disruption and to facilitate the learning process by clearly defining appropriate behaviors and consequences of inappropriate choices.

In an effort to support the mission of developing responsible citizens, staff and community work together to provide effective discipline policies, resulting in a safe school. The quantifiable data give a clear indication of success in supporting MRMS students in making healthy decisions.

C. Challenging Standards and Curriculum

C1. How does the curriculum serve the broad goals for student learning and development that the public generally expects education to achieve: personal and intellectual growth, citizenship, and preparation for work and higher education? What relative emphasis does the school place on these goals in the curriculum?

Student learning and development is the top priority of the MRMS staff. Students spend 77% of the school day in core and exploratory classes, designed to ensure high levels of achievement for all students within the framework of a rigorous curriculum, and 23% of the day in activities that foster personal growth and positive character development. Academic learning ties directly to Missouri Show-Me Standards, outlining 4 principal goals and 73 performance and knowledge standards that collectively provide a balanced education for all Missouri students. The curriculum (C5) integrates these skills and competencies throughout both core and exploratory (practical and fine arts) classes. Several years ago, prompted by statewide deficits in Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) test data, MRMS increased emphasis on reading, writing, and thinking across the curriculum. For example, science teachers now not only teach the scientific method, but also develop students' technical writing skills by designing and articulating procedures for related experiments.

Character development also integrates throughout the curriculum. Daily character education begins in PACK (A2) where students listen to school-wide announcements and *Project Wisdom™*, a published series of daily stories, quotes, and open-ended questions that encourage responsibility, tolerance, and understanding of others. These short character lessons, read by students and faculty members, refocus students daily on becoming educated, responsible citizens. MRMS curricular units in sixth grade reading, seventh grade life skills, and eighth grade academic applications classes also promote personal growth. For example, a seventh grade relationships unit teaches students about relationship building, goal setting, and ethical decision-making. In this unit, positive character traits, brainstormed by the class then sequenced according to the importance of each to society, become the focus for lessons on friendship building and dating, developing the skills to make positive, healthy choices. Additionally, CLEEO lessons (B4), emphasizing consequences of drug/alcohol abuse, and other units, like *Walk a Mile in My Shoes* (B2, F4), prepare students for life in a complex and diverse society.

Citizenship skills, an integral part of the social studies curriculum, also integrate throughout many cross-curricular units. Eighth graders experience democracy and develop an appreciation for American democratic values through an academic applications law unit in which students learn legal terminology then prepare and conduct mock trials. Numerous service learning programs (C6) and opportunities to influence school policies, such as a recent vote by students to recite the Pledge of Allegiance every Monday (F2), allow all students to practice authentic citizenship skills.

The MRMS *Frontier for Learning* continues to change as technology redefines the needs of tomorrow's workforce. While computer instruction begins for sixth graders with a six-week computer class, most teachers now incorporate the utilization of productivity/presentation software in instruction. Career education, introduced in sixth grade industrial technology, becomes a significant component of the eighth grade curriculum by providing students opportunities to explore career options and to create a high

school enrollment plan that matches interests to career paths. Instructional design in all classes helps students develop skills valued in the workplace, such as time management and collaboration skills learned by completing group projects to required specifications within a designated time frame.

The curriculum at MRMS challenges and inspires students as they develop the knowledge and skills necessary to advance to the next levels of schooling and to become educated, responsible citizens.

C2. How is the school organized to provide for differing student academic needs within the school's goals, priorities, and curriculum?

The Moreland Ridge student body includes children with many differing abilities and academic needs. Placement options and remediation programs both address this diversity, creating an educational environment where all students receive challenging curriculum and achieve high standards.

Students meeting the district's requirements for placement into the gifted and talented program receive 45 minutes of instruction daily. This program, entitled STRETCH (STudents Reaching Excellence Through CHallenge), services approximately 6% of the student population with units designed to challenge the students, complementing and enriching the other academic disciplines (C3). While most students move into STRETCH from the elementary program, placement opportunities also exist at the beginning of sixth and seventh grade, allowing qualified students to enter the program in middle school.

MRMS also provides accelerated math classes for seventh and eighth graders who demonstrate strong proficiency in math. This year, 30% of seventh and eighth graders study pre-algebra and algebra, respectively, qualifying these students to enroll in advanced math classes in high school. Students not placed in pre-algebra and algebra receive math instruction designed to solidify basic math skills and concepts needed to progress to abstract algebraic concepts. Both math programs offer challenging course work and numerous opportunities to think and communicate mathematically, and both prepare students for statewide math MAP tests as evidenced by the school's consistent NCE scores above 61 (H4) and performance at or above the adjusted mean MAP score each year since the school expanded in 1998 (H5).

Eighth grade students demonstrating proficiency in English may enroll in Communications I and/or Spanish I/French I. Students successfully completing these classes, recognized by the high school, may enroll in second-year classes as freshmen. Currently, 29% of the eighth graders are enrolled in Communications I, and 34% of the eighth graders take either Spanish/French I.

Short-term programs, developed by MRMS staff members, are effective in helping low-achieving and average students make significant gains. One such program, a MAP remediation program offered last year to eighth grade students, enabled 82% of the participants to advance from the lowest level (Step 1) to the next level of performance when retested. Sixth grade students with reading scores two or more levels below grade level as measured by an individualized computer tutorial program and an individually administered reading test, are eligible to receive additional help through the Reading Improvement Program, an after-school study group.

These programs and daily classroom instructional practices meet the needs of Moreland Ridge's diverse community of learners, ensuring that all students achieve high academic standards and are prepared for the next level of schooling.

C3. How does the school ensure that diverse learners (for example, students with disabilities, gifted and talented students, students with limited English proficiency, migrant students, and students placed at risk) have the opportunity to learn challenging content and achieve at high levels?

A true MRMS strength is the staff's ability to meet the individual needs of students. Through classroom instructional practices and programs designed for students with particular needs, all students achieve in challenging classes designed to prepare students for the future.

Students with limited English proficiency receive special assistance from the English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers twice weekly, spending the remaining time in the regular classroom. All MRMS staff receives ESL in-service training, illustrating the staff's commitment to this full-inclusion program. The staff also works collaboratively to maximize inclusion for the special education population, providing a variety of service options to meet the diverse needs of these students. Some students fully

participate in the regular education program, receiving special assistance from a learning disabilities teacher in the room only when needed. This method allows the student to work autonomously while establishing a way for the student to receive additional guided practice or other modifications as needed to facilitate learning. Other special education students receive instruction in the regular core classes but take tests in a small group setting with a special education team member who assists students with difficult reading passages, paraphrases, or reads the test aloud. Alternative classroom placement in language arts and/or math is also available for students with limited English/math skills. All students, even those with disabilities such as autism and severe language disorders, receive a minimum of 43% of daily instruction in a regular classroom environment with most mainstreamed for nearly 85% of the day. A dedicated team of 20 special education teachers and aides works collaboratively with classroom teachers to maximize the special needs students' successes in the regular classroom environment. Reading, life skills, and academic applications teachers and special education staff review individual student needs to determine whether a regular classroom unit or a parallel unit of study taught by a member of the special education team will most benefit the student. For example, eighth grade classes and a self-contained group of eighth grade students with special needs both completed units on geometry this fall. While the units differed in scope, teachers worked together to create complementary units, introducing and developing the same challenging concepts for both groups of students.

The entire MRMS staff works to maximize the success of students with special academic needs on statewide Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) tests each spring. During testing week, the entire school operates on a schedule that utilizes the first two hours of each day for testing in all grades. Since no exploratory classes meet during this testing time, exploratory teachers proctor the test for small groups of students who require a special, low-distraction testing environment. MAP test data from 2001 show that the average norm-referenced score for students receiving the test in a modified administration setting was an NCE score of 51, indicating the success of this testing plan for special education students.

Counselor-facilitated support groups, such as grief, divorce, and anger management (A2), an extensive teacher-student Buddy program (A2), and a strong school-community connection with the local police force and Youth Outreach Unit (A2, B4), currently serve the MRMS at-risk student population. Based on data collected last year by a MRMS study group and tied to a building goal regarding the at-risk population, sixth grade students demonstrating academic and behavioral patterns exhibited by high school drop-outs will begin a proactive semester-long program in January 2002.

Gifted and talented students spend 89% of the day in core and exploratory classes and 11% in STRETCH (C2), a class designed for students with IQ scores of 131 or above. STRETCH develops the students' analytical skills while introducing a wide range of topics not included in regular core curricula. STRETCH students conduct field and library/Internet research, design and race robots, and refine ACT/SAT test-taking skills. STRETCH students also compete with other accelerated students across the country through contests like Toshiba's *Exploravision* (a futuristic invention competition) and the Knowledge Master Open (a computerized quiz bowl-type competition). In 2000-2001, 82% of the eighth grade STRETCH students scored in the highest level on the social studies MAP test, and over 50% of the top level math MAP scores were achieved by STRETCH students. Norm-referenced test data support the success of these students, with NCE scores of 83-93 on all four MAP tests in 2001.

By design, the special education, at-risk, gifted/STRETCH, and ESL programs at Moreland Ridge join with the rigorous core curricula, providing opportunities for all students to achieve at high levels and to become educated, responsible citizens. Students with special needs, each belonging to a team and a PACK (A2, C1), are fully participatory members of the Moreland Ridge school community.

C4. What is the process for continuous curriculum renewal at the school? What questions about curriculum is the school currently addressing?

Curriculum renewal at MRMS enables courses and programs to best reflect current trends and research in education. Through this process, students receive content developed to meet the needs of today's world, as teachers deliver information using methodology designed and redesigned to meet building goals and to provide the best opportunities for MRMS students.

Most core and exploratory curricula originate at the district level. During 2000-2001, staff members played instrumental roles in the development and/or revision of these comprehensive curriculum guides, with 100% of the MRMS faculty participating in the development of at least one curriculum guide. Some curriculum guides provide sample units and outcomes but leave actual curricular decisions to teachers, providing the freedom to determine which units will be most conducive to students' intellectual and social growth. Teachers make these decisions through analysis of current world topics, student needs surveys, parent surveys, and student achievement data, especially MAP and sixth grade norm-referenced test results. Further curricular choices serve to align units and programs to the school's School Improvement Plan (SIP) goals, derived, in part, from Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP) evaluation data. Each school year brings new students with new needs, and the staff works collaboratively to meet those needs.

The administration and Professional Development Committee (PDC) further support curriculum renewal through daily scheduling that allows teachers time for cross-curricular planning and student performance assessment and through the funding of building-wide content area Collaboration Days (E2) that provide an opportunity for teachers from all grade levels to monitor and evaluate school courses and programs. Additional PDC funding supports study groups throughout the school year. These groups, united by study topic, meet to discuss the latest educational research and to brainstorm ways to use this information to best meet the needs of students. Examples of these study topics include brain-based research, at-risk population, and motivation in middle school-aged students. MRMS also uses a significant portion of PDC funding to send teachers to national and state conferences such as the National Middle School Association conference. These teachers share current information on effective teaching practices, content/curriculum standards, and educational research with the staff upon return.

Future curriculum renewal plans include refinement of the new at-risk curriculum and development of a more extensive career education curriculum. These two building goals align with the district's goals to reduce the dropout rate and to improve vocational placement. The MRMS staff believes that because the frontier of knowledge is constantly expanding, curriculum requires continuous renewal to maximize the effectiveness of courses and programs for all students.

C5. Successful schools offer all students opportunities to be engaged with significant content. How does the school ensure that students achieve at high levels in the core subjects?

MRMS staff expects all students to learn significant content and to develop the skills necessary to become educated, responsible citizens. Content area curricula, based primarily on Missouri Show-Me Standards (C1), blend to create a solid academic foundation from which students emerge fully prepared for high school and beyond. Language arts, science, mathematics, and social studies form the basis of the core curriculum at MRMS. Additionally, sixth grade students receive daily instruction in reading; seventh and eighth grade curricula include the cross-curricular classes of life skills and academic applications, respectively. Students enrolled in the gifted program attend STRETCH (C3) in lieu of these three grade-level specific classes. The practical and fine arts classes of foreign language, vocal music, instrumental music, physical education, communications, art, industrial technology, computers, and family and consumer science form the exploratory component of the curriculum.

The language arts curriculum incorporates four key strands of communication: reading, writing, research/inquiry, and speaking/listening. Essential grammar and analytical skills, woven throughout these strands, provide students with progressively challenging instruction from grade to grade. MRMS language arts teachers use a wide variety of literature texts to strengthen reading skills, relating language arts instruction to topics in other curricular areas. Selected literature, representing a diverse cultural spectrum, broadens students' perspectives, preparing them for life in a diverse society. Students also use literature to develop personal writing skills. Writing samples, stored in portfolios, advance with students through the grades, providing regular opportunities for self-evaluation and growth. Guest authors share writing strategies and techniques. Students further learn the value of exemplary writing through participation in national, state, and local essay and poetry contests and through specific activities like the eighth grade letter-writing unit in which students correspond with members of local veterans

organizations. Using Big Six Research Skills as a framework, students progress from sixth grade “I-Search” papers to research papers with increased resource, citation, and format requirements in the seventh and eighth grades. These research papers align primarily with cross-curricular units, such as Dickens Day (C6) and eighth grade Civil War Day. Currently, 87% of special needs students receive language arts instruction through core classes, accepting special education staff support and/or modifications as needed. Whenever feasible, students requiring small group or individual instruction read novels/literature from the core curriculum to ensure challenging academics.

The mathematics curriculum includes instruction in number sense, geometry, measurement, data analysis, computation, and algebraic concepts. The foundation for both general and accelerated math curricula, offered to advanced seventh and eighth graders (C2), are the Missouri Show-Me Standards and the National Council for Teachers of Mathematics Standards, supporting understanding of fundamental math concepts and providing challenging instruction for all students. Currently, 88% of special needs students receive mathematics instruction in core classes, accepting special education staff support and/or modifications as needed. All math teachers use class sets of manipulatives to solidify concepts for visual/kinesthetic learners. By adding a writing component, teachers empower students to think critically. Students also apply math to the real world through projects involving quilting (geometry) and house design (geometry, ratios, and proportions). At the annual Math Day, students become immersed in activities, enhancing an already rich curriculum.

The science curriculum further develops students’ skills using mental and physical tools associated with science, technology, and society, including units such as properties and principles of matter and energy, force and motion, living organisms, ecosystems, earth’s processes, and universe and earth systems (such as meteorology, hydrology, oceanography, and geology). By aligning these units across the grade levels, science teachers build a foundation for advanced content in specialized high school science courses. Each grade level curriculum provides significant instruction in methods of scientific inquiry, reading, note-taking, measurement, data analysis, and problem solving, enabling students to see relationships between scientific topics, grade level units, and other curricular areas. Science classes provide students with opportunities to form and manipulate knowledge as they burn peanuts to discover fat content, design pulley systems to lift brave teachers, and determine electrical current patterns by investigating the luminosity of pickles. Technological tools, such as digital video cameras and flex-cams, provide all students front row seats during teacher demonstrations. All students receive rich science curriculum in core classrooms. When appropriate, special education staff members assist students with special needs in these classes (C3), ensuring that all students acquire necessary scientific knowledge and skills.

The social studies curriculum extends lessons in citizenship (C1) while incorporating the seven key strands of constitutional democracy, continuity and change, governance systems, economics, geography, interpersonal relations, and the use of research tools. Sixth grade students focus on the principles and documents of geography and government, including study of personal history and immigration culminating with a costumed, multi-cultural simulation of the Ellis Island experience. Seventh grade social studies classes broaden students’ knowledge of world history through units on ancient cultures of the Eastern Hemisphere, relating these early social, political, and economic systems to Western culture and contemporary issues. Eighth graders traverse American history with a whistle-stop tour that begins during the Ice Age and continues through the Civil War reconstruction years. Critical thinking and problem solving are integral skills reinforced through a special Civil War Day, developed for eighth grade students. During this simulation, students march, taste hardtack and broth, square dance, participate in mock battles, play baseball, and witness Civil War hospital conditions. While key terminology, map skills and research methods are important, the primary goals of MRMS social studies teachers are to help students establish a role in community, state, and country, fostering a sense of belonging and an appreciation for diversity for 100% of the MRMS student body.

The arts curricula offer students courses in fine and practical arts. A sixth grade exploratory rotation introduces students to foreign language, vocal music, instrumental music, physical education, communications, art, industrial technology, computers, and family and consumer science. This

exploratory structure enables students to experiment with new content before selecting exploratory offerings in seventh and eighth grade. Vocal music, band, and orchestra programs provide students instruction and opportunities for featuring talents at concerts for the school and community. Physical education classes emphasize health concepts while developing physical fitness and sportsmanship skills. Communications students receive instruction in research, writing, and performance skills while developing public speaking abilities. Art students experiment with a variety of media and showcase works throughout the school and in the community. Industrial technology and computers introduce students to skills valued in the workplace, such as robotics, engineering, and presentation software applications. Family and consumer science classes teach domestic arts, such as cooking, sewing, and nutrition. All students participate in fine and practical arts classes during the day.

The foreign language curriculum invites students to experience many foreign languages during middle school. Foreign language instruction begins with a six-week course that is truly an “exploratory” curriculum, in which sixth graders learn basic greetings/dialogue for 12 languages and cultures, including Latin, French, German, Mandarin, Italian, Spanish, Japanese, Russian, Greek, and Swahili. Lessons on culture, geography, and demographics focus students on similarities among languages, promoting acceptance and understanding of others. Students have an active voice in selecting activities, providing for individual differences in learning styles/abilities. The seventh grade foreign language classes, designed as a travel unit, feature three languages: Spanish, French, and German. Each student makes a passport, receiving visa stamps by earning points. Content includes basic phrases, strategies for effective communication, and cultural awareness, with mini research units on bullfighting, the United Nations, and the European Union. Eighth graders may choose Spanish I/French I (C2), two grammar/vocabulary intensive courses, thus creating a solid foundation for additional language studies.

C6. What other content areas or programs play essential roles in the schoolwide curriculum goals?

In 1986, the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation began funding a values-based curriculum entitled Community of Caring. Five years ago, realizing that the values of respect, responsibility, caring, trust, and family perfectly complemented the school’s mission, MRMS became a Community of Caring school, fully integrating the program’s principles and curriculum. MRMS students learn and experience these values, and, along with the MRMS faculty, exemplify the principles daily. This program reaches across every grade level and into every classroom. Sample units include a sixth grade friendship-building unit and a seventh grade relationships curriculum (C1). Exploratory classes also incorporate instruction about values. Family and consumer science students, after researching the relationship between teen pregnancies and premature babies, sew and deliver blankets to the Kansas University Medical Center neonatal unit (G4). *Project Wisdom’s* (C1) closing line, “Make it a great day or not... The choice is yours,” reminds students every morning that, above all, actions influence one’s successes.

Staff-led seminars and an extensive parenting library enable parents to network with teachers and other parents and to receive the latest research on developing and maintaining healthy relationships with teenagers. Teen forums and service learning (curricular units with a community service component) give students an opportunity to branch out beyond the classroom. In this last area, service learning, the MRMS staff and students are truly exemplary. For example, eighth graders study natural attributes of fresh water and the effects of pollution on watersheds, then travel to a stream to run water quality tests for the Department of Natural Resources. Seventh graders visit a local food pantry, boxing canned food for distribution to agencies that service the needy. An eighth grade team plants 800 trees to repair eroding land, while another participates in “Coastal Clean-Up,” a local lake-beautification project. All students take turns cleaning streets adopted by the staff and students (F2), further illustrating students’ understanding of service to others and the true meaning of community.

Another content area unique to MRMS is Dickens Day. This multi-grade, cross-curricular experience joins seventh grade units on Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* (language arts), Victorian Age diseases (science), and the Industrial Revolution (social studies), creating an opportunity for students to bring the past to the present. Mix in an Internet study of the latest research on homelessness in contemporary society (life skills) and a service learning field trip to a local food pantry (Community of

Caring), and the seventh grade students, who now understand both the desperation and grandeur of Victorian England, travel back in time on a December day known building-wide as Dickens Day.

In the weeks before Dickens Day, seventh graders of all abilities and special needs form mixed gender “families”, reading *A Christmas Carol* and learning about Victorian manners and customs. On the morning of Dickens Day, seventh graders step off buses in Victorian attire: dark trousers, scarves, hats, long skirts and full-skirted dresses, shawls, bonnets, and other makeshift apparel mirroring that of the Victorian Age. These students spend the morning creating period crafts, playing draughts (checkers) and other Victorian games, participating in an “I Am Ebenezer Scrooge” dramatic reading competition, and learning to waltz from a professional dance instructor. While Dickens Day immerses seventh graders in the Victorian Age, across the building numerous eighth grade groups prepare for this special day. Family and consumer science (FACS) students finish baking 700 cookies, orchestra members practice Victorian songs, art students complete table decorations, and choral readers (also dressed in Victorian apparel) perform one last dress rehearsal in Communications I classes, anticipating the opportunity to return to seventh graders what was given to them the previous year: The Dickens’ Tea.

Early in the afternoon families of seventh graders, having received a formal invitation, enter the Library Media Center, greeted by costumed eighth grade hosts and hostesses. The library, now transformed into a darkened, candle-lit social hall, resounds with Victorian tunes provided by the eighth grade orchestra. Gentlemen, after seating the ladies in the family, take a seat and read the full-color programs provided by the computer classes, while awaiting the tea and cookies. After tea is served and the choral readers perform, the group departs for the gym and an opportunity to practice the morning’s new waltzing skills before the day ends. The next day’s writing activities and discussions recount the Victorian experience, documenting the impact of Dickens’ Day and the unit.

C7. What requirements must be satisfied before a student is promoted to the next grade or level of schooling?

MRMS follows the promotion/retention policy of the Blue Springs district which states that students must pass eight semesters (four units), including at least one semester of English, one semester of reading, and one semester of math, to be automatically promoted to the next grade or level of schooling. The district offers middle level summer school annually to assist students who need to improve skills in these areas. Students passing only six or seven semesters advance after successfully completing at least one semester of English, one semester of reading, and one semester of math in the current school year. Students not passing these classes may advance by completing failed courses in summer school before the next academic year begins. The building principal reviews the individual cases of students failing both math and English or reading, deciding upon the student’s retention or promotion after considering his/her academic history and other special characteristics/needs. Parents of students not automatically promoted conference with staff members, discussing the principal’s decision and the importance of the student’s skill development in math and English.

The MRMS staff recognizes that research does not support retention at the middle level. Instructional practices, policies, and programs, such as the at-risk curriculum (C4), attempt to ensure content mastery and student development, maximizing success for all students.

D. Active Teaching and Learning

D1. How are teaching practices and learning experiences in the school consistent with current knowledge about successful teaching and learning?

The Moreland Ridge staff utilizes resources and current knowledge about student learning and teaching methods in planning curriculum and instruction, creating educational opportunities that are challenging and appropriate for all students.

Text, electronic, and human resources all play important roles in curriculum planning. Textbook review committees use student achievement data and current educational research to assess the effectiveness of textbooks. Electronic resources, found in the Library Media Center (LMC) and all teacher workstations, enable staff and students to access current research. Articles, shared regularly

among administration and staff, create a school climate that encourages regular curriculum assessment and empowers teachers to seek new ways to meet student needs. Research states that teacher collaboration increases student achievement. The school schedule supports this collaboration by providing teachers with daily plan time to meet with teaching team members and/or content area colleagues, addressing both personal and academic needs of all students. Building-wide content area meetings, made possible with professional development funds, enable staff members to maintain high standards for student achievement by aligning curricula and sharing successful instructional methods.

Teachers use classroom time effectively, incorporating a variety of teaching methods and materials to promote high student achievement. Instruction, designed to accommodate three principal learning styles -- visual, kinesthetic, and auditory – meets the needs of the school's diverse group of learners. Through grade level simulations (C5, C6) and other experiential learning opportunities, such as a Renaissance unit activity modeling Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel experience, students develop an understanding of core content and achieve high standards. Manipulatives, such as pattern blocks and desk maps, further solidify core concepts for diverse learners while investigative experiences, such as science fair projects, provide challenging and active learning opportunities for all students. High interest coursework, relevant to students' daily lives, encourages the development of critical thinking skills and problem solving strategies. These units, such as the seventh grade entrepreneurship unit in which students create and evaluate businesses by analyzing various economic factors, teach students the knowledge and leadership skills to become productive members of society.

Because teachers believe all students have the ability to learn challenging content, MRMS is a school with a strong sense of academic purpose and a commitment to quality education where self-reliant, motivated students achieve high standards through well-developed instruction and special programs designed to assist with special needs (C2).

D2. In what ways do teaching practices support student-initiated learning?

MRMS teachers empower students by offering a wealth of learning opportunities and by instilling in students a sense of responsibility for that learning. Classroom instructional design provides multiple opportunities for both individual and group work, teaching accountability to self and to others while also developing content area knowledge and application skills. Independent projects vary from "passenger" scrapbooks detailing information about the *Titanic* to Oriental rugs decorated with facts and illustrations of other countries and cultures. Caricatures drawn in art and public speaking competitions in language arts and communications classes allow students to personalize instruction while learning self-reliance and time management skills. Personal portfolios, filled with student-selected assignments, provide students a tool for reflection and self-evaluation as well as a vehicle to review previously mastered content.

The staff, seeing first-hand the benefits of a collaborative environment, incorporates numerous group activities and projects into lesson designs. Teams of three students compete in the Math and Logic Contest, sharing strategies and ideas for solving problems on the test. Family and consumer science students simulate family life by planning and cooking meals in teams while science classes form groups to conduct experimental research. Students study group dynamics, set those dynamics in action by working together to develop a futuristic product, and prepare marketing storyboards for a national competition. Students recently completed a careers unit, working collaboratively to create an interview skills tutorial video for special education teachers to use with special needs students.

In addition to personalization offered through independent and group projects, students share ownership in the education process through formal surveys and class votes to determine units/activities. Students select groups or request random group assignments. Some classes also offer tiered assignments, individualizing instruction by allowing students to select assignments by degree of difficulty.

MRMS reviews the curriculum regularly (C4), noting opportunities to include real-life experiences to existing content. For example, life skills students participate in *The Real Game*[™], learning personal finance management through the unit's economic "good/bad" times. Students learn engineering skills and develop problem-solving strategies, testing and building various bridge designs in industrial technology classes. While not classroom endeavors, students also practice real-life, problem-solving

skills through co-curricular offerings (A4), such as writing for the school newspaper and monitoring/stocking inventories at the sixth grade school store. Students have multiple opportunities to develop responsibility and collaboration skills, actively participating in the community of learning.

D3. How are resources made available to teachers and students for gathering information and sharing the results of their efforts?

The Library Media Center (LMC) is a *Frontier for Learning* at MRMS, supporting the curriculum and classroom instruction by providing students, staff, and families access to print and technological resources. The LMC staff, which includes one library media specialist and one full-time aide, plays a key role in instruction at MRMS, helping students develop independent learning skills, fostering exploration of new ideas, and promoting an appreciation and enjoyment for reading. The LMC staff also works collaboratively with faculty members, acquainting teachers with new resources, providing in-service technology training, and regularly assembling carts of reference materials for classroom use.

The LMC adds to the overall MRMS climate by providing a comfortable and inviting environment, housing a collection of over 18,000 reference materials, professional resources, periodicals, and fiction/nonfiction books, carefully selected to reflect student and teacher needs. An average of 58 classes per week (Sept. 2001) check out books, conduct research, utilize technology in the writing lab, and read for enjoyment in this spacious room with oak tables and comfortable chairs. Sixty-one computer stations with Internet access, on-line periodical databases and encyclopedia, and presentation software assist students in gathering research and displaying information for classroom projects. A class set of AlphaSmarts™ (D4), accessed through the LMC, enables an additional 30 students to type and edit assignments. An extensive professional library and educational periodicals provide teachers with the necessary materials and current research to plan effective curriculum and instruction for students. Based on the *Standards for Missouri School Library Media Centers*, the Moreland Ridge LMC currently ranks at the highest level of excellence in all collection areas.

The LMC utilizes flexible scheduling to accommodate the needs of classroom teachers and students. All grade levels visit the LMC on a regular basis to check out books and magazines. Both core and exploratory classes use LMC print and electronic resources for class projects. Students may also attend to library business immediately before or after school. Tutoring, Library, and Computers (TLC) (G4), a program unique to MRMS, offers students and parents access to the MRMS library and computer labs on Tuesday evenings. Staff supervises the two-hour TLC sessions, tutoring students as needed. Last year, 34 teachers provided homework assistance for 270 students on TLC nights.

Students from all grade levels share research findings through presentations generated in the LMC multi-media lab. Sixth graders, after assessing individual strengths and weaknesses, use presentation software to organize these thoughts for student-led conferences (G2) with parents each spring. Teachers showcase student research efforts through competitions like the MRMS Science Fair and the Modern Woodmen of America Oration Contest. Biography projects and dioramas, presented first to classmates, become educational tools for others stopping to admire assignments in hallway display cases. LMC exhibits of student work also promote reading and programs like Missouri's Mark Twain Reading Award, a statewide program designed to expose adolescents to quality literature.

The LMC staff constantly seeks ways to incorporate library resources and skills into daily instruction across the curriculum. Working with core and exploratory teachers, library skills, such as information gathering and analysis, form an integral part of students' educational experiences at MRMS.

D4. What technology applications is the school using? How do they relate to the curricular goals and how do they support teaching and learning?

MRMS recognizes the vital role of technology in the future of today's students. Educated, responsible citizens of the 21st century must possess the knowledge and skills to collect, organize, and present data in the Information Age. To fulfill its mission, staff developed a long-term technology plan in its first year of operation. This plan outlines and prioritizes acquisition and utilization of technology,

establishing technological advancements/improvements as the primary benefactor of all spring fund-raising efforts. This vision and building-wide commitment to technology keeps Moreland Ridge at the forefront of innovation, effectively utilizing the Internet, digital video technology, and a variety of software programs to support classroom instruction and enhance student achievement. The MRMS Technology Committee, which consists of an administrator, library media specialist, classroom teachers, and the building technology chairperson, meets regularly, gathering feedback from stakeholders, assessing building needs, and upgrading the technology plan when needed.

MRMS houses over 200 computer workstations equipped with Internet access and presentation software used daily by students and staff. LMC computers (D3), outfitted with Microsoft Office 2000™, Proquest™, and Athena On-line catalog™, enable whole-class research projects while a class set of AlphaSmarts™ provides students with additional, word-processing capabilities. A multi-media lab, scheduled through the LMC, contains 26 student workstations, a flatbed scanner, a CD-burner, and two large monitors connected to an additional teacher workstation, and services students throughout the day in both core and exploratory classes. Students learn technology skills through computer and industrial technology classes and instructional activities requiring students to use these skills to conduct research, word-process documents, generate tables/graphs, and create Powerpoint™ presentations. Teachers receive technology training through graduate-level and continuing education classes and in-service opportunities provided by staff members with advanced computer knowledge. Classrooms outfitted with a 36” multi-media unit networked to the teacher’s station enable teachers to enhance instruction with high impact, visually stimulating alternatives to traditional classroom practices.

The Computer Curriculum Corporation (CCC) program is a technology tool from SuccessMaker™ used to support sixth grade reading and math. Through participating in this program, students receive computer-assisted instruction tailored to individual knowledge and abilities, remediating or enriching grade level concepts as necessary to meet student needs.

Moreland Ridge Middle School has a link to the Blue Springs School District website.

E. Professional Community

E1. What opportunities do teachers and other staff have to build professional community that enhances their collective capacity to work together to support student learning?

The MRMS faculty and administration, sharing a collective responsibility for student outcomes, create a professional community that maximizes student achievement. The organizational structure/schedule facilitates collaboration with teams, grade levels, and curricular areas, creating regular opportunities to reflect on current practice, such as writing across the curriculum, and student performance. Core teaching teams meet daily to develop integrated units and discuss student expectations/concerns. In addition, grade level teachers, joined by special education staff, counselor, and librarian, meet bi-weekly to review and facilitate grade level programs/procedures, such as planning service learning opportunities, evaluating policies, and coordinating activities to ensure teams remain more alike than different, promoting the philosophy that students receive the same, high quality education regardless of team placement. Exploratory teachers meet weekly to coordinate activities between classes and discuss student behavior and achievement. Special education teachers meet weekly to discuss student progress, program implementation, and special education procedures, while informally meeting daily with paraprofessionals to discuss these same issues. Grade-level content area teachers meet bi-weekly to seek a cohesive approach to implementing curriculum and meet with teachers across grade levels regularly to review curriculum alignment/implementation, such as assessment methods and use of materials. The administration, valuing this collaboration, protects these opportunities by scheduling both a personal and team plan period daily so that teachers advance the *Frontier for Learning* that fosters success for students.

Faculty Leadership (F1), a team representing all facets of the professional community at MRMS, works together to address issues that affect school climate and student learning, such as attendance policies and home/school communication practices. Faculty Leadership also seeks out information and reviews student test data, providing a context for reflection on curricular and instructional effectiveness.

Effective collaboration in all curricular areas is also the direct result of the Professional Development Committee (PDC), actively creating a culture that encourages and rewards staff to plan and implement new strategies to improve instruction (E2). A portion of the annual PDC budget (\$10,000) enhances professional growth by forming faculty study groups (C4) that share new practices with staff, furthering the MRMS commitment to student learning. PDC also funds faculty Collaboration Days (E2) to provide additional opportunities to develop and implement new ideas across the grade levels.

Faculty and administration consistently work together in both formal and informal settings to solve common problems. Increased student achievement is always the focus of this collaboration.

E2. How does a coherent approach to professional development for teachers and other staff ensure their ability to implement effectively the school's curriculum, instructional strategies, and support system? How do organizational arrangements, such as time and teaching assignments, and school norms and culture, make professional development a priority?

The MRMS staff epitomizes professional development, as exemplified by the advanced degrees earned by 71% of the certificated staff. The faculty regards staff development as an essential component of the school's mission, with 87% actively promoting and supporting continuous professional growth through attendance at local, state, and national conferences, in-service workshops, and/or graduate coursework within the past year. This commitment to professional development keeps staff members apprised of current research and trends in education, maximizing student success.

The MRMS culture recognizes staff development as vital to increasing student achievement, offering regular opportunities to discuss relevant educational issues. All faculty members meet to review Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) test performance data, planning strategies to increase student results and modifying curriculum/instruction to incorporate state revisions. Workshops concerning special disabilities, such as English as a Second Language (ESL) and autism, provide teachers the information needed to effectively implement the school's curriculum for all students.

The Professional Development Committee (PDC) provides a coherent, ongoing staff development program, focused on improving instruction for all students. Comprised of teachers from all grade levels, exploratory, and special education teams, PDC annually surveys faculty members to determine the school's professional needs and to align these needs with building goals. PDC manages an annual budget in excess of \$10,000, meeting bi-weekly to review requests and allocate funds for attendance at national, state, and local conferences. Teachers attending these conferences contribute to an annual Share-a-Thon, sharing acquired materials and insights. PDC facilitates a mentoring program (E3), pairing experienced teachers with teachers new to the building and/or profession to assist with school procedures/policies and climate expectations. PDC also sponsors activities at the building level, such as technology and special education workshops, study groups, and Collaboration Days (C4). Originally occurring on non-contract time, PDC now funds these Collaboration Days, allowing teachers to spend a day dialoguing with colleagues, discussing cross-curricular extensions, anchoring skill development, and planning special curricular extensions such as Math Day and the MRMS Spelling Bee.

The Library Media Center maintains a comprehensive professional development library to inform teachers of new ideas in education and to assist with curricular planning. Currently, the professional development library houses 569 books and 17 subscriptions to print or on-line journals, selected to satisfy needs identified through annual staff surveys.

Research and literature suggest that the most effective professional development is job-embedded, creating situations where teachers have time to talk with colleagues about the art and science of teaching. Organizational arrangements for supporting professional development, such as this collaborative team structure, are firmly in place. Professional development, vital to accomplishing the school's mission, will always play a key role in the culture and goals of the school.

E3. How does the school tailor professional development and support to address the difference in career experience or professional responsibility?

The Moreland Ridge PDC leads many of the professional development activities. The mentoring program combines district services for beginning and new/experienced teachers with additional unique components, designed to smoothly assimilate new staff members into the school's culture. Before school begins each year, administrators and representatives from Faculty Leadership meet with new staff members, addressing school policies and detailing school climate expectations. Each new teacher receives a personal copy of *97 Savvy Secrets for Protecting Self and School: A Practical Guide for Today's Teachers and Administrators* by Alice Healy Sesno and "Tips and Tricks for Teachers," a staff-developed pamphlet. First- and second-year teachers, paired with a veteran mentor for support, attend scheduled district-level meetings, frequently participating in less formal conferences at school. PDC encourages new staff members to observe effective instructional and management techniques of veteran teachers by providing funding for substitutes. The mentoring program also sponsors group breakfasts and other meetings, establishing opportunities for new teachers to network with each other, share the successes and frustrations of beginning teachers, and pose questions for clarification. The PDC extends the district's mentoring program one additional year to provide collegial support for teachers developing state-mandated Professional Certification Plans.

While at MRMS, student teachers receive regular feedback from supervising teachers and from administrators who conduct a formal observation for each student teacher, introducing the evaluation process while enumerating teacher strengths and delivering suggestions regarding techniques. Near the end of the experience, student teachers observe a variety of teachers and attend a breakfast, celebrating accomplishments with the rest of the staff. At this gathering, each student teacher receives a gift basket, filled with assorted teaching "tools" donated by staff members.

PDC annually surveys veteran teachers to assess professional growth needs and to prioritize funding for resources. One such resource, a pamphlet from Master Teacher™, provides team members quick reminders effectively enhancing student learning, supporting teaching practices, and suggesting creative and valuable ways to address teaching concerns. Teams discuss the content of these pamphlets and other PDC resources, such as copies of *Keeping the Light in Your Eyes: A Guide to Helping Teachers Discover, Remember, Relive, and Rediscover the Joy of Teaching* by Beth Hurst and Ginny Reding, at team meetings, renewing team expectations and refreshing the sense of purpose.

PDC guidelines require that funded activities relate directly to school and/or district goals. Several years ago authentic assessment became an important aspect of instructional programs as Missouri began to move toward a performance-based testing program. While recent graduates and student teachers were familiar with this type of assessment, experienced teachers were not. To provide the necessary training for veteran teachers, MRMS formed a partnership with the University of Missouri, enabling a team of five teachers to attend classes for a week at MU, learning how to develop and implement authentic assessments. These teachers then presented a series of in-service workshops to staff members, teaching colleagues how to integrate this new form of assessment in curriculum/instruction. A significant amount of annual PDC funding provides staff members opportunities to attend regional, state, and national conferences (E2), collecting information regarding current teaching assignments or gathering new instructional ideas to accommodate changes in responsibilities.

The paraprofessional staff currently outnumber the certified special education staff due to the number of students with special disabilities mainstreamed into core and exploratory classes. Certified staff members work closely with these paraprofessionals, developing the skills needed to help students succeed. Paraprofessionals keep abreast of current educational information by attending district and building-level professional development activities and by receiving and reviewing *Paradise*, a newsletter of information and resources specific to the needs of paraprofessionals.

Finally, administrative support for professional development has created an environment that promotes teacher advancement. In its five years of operation, five teachers and administrative interns have advanced to administrative level positions, with several others completing training in administration and counseling. MRMS programs promote success for both students and staff.

E4. How does the school use the process of student assessment, staff evaluation, and school review to support professional growth? How has teacher professional development improved teaching and resulted in higher student achievement and success?

MRMS uses Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) test data, staff surveys, and Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP) reviews to determine curricular needs and professional development offerings. Administrators share statewide assessment results with staff at building and grade level meetings, discussing the data and addressing needs indicated by the results. Surveys, conducted annually by PDC, provide the building focus for in-service/workshop topics. Administrators analyze teaching effectiveness, following Missouri's Performance-Based Teacher Evaluation (PBTE) model. Through reflective conferences with teachers, administrators empower teachers to guide professional development, facilitating student achievement. Mentoring and peer coaching also provide opportunities to grow professionally. District Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP) goals, based on directives from MSIP review, provide the basis for building School Improvement Plan (SIP) goals (F3). These SIP goals, created by Faculty Leadership, a representational site-based leadership team (F1), annually include at least one professional development goal.

Teacher professional development improves student achievement through changes in instructional practices and increased content area knowledge. PDC in-services in technology lead teachers to increase use of presentation software and to incorporate the use of technology into more lessons. MAP workshops increase student test performance by training teachers to modify content area tests to match MAP test formats. Increased content area knowledge, attained through professional development, enables teachers to improve subject-matter instruction.

MRMS stakeholders acknowledge the importance of recognizing excellence in teaching through formal internal awards like the Honorable Husky Award, Teacher of the Year Award, and Phoebe Apperson Hearst Award. The Honorable Husky Award recognizes individuals who honor MRMS with distinction and integrity. Recipients include members of the teaching staff as well as custodial, administrative, and paraprofessional staff members. Teachers select the MRMS Teacher of the Year based on excellence in teaching or program development/implementation. Recipients of this award and the Phoebe Apperson Hearst Award, selected by PTSA based on professional excellence and commitment to the objects of PTA, go on to represent the school in subsequent competitions. In addition to these honors, the principal recognizes individuals in Stonner Notes, an informational handout regularly distributed by Principal Nancy Stonner that disseminates important school information.

F. Leadership and Educational Vitality

F1. How does the leadership move the school toward its vision/mission? How is the instructional leadership role defined and implemented? How are resources aligned with goals?

The mission of MRMS is to build a partnership with families and the community (G1) in order to establish a *Frontier for Learning* for its students, whereby students develop the knowledge and leadership skills necessary to become educated, responsible citizens (A1). The most important leadership role at MRMS centralizes in the principal, Dr. Nancy Stonner, surrounded by an assistant principal and administrative intern, also embodying the school's vision. Dr. Stonner provides the framework for instructional leadership that makes MRMS a *Frontier for Learning* for all students in all aspects of school life. As a leader, Dr. Stonner models empowerment to teachers who in turn empower students to become educated, responsible citizens. In opening MRMS, Dr. Stonner, believing in the value of shared leadership in setting leadership goals and policies, established a site-based committee called Faculty Leadership. Still a driving force, Faculty Leadership is composed of the principal, assistant principal, activities director, each of nine core team leaders, special education team leader, exploratory team leaders, library media specialist, and counselor representative. Meeting regularly to establish goals and action plans to carry out the school's mission, such as developing a MAP-testing plan to meet needs of students with disabilities (C3), FL is a valuable resource in communicating decisions to teams. Staff members, families, and students view school relationships as personal and interactive due to team/grade level

organization, enabling staff to partner with families in building student leadership skills, while continuing to maintain nurturing relationships. Dr. Stonner protects the *Frontier for Learning* each year by allocating a sizable portion of the school budget to the library media center and by implementing the long-range technology plan as advised by the Technology Committee. Through strong organization and purposeful uses of resources, there is never a doubt that leadership is proactively strong at MRMS.

F2. How does the school engage its internal and external stakeholders in leadership and decision-making? What is the relationship between the principal and stakeholders?

MRMS engages its internal and external stakeholders in leadership and decision-making through open and respected avenues of communication. Dr. Stonner is the primary communicator to all stakeholders. Staff members maintain high regard for each other, fostering open communication. While team leaders often facilitate communication to administration, staff members also feel comfortable approaching administrators who in turn listen to concerns and consider all viewpoints in a professional manner. Staff accepts rendered decisions as fair and best for staff and students, as evidenced by recent Organizational Health Survey results, validating authenticity of teachers as valued stakeholders (B1).

Parents are important stakeholders at MRMS. Each August, Principal Stonner mails a thorough letter concerning the opening of school to each household. The mission of collaborating with families keeps parents apprised of everything from cost of school lunches to updated school board policies. A well-organized, highly visible PTSA serves as a support base for student growth and development, and MRMS staff in turn supports all PTSA activities with 100% membership. The PAFLE (G1) and Community of Caring Parent Involvement Team (G1) are parts of the coordinating committee that sets goals for curriculum and establishes the program's comprehensive action plan (C6). Parent survey data, such as guidance counselor surveys, lead to decisions regarding special services.

Students are also important stakeholders in leadership and decision-making. Dr. Stonner meets monthly with team Citizens of the Month to glean information about school programs and to keep current with student issues. The vibrant Student Council seeks student input before making decisions concerning service projects. Recently, based upon requests from both parents and students, student council members conducted a poll about reciting the Pledge of Allegiance in classrooms. Since the majority of students voted to recite the Pledge every Monday morning, student council initiated the practice. The student council is also instrumental in planning Spring Fling, a week of spirit activities, generating funds to purchase technology upgrades in classrooms (G1). Students are also trained and valued as leaders in smaller ways, organizing the collection of used ink jet cartridges for recycling as well as selling donuts and bagels before school. PACK classes, organizing and implementing the Adopt-a-Family student council project during the holidays for needy families, blend leadership with caring. National Junior Honor Society also trains and nurtures student leaders through its high standards of academic excellence and community service. These students plan and "man" concession stands at athletic events, using the proceeds for transportation costs to deliver collected winter items to the Project Warmth distribution center and to bring cheer to the elderly in local nursing homes. Students expand a *Frontier for Learning* to the community while gaining confidence to become tomorrow's leaders.

The community is another important stakeholder. Dr. Stonner communicates regularly with citizens, incorporating community needs into school programs. Through committed Adopt-a-School partners in businesses such as Osco Drug, Golden Corral, Petals and Potpourri, Steak 'n Shake, and McDonalds, students are also encouraged to develop entrepreneurial and citizenship skills. The City of Blue Springs recognizes MRMS students as valuable participants in its Adopt-a-Street program (C6), whereby each team cleans streets surrounding the school.

At the center of all these stakeholder relationships is Dr. Stonner. Stakeholders gain confidence, respect, and trust, enabling everyone to share in the success of MRMS. At every level, the school's family benefits from Dr. Stonner's administrative skill of nurturing leaders.

F3. What kind of participatory school improvement process operates at the school? How did the school prepare its Self-Assessment for the Blue Ribbon Schools Program and how did this initiative relate to other school improvement and planning efforts?

As a *Frontier for Learning*, MRMS involves all students and staff in continuous self-assessment processes, resulting in improved current programs and implementing new ones (C4). The decision to participate in the Blue Ribbon Schools Program represented an opportunity for the school to evaluate and improve educational effectiveness while simultaneously preparing for the Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP) visit in 2002. MRMS adheres to the district's Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP) by annually developing a building School Improvement Plan (SIP). District CSIP goals include improving student achievement rates in all grades on the MAP (H4, H5), reducing the dropout rate, and improving vocational placement and completion. MRMS formulates SIP goals to align with the CSIP goals, including improving student MAP performance to reach within the two highest MAP scoring levels and reducing the number of students performing in the two lower levels (H2). In addition, while maintaining 95% or better average daily attendance rates, MRMS identifies and implements programs to assist potential dropouts with planning high school career paths and additional career exploration.

MRMS adopts additional building goals of supporting and enhancing proactive professional development opportunities and of maintaining strong school climate expectations. In preparation for the Self-Assessment for the Blue Ribbon Schools Program (BRSP), Dr. Stonner first presented this opportunity to Faculty Leadership, who concluded the school should participate in the application process. The staff then provided input through an evening of brainstorming successful MRMS practices as related to the various sections of the BRSP application. Dr. Stonner then selected lead writers and assistants, forming a representation from all grades and curricular areas to facilitate vertical writing teams. The vertical teams, comprised of teachers of all grade levels and exploratory areas, collaborated to organize, compose, review, revise, and edit multiple drafts of the BRSP application. To conclude the process, a small core of teachers, parents, and Dr. Stonner finalized the application.

The Moreland Ridge culture supports ongoing opportunities to improve, moderating and evaluating new and old programs when necessary. The six weeks spent reflecting through BRSP validated stakeholders' confidence in school programs and procedures and provided many opportunities to dialogue with colleagues. This initiative focused attention on elements of the school that make it exemplary and identified areas for future reflection.

F4. How does the school leadership use the most current information about education to promote continuous improvement in the school? How does such evidence influence decision-making?

Teachers use current information about education, including content area standards and guidelines from professional organizations such as National Middle School Association (NMSA), to promote continuous improvement and informed decision-making. Several teachers, participating in the University of Missouri Partnership program, now train staff on current trends in effective teaching practices such as authentic/performance assessments. Recently, the school's leadership studied attendance data, leading to new policies concerning students' absences and tardies to school. A vast supply of professional journals housed in the LMC, in-services, study groups (C4), and staff attendance at conferences assist staff in continuously improving MRMS. The Professional Development Committee is proactive in keeping the staff informed about how and when to get training on cutting-edge educational practices. Often attached to Stonner Notes (E4) is an article relating to a current theme or proposed improvement in the school. Building PDC provides monthly Master Teacher™ pamphlets for all staff to reflect about improved teaching, social, and teaming skills, as well as teacher/parent communication (E3).

MRMS mainstreams special needs students into regular education classrooms in accordance with current research findings regarding improved performance. The school's leadership, directed by other FL members and in response to recent data indicating that violence stems from intolerance, designed a special unit known as *Walk a Mile in My Shoes*, teaching respect for intellectual diversity (B2). The school's mission of nurturing students to become responsible citizens is at the core of this unit because it

educates students regarding acceptance and understanding of intellectual differences. The simulations, involving all students, promote improved decision-making skills and treating others respectfully.

F5. Reflecting on the last 5 years, what conditions or changes have contributed most to the overall success of the school?

Strong, effective, shared leadership is the condition that has contributed most to the overall success of MRMS. As its only principal since MRMS opened, Dr. Stonner has provided consistent leadership over the last five years. The staff expects exemplary leadership, which is one reason positive communication remains high and staff turnover rates remain low. If staff members leave, it is usually for professional advancement, such as teachers moving into administration or joining the staff of professional state teacher organizations. The district human resources department has many transfer requests on file for placement at MRMS. Major changes in staffing are not necessary due to Dr. Stonner's strengths in hiring staff that shares the same MRMS cultural expectations. The school continues to seek highly qualified professionals to continue the strong tradition of leadership in education.

F6. How has the school integrated technology to improve management and program efficiency and effectiveness?

MRMS integrates many technological devices to improve management and program efficiency/effectiveness. Teachers have personal computer workstations in each classroom that can send documents directly to the school copier. School Master™ allows for computerized attendance, student information, and grade cards. Teachers also have access to a computerized grade book, Making the Grade™, to record and provide students and parents with a hard copy of all assignments and grades at any given time. Teachers use computers to write lesson plans, to design assignments and activities, to create and present PowerPoint™ presentations as a part of a lesson, and to use e-mail and voice mail for faster communication with staff members and parents. With Microsoft 2000™ in each classroom, teachers use 36" mounted monitors to present information and to make presentations from prepared PowerPoint™ slides. In addition, teachers can easily make copies of information for absent or special needs students. Students have access to three computer labs and a class set of AlphaSmarts™, mobile keyboards on which to word process, research, and synthesize academic information. Students may enroll in computer or industrial technology courses, utilize Computerized Curriculum Corporation (CCC) stations for improved math and reading skills, access the LMC on-line catalog, and complete assignments in the writing lab. The administration utilizes the technology available to record and analyze data related to academic achievement, school attendance, office referrals, and suspensions. Clear Access™ data disaggregates MAP test results for curricular planning. Staff receives frequent in-service training on current technology software programs, such as Marco Polo™ and Embark™.

F7. What are the major educational challenges the school must face over the next five years, and how does the school plan to address them?

MRMS staff realizes that many challenges loom in the near future. Perhaps the greatest challenge will be maintaining the existing high standards. Staff and students will continue to annually review/revise School Improvement Plan (SIP) goals in an effort to maximize student achievement and performance on MAP or other standardized tests. Another key issue will be the need to develop additional programs that address academic and social/emotional needs of at-risk students. MRMS is committed to bringing these at-risk students back into mainstream society. To assist counselors, teachers will need training to facilitate support groups such as Anger Management and Families in Transition (A2, C3). A third major challenge, reflecting district demographic data, is the anticipated population growth within the MRMS attendance area. Fifth grade visits from the four feeder schools will need to continually find ways to enhance the nurturing environment with individual recognition of student effort and achievement. A fourth major challenge will be finding solutions to space limits and staffing considerations resulting from population increases and the district's recent emphasis on mainstreaming special needs students back into

neighborhood schools. Finally, due to the constantly changing nature of technology, MRMS must continue long-range plans to stay abreast of current technological advances. The Technology Committee constantly researches these issues, proposing solutions through prudent planning. MRMS staff will turn these challenges into opportunities to enhance student growth and development.

G. School, Family, and Community Partnerships

G1. What are the goals and priorities of the school, family, and community partnerships? How have the school and community both improved as a result of these partnerships and how did the school measure the improvements?

“MRMS builds a cooperative and collaborative partnership with families and the community to establish a *Frontier for Learning* for its students.” This quote, excerpted from the MRMS mission statement, outlines the importance the staff places on school, family, and community partnerships. The staff, firmly believing that these partnerships are crucial for student success, further emphasizes the role of these stakeholders in the school’s goals and activities.

As a Community of Caring school (C6), MRMS staff collaborates with parents and families in numerous ways. Members of the Community of Caring Parent Involvement Team and the PTSA Parent and Family Life Education Committee join teachers in planning and implementing parent seminars. Parents provide regular input regarding seminar topics through PTSA surveys, evaluation feedback at each seminar, and informal discussions with staff and committee members. Some seminar topics include *Family Communication*, *Motivating Students to Get Organized for Homework and Schoolwork*, and *Drug Trend Awareness*. MRMS staff presenters and community professionals, such as licensed psychologists, provide participants suggestions for effective parenting strategies. To meet families’ needs, parent seminars occur simultaneously with evening study sessions (G4), providing safe and supportive learning environments for both students and parents. Community of Caring and PTSA coordinators take special care to create a welcoming and nurturing climate, receiving regular positive parent feedback that reinforces the benefits of mutual respect and caring between parents and staff.

The parenting library is a quality resource for parents and families. The library media specialist uses survey data from parents and staff to select various books and audio/videotapes, meeting the needs of all families. Families utilize this parenting library during school hours, at parent seminars, parent-teacher conferences, concerts/performances, Open House nights, and PTSA meetings.

The community is another important partner in the education of MRMS students. Business partnerships, formed through the district Adopt-a-School program, collaborate with staff, providing students opportunities to take part in community events such as performing at grand openings. Community support and collaboration extend the MRMS *Frontier for Learning* through donations of goods and services for an annual spring fundraising activity known as Spring Fling. Proceeds from Spring Fling enhance technology resources, positively affecting student achievement. Business partners also reward students for academic accomplishments. Last spring, one supportive business partner recognized MRMS honor students at Academic Recognition Nights by instituting two special awards for high achievement. The Blue Chip Award, presented to 51% of MRMS students, acknowledged those who maintained grade point averages of 3.5 or higher. A second award, the Moreland Ridge McDonald’s Award, recognized four special students who scored in the top/advanced level on all MAP tests throughout middle school. Through this community recognition, students realize firsthand that hard work affects success at school and in the workforce. Overwhelming community support enables MRMS to provide educational, motivational, and enrichment opportunities for all students.

G2. How does the school involve families in their children’s education?

Families are a vital part of the educational community at Moreland Ridge. The school supports and enhances parenting roles by hosting parent seminars (G1) and opening the door for communication while providing support for parents. MRMS also subscribes to *Middle Years: Working Together for School Success*, a concise publication available for parents through the library media center.

MRMS ensures effective two-way communication in several ways. Proactive communication with families about the upcoming school year begins each summer when each family receives a packet of orientation materials in the mail. This packet includes a welcoming letter from Principal Stonner, class schedule, invitation to Socials in the Park (A3), school supply list, emergency procedure/health cards, Student Code of Conduct form, and a checklist of items needed on the first day of school. In August, MRMS schedules new student orientations, enabling these students to locate classrooms. One week before school begins, staff greets new teams at Socials in the Park, providing opportunities for students, parents and teachers to begin two-way communication for the upcoming school year. On the first day of school, students receive the MRMS Parent-Student Handbook, an essential tool for home-school communication outlining school information/guidelines and discipline policies. Within the first two weeks of school, teachers telephone each household of PACK students (A2), inviting parents to the annual Open House. By early November, teachers contact 100% of MRMS parents to discuss student progress. Each year, parents utilize this two-way communication to a greater degree by attending team conferences on district Parent-Teacher Conference Days. When necessary, staff schedules conferences before and after school, and frequently during team plan times, fostering effective two-way communication and promoting proactive strategies to meet student needs. Other means of two-way communication include regular team newsletters, *Iditarod* newspaper issues, notes to parents in student agendas, and regular grade checks requiring parent signatures. In addition, the use of e-mail and voice mail as communication tools maximizes time efficiency. These forms of two-way communication provide important ongoing links between school and home, facilitating student learning.

The PTSA is a strong partnership between school and home, recruiting volunteers to serve on PTSA Executive Board and Community of Caring Coordinating Committee as well as to assist with annual fundraisers, Hepatitis B clinics, Red Ribbon Week, Math Day, Reflections program, grade level mixers, library and book fair, and field trips. In August 2001, approximately 328 willing parents returned completed volunteer forms, validating the effective communication and positive working relationship between parents and staff.

Each spring, sixth grade teams host student-led conferences through Portfolio Celebration Nights where students strengthen communication with parents by sharing a portfolio of classroom work and an original multimedia presentation, highlighting sixth grade events and memories. In these presentations, students reflect on classes and performance, identifying individual strengths/weaknesses and establishing goals. Last spring, 78% of sixth grade parents attended Portfolio Celebration Nights, each benefiting from rich opportunities to dialogue about expectations and to address decisions for the student's future.

Moreland Ridge families are a vital part of the school community, strengthening the *Frontier for Learning* through effective two-way communication, volunteerism, and collective decision-making.

G3. How does the school support the needs and concerns of families?

Moreland Ridge strives to support the needs and concerns of families through services, programs, and instruction. MRMS follows district health procedures, offering a comprehensive school health program that strives to maintain, improve, and promote the health/safety of students. The school health aide facilitates learning by modifying or removing health-related barriers and promoting student wellness through screenings such as scoliosis and vision/hearing checks. District nurses supplement parental instruction through a sixth grade growth and development seminar. Counselors and district social workers assist the health aide by meeting with parents regarding frequent visits to the clinic, emotional/behavioral problems, poor attendance, unmet medical needs, or homelessness, helping to connect parents with appropriate community resources. The health aide not only keeps parents informed about student health/safety issues, but also notifies staff about student health concerns, preparing a confidential listing of student medical needs and providing in-service training on meeting these needs in the classroom. Staff integrates lessons addressing health issues, such as nutrition and teen pregnancy, through classes such as life skills, health/physical education, and family and consumer science.

Staff meets the needs of at-risk students and families through Choices, a student assistance program designed to provide a support base for students with observable social and/or behavioral

concerns (A2). While most Choices referrals result in staff intervention, team members refer serious cases to the local Youth Outreach Unit (A2) and/or to the Division of Family Services, networking parents with the appropriate community services.

The Blue Springs School District provides daily bus transportation for all students. When necessary, the Campus Law Enforcement Education Officer provides special transportation to school for the occasional truant student. When transportation fees are required for a field trip, students needing financial assistance discreetly receive help from designated school funds.

By embracing and supporting the Community of Caring program (C6), MRMS staff underlines instruction with heightened awareness and commitment to the core values of responsibility, respect, caring, trust, and family. Students participate in activities that focus on developing positive family relationships and responsibilities. The staff supports the needs and concerns of families, valuing the home/school connection as an important element of the MRMS *Frontier for Learning*.

G4. How are educational resources in the school and the community used to extend learning opportunities for students, teachers, and families?

Moreland Ridge seeks creative ways to extend the *Frontier for Learning* for students, teachers, and families within the Kansas City area by ensuring that all field trips and community speakers align with curriculum and service learning opportunities.

Field trips are one community resource utilized by MRMS students and staff. One of the most memorable trips was the all-school field trip to the Kansas City Zoo in 1997, incorporating the IMAX production of *The Living Sea* into the Sea Quest theme. Eighth grade family and consumer science classes use the neo-natal unit of the Kansas University Medical Center as a community resource, studying teen pregnancies then delivering hand-sewn blankets to the Medical Center. STRETCH (gifted/talented) students (C2) travel to the Kansas City Renaissance Festival to experience life in the past. Sixth graders visit a local historic cemetery studying the cemetery's history, studying epitaphs, and learning respect. Seventh graders investigate struggles of modern-day homelessness by traveling to Harvesters Food Network in North Kansas City to volunteer time in organizing non-perishable items into boxes for distribution to local agencies assisting the needy. Eighth graders visit the Coterie Theater in Kansas City, this year viewing Holocaust-related productions then hosting a visit from Andrea Warren, a local Holocaust survivor who wrote *Surviving Hitler*.

Ms. Warren and other guest speakers provide an additional bridge between the school and the community, enriching student learning with real-life experiences and programs. After reading novels by Missouri authors June Rae Wood and Vicki Grove, sixth and seventh graders, respectively, meet these authors, learning about the art of writing from personal experience stories shared by the authors. The eighth grade *Frontier for Learning* travels back to Civil War days as community members recount the experiences of Union soldiers and share stories about travel along the Underground Railroad.

MRMS staff and parents also benefit from community resources, with presentations from Kansas University specialists on Asperger Syndrome and from Sylvan Learning Center resource staff on learning deficiencies. Local police officers and medical personnel present evening workshops for parents on drug awareness and other adolescent issues (G1).

Community groups regularly utilize MRMS facilities for youth/adult sports leagues, Special Olympics competitions, and organizational meetings and dinners. On Friday mornings, Club 121, a nondenominational teen religious group, meets in the cafeteria. District staff utilizes the school for staff development, workshops, and classes in the LMC and computer labs. Community education classes, offered through Blue Springs Community Education program, take place in MRMS commons areas. One of the unique programs MRMS staff offers to students and families is Tutoring, Library and Computers (TLC) (D3). This Tuesday evening program invites students and parents to utilize Library Media Center print and electronic resources for homework, research, and projects. Teachers staff TLC nights, volunteering time to help students with homework. TLC demonstrates Moreland Ridge's commitment to the community and to extending the *Frontier for Learning* to its students and parents.

H. Indicators of Academic Success

H1. What is the school's overall approach to assessment? How do the methods align with the educational vision/mission and curriculum? What questions about assessment is the school currently addressing?

At MRMS, student learning is the top priority (B1). To meet this school climate expectation, a coherent and comprehensive school-wide assessment plan exists at Moreland Ridge Middle School, providing data that identifies student needs and highlights areas for curricular review. All MRMS assessments, from daily coursework to Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) tests, create a profile of the knowledge and skills acquired by students along the path to responsible citizenship.

Teachers use a variety of assessment techniques to evaluate student success. Language arts portfolios travel with students from grade to grade, enabling students, parents, and teachers to review current performance and assess skill development across the years. Similarly, students maintain files of computerized work from year to year on a designated server, accessing personal files with individual login names and passwords. In accordance with the spirit of collaboration established by the MRMS mission, sixth graders reflect on personal progress then share observations with parents through self-generated multi-media presentations (G2). The use of scoring guides, aligned with the criterion-reference portion of the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) test, familiarize students and parents with MAP testing parameters and performance expectations.

School administrators focus on statewide assessment, concentrating mainly on MAP test results. MAP tests, given to MRMS students each spring, combine criterion- and norm-referenced questions with a writing component, providing students the opportunity to explain thought processes. Analysis of grade level, content area, and subgroup performance on these tests validates existing curriculum and instructional methods and/or provides the impetus for change (H4, H5). The MAP test itself, now in its fifth year of implementation, undergoes annual assessment. As the state fine-tunes this assessment tool, staff adapts instruction to best prepare all students for this and other assessment challenges by emphasizing programs such as writing across the curriculum.

While MAP test results continue to define curricular changes, staff members address future assessment issues, such as the development of content-area exit exams to provide teachers additional feedback and to prepare students for possible state-mandated high school graduation exams. Based on district-level recommendations from the Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP) visit three years ago, MRMS increased vocational training, incorporating lessons on career options and entrepreneurship into cross-curricular classes like life skills and academic applications (C5). This curriculum and a program for at-risk students (C4), both still in the developmental stages, facilitate the MRMS mission of preparing students for the future.

Educational assessment guides curricular planning by identifying student needs and current educational issues. MRMS teachers, students, parents and administrators work collaboratively, utilizing the results of a variety of assessments to ensure student success.

H2. How does the school use assessment results to understand and improve student and school performance? How are data used to influence decision-making?

Moreland Ridge administrators and teachers use assessment data to make decisions about programs and students. Each year, Faculty Leadership utilizes assessment results from the most recent Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP) visit to establish the School Improvement Plan (SIP) goals. For example, MSIP data suggested a need to increase vocational placements and reduce the dropout rate at the high school. Faculty Leadership, realizing that many high school behaviors stem from habits formed at younger ages, adopted goals and created programs providing for career instruction and service for the at-risk population. MRMS climate expectations state, "Student learning is our purpose," but data from statewide assessments further define that purpose and school policies and practices. Based on 1999 MAP test results, Faculty Leadership established an academic SIP goal, challenging the staff to raise 3% of the students scoring in Levels 1 and 2 to a higher level and increasing the number of students scoring in Levels 4 and 5 by 3% (F3). MRMS met or exceeded this goal in all but one core area (H5),

and in that one area, social studies, students have consistently placed well above the state norm. Based on early MAP scores, MRMS instituted a building-wide movement to include writing in all content areas. This shift in instructional focus not only raised communication arts scores, but it also trained students to more fully articulate ideas and concepts in other subjects such as math and science.

MAP data, provided to the district through a computer program called Clear Access™, supply teachers and administrators with an item analysis of each objective tested on MAP, enabling teachers and administrators to identify specific areas of strength and weakness, as well as comparing student performance to that of others throughout the district and state. MRMS uses this data to identify which grade-level skills need reinforcement and to align curriculum. In the 2000-2001 school year, students who scored at the lowest level on MAP tests the previous year were required to retake the test the following February. Staff members, using Clear Access™ data, isolated the missed skills and developed a 30-hour remedial program for these students that incorporated test-taking strategies with content area instruction specifically tailored to meet the needs of the students in the program. Retesting results supported this program with 82% of the students advancing beyond Level 1 (H5).

H3. What assessment data are communicated to students, parents, and the community? What are the purposes of these communications? How does the school ensure that these stakeholders understand the standards for judgment and the meaning of the data?

Moreland Ridge receives spring MAP results shortly after the new school year begins. At that time, MRMS mails to parents each student's assessment scores. Shortly after this information goes home, administrators, counselors, and staff host a MAP Interpretation Night, providing parents with instructions on reading/interpreting MAP scores and answering parent questions. In the spring of 2001, parents also received information on the scope and sequence of the MAP test. Parents were then able to understand testing expectations and the testing sequence. Additionally, newsletters, distributed to all MRMS parents, detail grade level testing arrangements and provide parenting tips for preparing students for the MAP test.

Throughout the year, teachers communicate the importance of the MAP test to students as well, utilizing state-released test items and scoring guides to provide experiences with the MAP testing format and evaluation standards. Students enter the testing week with greatly diminished test anxiety, better understanding what to expect on the assessment.

At the end of each school year, the Blue Springs School District produces its annual report. This report details the district average per pupil expenditure and each school's assessment results, enrollment, and staff. Also included in the MRMS segment of the report are student activities, awards and recognitions of staff and students. In addition, local newspapers print the district's annual report and MAP score data, enabling all community members to view each school's progress towards its goals.

This system for disseminating statewide assessment data, coupled with six annual grade reports and numerous informal grade checks, keep parents abreast of school and student progress at MRMS.

H4. What standardized norm-referenced tests developed at the national, state or district level has your school given in the last five years? What are the results for the past five years?

In 1997, the state of Missouri implemented the first phase of the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP), testing only the math section that year. One year later, the state added social studies and communication arts tests, with science joining the testing battery in 1999. Because MAP testing replaced a previous state assessment, no test results exist for some core areas in the past five years (Table 1). The Missouri Assessment Program utilizes tests copyrighted by CTB McGraw-Hill in 1997 (1996 Edition). MRMS uses TerraNova Survey - Form A™ information to generate norm-referenced data. From 1997-2000, an average of less than 2% of the population did not take the MAP test. These special needs students were exempt due to IEP specifications. Due to state policy changes disallowing exemptions, nearly 100% of the MRMS student body participated in the 2000-01 MAP tests.

In the school's five-year MAP history, eighth graders have scored above a 61 NCE every year, with a high score of 72 in math. Social studies, another eighth grade test, has NCE scores above 61 each year, with the high NCE score of 66 for the past two years. Seventh graders, participating in the

communication arts and science MAP tests for four and three years, respectively, have NCE scores above 61 on each test in every year but one, with high NCE scores of 64 on both tests.

H5. What criterion-referenced tests does the school use? What are the results for the last five years?

MRMS compiles criterion-referenced data from statewide MAP tests, copyrighted by CTB McGraw-Hill in 1997. Data provided in Table 2 reflect student performance since Missouri implemented the Missouri Assessment Program in 1997. In that year, Missouri only administered the math component of MAP, adding communication arts, then social studies and science in subsequent years. Data is incomplete due to gradual implementation of MAP testing over the years (H4).

The criterion-referenced portion of MAP tests includes constructed response and performance events. On seven of fifteen MAP tests taken since the program’s inception, students scored at or above the state mean MAP score plus one-half standard deviation. On the other eight tests, five out of eight test scores were within four tenths or less of a percentage point from being one-half a standard deviation above the state mean MAP score. The other three tests were 0.9%, 1.1%, and 1.5% away. A scale using five achievement levels ranks student performance on MAP tests. These achievement levels range from the lowest level (Step 1) to Progressing, Nearing Proficiency, Proficient, and Advanced. Schools refer to the top two levels, Proficient and Advanced, when comparing achievement. Since 1997, MRMS performance data in these two areas surpassed the state average each year on every test, occasionally doubling the state averages.

H6. What alternative assessments of student performance does the school use?

Teachers at Moreland Ridge incorporate alternative assessment activities to unite real-life applications with classroom instructional objectives. Grade level collaboration ensures that assessment plans remain comprehensive and coherent, involving students in this assessment across the curriculum. Alternative assessments, scored using criterion-based scoring guides, allow students to demonstrate acquired knowledge and skills in unique and creative ways that incorporate self-expression and independent learning styles. Use of scoring guides aligns classroom assessment with the criterion-referenced portion of the MAP test. On this portion of the test (H5), students work to complete constructed response questions as well as performance events, requiring students to communicate solutions in various ways. Building-wide student self-assessment activities incorporate the use of Grammar, Usage, and Mechanics (GUM) sheets which provide commonly used grammar rules as well as a grade-level appropriate MAP scoring guide, outlining benchmarks used to evaluate written work. Whether asking students to explain a math answer or to interpret experimental results in science, teachers incorporate multiple opportunities daily to improve communication skills.

Through performance-based assessments, such as student-led conferences (G2), writing portfolios, multimedia presentations, letters to veterans and state agencies, and foreign language interviews, students receive additional achievement feedback while classroom teachers receive information necessary to evaluate lesson effectiveness.

H7. What are the data for the past five years in the following areas that serve as quantitative indicators of the school climate and engagement?

	2000-01	1999-00	1998-99	1997-98	1996-97
Daily student attendance	95.13%	95.40%	95.73%	95.06%	95.45%
Daily teacher attendance	96%	97%	97%	97%	96%
Teacher turnover rate	11%	6%	11%	11%	0%
Student dropout rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Student drop-off rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Moreland Ridge stakeholders recognize student attendance as paramount to school success. Teachers model exemplary attendance, seeking ways to teach this ethic to students. Despite a history of strong student attendance, Faculty Leadership continues to evaluate ways to improve, introducing a policy this year that establishes disciplinary action for students with excessive first hour tardies, encouraging promptness in students who are habitually late to school. MRMS has a 0% dropout rate due to student population ages 11-15 and state law requiring students to stay in school through age 16. The 0% drop-off rate reflects annual increases in student population due to steady growth in the MRMS attendance area and changes in district boundary lines that added over 100 students to each grade level in 1998.

Teachers enjoy working at Moreland Ridge. Professional advancement, promoted by the administration, accounts for 71% of the turnover rates shown above. Five former staff members entered administration, one became a school counselor, two became field representatives for the Missouri State Teachers Association, one became a STARR teacher, one became a church missionary, and six retired. There was no teacher turnover rate in 1996-1997, the year MRMS opened.

H8. Which awards received by the school, staff or students are most indicative of school success?

While MRMS staff and students have won numerous professional, academic, and performance awards, the following awards are the most indicative of MRMS success in the last five years:

- Spring 2001 Blue Chip Award (Local)
Received by 51% of the MRMS student population
For maintaining a 3.5 (or better) GPA
- Spring 2001 National PTA Reflections Honorable Mention
Received by sixth grader Nathan Feyerabend
For a negative exposure photography entry tied to the competition's theme
- Spring 2001 Sprint Sportsmanship for Life Essay Contest Winner
Received by eighth grader Mark Beck
For an essay describing sportsmanship and how it relates to his life
- Spring 2001 Greater Kansas City Counselor Association *Advocate of the Year Award*
Received by CLEEO Officer David Raines
For Excellence in Supporting School Counselors
- April 2000 National Phoebe Apperson-Hearst Outstanding Educators Award, Hon. Mention
Received by Principal Nancy Stonner
For promoting parent/family involvement to encourage student success
- October 1999 National Middle School Association's *Teams That Make A Difference Award*
Received by Kim Alberg, Betty Beal, Charles Brooks, Mike Moon, Jan Rase
For "working to improve the education and well being of young adolescents"
- March 1999 Missouri Middle School Association's *Team Teaching Award*
Received by MRMS Team 8-2, The Kodiaks
For successful use of interdisciplinary teams... *Titanic* Unit
- May 1998 Sallie Mae First Year Teacher Award
Received by Greg Johnson
For Excellence in First Year Teaching
- October 1997 Missouri Partnership for Outstanding Schools, *Outstanding School Award*
Received by Moreland Ridge Middle School
For exemplifying education reform and strong student achievement
- May 1997 Blue Springs School District *Teacher of the Year*
Received by Betty Beal
For Excellence in Teaching

Part VII – Special Emphasis Areas

J1. Special Education

The Moreland Ridge staff believes that all students can learn challenging content and maintain high academic standards. Regular education staff and an extremely dedicated special education team work collaboratively, ensuring that diverse learners have the necessary support to make this belief a reality for the special needs population at MRMS. The twenty-member special education (SpEd) team, consisting of ten certificated staff members and eleven paraprofessionals, facilitate learning for students with disabilities such as limited English proficiency, autism, Asperger Syndrome, physical impairments, emotional disorders, visual impairments, traumatic brain injuries, hearing impairments, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, bipolar disorder, other health impairments, and specific learning disabilities. The commitment of the SpEd team and the collaborative efforts of the regular education staff enable these students to receive challenging curriculum both in regular core and exploratory classes and in special classes designed to meet specific academic needs. Students with disabilities are valued members of the MRMS school community, each belonging to one of the nine core teams, participating in PACK (homeroom) activities and, with the help of special education teachers and classroom/personal aids, mainstreamed for instruction with fellow team members in the regular classroom environment 43% to 85% of the day.

Access: The Moreland Ridge staff, believing that parents play a vital role in the instruction of special needs students, creates an environment that fosters and encourages parents to be partners in education. The SpEd team plays a vital role in this relationship, developing a welcoming climate before the school year begins by providing numerous school tours for special education students and families prior to the first day of school. Through these tours, teachers help students and parents locate classrooms, open lockers, and meet members of the core teaching teams, putting transitional fears at ease while forming a connection between special needs students, parents, and special education staff.

Special efforts to maintain access and contact with parents continue as SpEd team members contact each parent early in the school year, extending a personal invitation to Open House. The Open House schedule, designed to introduce parents to each of the core and exploratory teachers, simulates the school day by taking parents through an abbreviated daily schedule. To enable parents of special education students to meet all the classroom teachers and follow this schedule, the SpEd team meets with parents 30 minutes prior to the official start of Open House, addressing questions about the upcoming year and providing information about special education goals and expectations. Teachers of students in the resource program also familiarize parents with the use of homework folders, designed to facilitate daily communication between school and home. The homework folder includes assignments, notices of school-wide activities, monthly and weekly calendars, invitations to assemblies, and progress notes from teachers. This special meeting and the regular education Open House serve to eliminate barriers and ensure open communication between school and parents.

MRMS staff and administration strive to ensure that all students have the opportunity to participate in co-curricular activities. Special needs students participate in a number of before- and after-school organizations, including Honors Choir, intramurals, yearbook staff, Ridge Readers, Math Club, Science Club, and Strategizers, a logic-game team. MRMS special needs students represent the school in athletic competitions and serve as managers for interscholastic sports teams. One co-curricular organization, Circle of Friends, provides a real-life setting for the development of social skills, gathering students who struggle with social interaction and a variety of middle school peers to play games, visit, eat snacks, and attend other co-curricular activities together. This organization, unique to MRMS, frequently takes trips into the community, giving students opportunities to develop positive interaction skills in a variety of settings. When parents of special needs students cannot provide traditional transportation to/from these activities, the MRMS staff finds solutions. Last year, MRMS provided transportation for parents to attend an in-service on communication assistive technology equipment utilized by the student.

The MRMS staff works collaboratively with parents, continually searching for opportunities to provide families with access to appropriate activities and information. The parent of an autistic student attending MRMS recently commented, “It has been my experience that there are no ‘road blocks’ on the communication highway between Moreland Ridge Middle School and myself. The staff provides a flow of information to me, in the form of open houses, parent-teacher conferences, phone calls home, e-mails, and the daily comments in a notebook that goes back and forth to school. There is an acceptance and openness with me as an equal member of my son’s education team. I don’t feel that the ‘them vs. us’ mentality exists. In fact, I don’t know if every teacher would feel comfortable having a parent substitute in their classroom, but the transition went smoothly thanks to the atmosphere of trust and candor that had long been established.”

Assessment: Moreland Ridge Middle School follows a consistent testing protocol in the case of initial referrals and re-evaluations. SpEd team members work closely with teachers to develop alternative intervention strategies and with parents in assessing student needs. The MRMS SpEd team makes every effort to complete testing and to reconvene with parents regarding results within thirty days instead of the forty-five days mandated by state and federal guidelines. Parents are an integral part throughout the evaluation process.

Staff members proactively identify potential academic and behavioral concerns. School counselors work closely with the staff, addressing situations pertaining to self-concept and providing additional background information for students when necessary. To ease the student’s transition from elementary to middle school, MRMS special education teachers visit with the elementary special education staffs, reviewing the types of services provided at the middle level and working closely to create student profiles which will help the MRMS SpEd team prepare to meet the individual needs of incoming students. Elementary classroom teachers also receive information regarding differences between middle and elementary level special education programs. This information is presented in a format that can be shared with parents to facilitate understanding of the inclusive nature of special education programs at MRMS. By compiling and providing comprehensive information, elementary and middle school teachers collaboratively assess the needs of students and develop the most appropriate program possible.

To implement a recent program developed within the district, students with reading skills significantly below grade level received a Reading Intervention Plan. Information from statewide testing and specific reading tests combined to identify students at-risk of failure due to low reading skills. Specific goals and objectives addressed deficits in reading skills. A member of the SpEd Team provided an extensive, after-school remediation program for these students.

Due to the number of students on IEP’s, the staff at MRMS works collaboratively to address accommodations required for statewide testing. Nearly 90% of the students receive accommodations that include, but are not limited to, testing in small groups, oral presentation, paraphrasing, and in some cases, scribing student responses. Faculty Leadership created an alternative school schedule for testing days, enabling members of the exploratory staff to apply accommodations for these students in small groups. Without the assistance of these staff members, the SpEd Team would not be able to fully implement the accommodations for the students involved.

Staff Development: Moreland Ridge teachers are fully informed of characteristics and modifications needed for special needs students placed in the regular classroom environment. To introduce the regular education staff to the wide variety of disabling conditions serviced at MRMS, the SpEd team produced a multimedia presentation reviewing these characteristics then provided staff members with activities that simulated life with certain disabilities. Through activities like a language-processing disorder challenge requiring teachers to create a story without using the letter ‘n’, teachers experienced the frustrations shared by the special needs population, developing an increased understanding of these students’ needs. This presentation led to the development of *Walk A Mile In My Shoes*, an instructional unit for students that utilizes similar activities and simulations to introduce regular education students to the broad spectrum of disabling conditions at MRMS. Staff members received an in-service and implemented the unit in the reading, life skills and academic applications classes. Through

the simulation activities in this unit, students also experience what it feels like to have any number of the twelve featured disabilities, including learning disabilities and attention deficit disorder. The multimedia presentation and instructional unit increased the sensitivity of staff and students resulting in greater acceptance of the special needs population at MRMS. During the implementation of *Walk A Mile In My Shoes*, the SpEd staff accessed a very valuable resource – an eighth grade student whose brother has a severe disability. This student normally quiet and reserved, swelled with pride, sharing information and a videotape of the brother’s story that had been profiled on *Lifetime*. The ability to teach others tolerance and acceptance by example was an incredible experience.

In addition to in-house staff training, MRMS also provides an exemplary model for sharing information among colleagues across the district, sponsoring in-service activities, such as one recently offered on identification and modifications for autistic students. At this in-service, teachers received information regarding characteristics and behavioral considerations as well as instructional strategies for working with Autistic students in the regular classroom setting.

Staff members at MRMS receive specific information for each IEP student in the form of a profile sheet. This chart allows teachers to identify students needing modifications in mainstream classes. The profiles provide goals, modifications, minutes of service, range of ability, assistive technology and any other pertinent information for meeting student needs. The SpEd team meets with each core and exploratory team to keep all staff members fully informed.

Resources: MRMS draws upon the resources of the community, bringing in professionals to address topics specific to building needs. Recently, an expert on autism spoke to MRMS staff and parents about addressing the special needs of autistic children. Additionally, a team of professionals from the Program of Study on Autism at Kansas University evaluated and made recommendations for programs servicing students with this disorder. A behavioralist from the Kansas City Responsive Center works with several students, parents, and staff at MRMS, making recommendations on providing effective instruction for students with Asperger Syndrome, Tourettes Syndrome, autism, and other disorders. The behavioralist also utilizes MRMS facilities for presentations to parents and educators about the characteristics and circumstances regarding these disabilities.

Teachers of the cross-categorical classroom at MRMS take advantage of the students’ excitement surrounding the Christmas season by teaching sequencing and following directions through the creation of gingerbread houses. This activity, which would not be possible without the assistance of a skilled community volunteer, supports the use of olfactory and tactile senses for students with autism.

The SpEd team at MRMS provides programs that are creative, innovative and fully implemented. The SpEd team continually seeks to identify barriers to parent access and develop programs to increase communication and participation. In addition, MRMS staff members work collaboratively to identify and provide for student needs. The SpEd team actively seeks information from previous schools to assess student abilities and needs in forming action plans. Staff development is ongoing and comprehensive for all members of the MRMS staff and the community. Finally, the SpEd team effectively utilizes external resources to enhance and sustain the involvement of parents and students with disabilities. All of these components combine to make MRMS one of the most effective learning environments for students with disabilities.

Table 1
H4. MRMS Norm-Referenced Data

	2000-2001	1999-2000	1998-1999	1997-1998	1996-1997
Testing Month	April	April	April	April	April
SCHOOL SCORES					
1. Math grade 8					
Number of students tested	322	302	225	196	189
Percent of total students tested	99%	96%	97%	95%	95%
Number of students excluded	0	6	5	3	1
Percent of students excluded	0%	1.9%	2.2%	1.5%	1.9%
NCE Score	67	65	72	66	62
2. Social Studies grade 8					
Number of students tested	321	308	224		
Percent of total students tested	99%	99%	97%		
Number of students excluded	0	6	5		
Percent of students excluded	0%	1.9%	2.2%		
NCE Score	66	66	64		

	2000-2001	1999-2000	1998-1999	1997-1998	1996-1997
Testing Month	April	April	April	April	April
SCHOOL SCORES					
1. Communication Arts grade 7					
Number of students tested	308	304	212	223	
Percent of total students tested	100%	98%	97%	97%	
Number of students excluded	0	5	6	5	
Percent of students excluded	0%	1.6%	2.8%	2.2%	
NCE Score	62	63	60	64	
2. Science grade 7					
Number of students tested	307	303	212		
Percent of total students tested	99%	97%	97%		
Number of students excluded	0	5	6		
Percent of students excluded	0%	1.6%	2.8%		
NCE Score	59	62	64		

Table 2
H5. MRMS Criterion-Referenced Data

	2000-01	1999-00	1998-99	1997-98	1996-97
Testing Month	April	April	April	April	April
<u>SCHOOL SCORES</u>					
1. <u>Math grade 8</u>					
Number of students tested	322	302	225	196	189
Percent of total students tested	99%	96%	97%	95%	95%
Number of students excluded	0	6	5	3	1
Percent of students excluded	0%	1.9%	2.2%	1.5%	1.9%
At or Above Proficient	30%	21%	33%	29%	29%
At or Above Excellent	5%	2%	3%	3%	3%
MRMS Scaled Score	716	721	727	717	728
Mean MAP & ½ Standard Deviation	716	718	715	726	727
2. <u>Social Studies grade 8</u>					
Number of students tested	321	308	224		
Percent of total students tested	99%	99%	97%		
Number of students excluded	0	6	5		
Percent of students excluded	0%	1.9%	2.2%		
At or Above Proficient	63%	61%	54%		
At or Above Excellent	23%	19%	38%		
MRMS Scaled Score	705	703	698		
Mean MAP & ½ Standard Deviation	707	706	700		
<u>DISTRICT SCORES</u>					
1. <u>Math grade 8</u>					
At or Above Proficient	27%	25%	22%	22%	22%
At or Above Excellent	4%	3%	1%	2%	2%
2. <u>Social Studies grade 8</u>					
At or Above Proficient	61%	61%	48%		
At or Above Excellent	22%	21%	14%		
<u>STATE SCORES</u>					
1. <u>Math grade 8</u>					
At or Above Proficient	15%	14%	10%	13%	13%
At or Above Excellent	1%	1%	0.6%	1%	1%
2. <u>Social Studies grade 8</u>					
At or Above Proficient	42%	42%	36%		
At or Above Excellent	12%	14%	9%		

H5. MRMS Criterion-Referenced Data (Continued)

	2000-01	1999-00	1998-99	1997-98	1996-97
Testing Month	April	April	April	April	April
<u>SCHOOL SCORES</u>					
1. <u>Communication Arts grade 7</u>					
Number of students tested	308	304	212	223	
Percent of total students tested	100%	98%	97%	97%	
Number of students excluded	0	5	6	5	
Percent of students excluded	0	1.6%	2.8%	2.2%	
At or Above Proficient	55%	49%	48%	56%	
At or Above Excellent	6%	6%	6%	6%	
MRMS Scaled Score	694	691	693	696	
Mean MAP & ½ Standard Deviation	697	694	693	691	
2. <u>Science grade 7</u>					
Number of students tested	307	303	212		
Percent of total students tested	99%	97%	97%		
Number of students excluded	0	5	6		
Percent of students excluded	0	1.6%	2.8%		
At or Above Proficient	22%	18%	24%		
At or Above Excellent	4%	3%	3%		
MRMS Scaled Score	697	694	700		
Mean MAP & ½ Standard Deviation	705	701	700		
<u>DISTRICT SCORES</u>					
1. <u>Communication Arts grade 7</u>					
At or Above Proficient	48%	47%	48%	49%	
At or Above Excellent	5%	5%	6%	5%	
2. <u>Science grade 7</u>					
At or Above Proficient	20%	24%	22%		
At or Above Excellent	4%	4%	3%		
<u>STATE SCORES</u>					
1. <u>Communication Arts grade 7</u>					
At or Above Proficient	34%	32%	30%	30%	
At or Above Excellent	2%	3%	2%	3%	
2. <u>Science grade 7</u>					
At or Above Proficient	14%	15%	15%		
At or Above Excellent	2%	2%	2%		