

**River Valley School District  
2013-18**



*“The mission of River Valley School District is quality education”*

**This Strategic Plan was funded by a grant from The Pokagon Fund.**

Submitted by the Michigan Association of School Boards  
Approved by the River Valley School District: **FEBRUARY 24, 2014**

## Letter from Board President and Superintendent

### ***River Valley School District (RVSD) 2013-2018 Strategic Plan: Participants Help Shape Vision and Goals for Future of RVSD.***

This document contains the 2013-18 RVSD Strategic Plan. We're excited about this plan and the possibilities it provides for our students, parents and community to improve education at RVSD.

This plan is the culmination of 6 input sessions and an electronic survey of more than 250 students, parents, staff and community members. In all, over 300 people provided input for the planning process.

Throughout the planning process the community expressed high expectations of RVSD becoming a world class school district and having all students graduate from high school. Even though some of the goals are extremely high, they reflect the strong desire that has been expressed to embrace significant change and dramatically improve the school system.

There were several clear and consistent themes that emerged from this process.

1. While much more work needs to be done, RVSD is headed in the right direction with positive momentum behind the academic growth, instruction reforms and innovative new school choices.
2. The future of growth and success of RVSD must be a top community priority that requires support from all stakeholders (students, parents, taxpayers, businesses, non-profits, foundations, government agencies, etc.).
3. As a district, we must do a better job of positively engaging and aligning internal (students, parents, staff and the school board) and external (taxpayers, community organizations, businesses, non-profits, government agencies, elected officials) stakeholders around common goals and strategies to significantly improve academic achievement and high school graduation rates.

Our Strategic Planning Team, comprised of a very broad and diverse group of 35 stakeholders, developed the goals. We look forward to continuing to work in partnership with all sectors of our community to implement these goals and suggested strategies.

*John Pawlik*

President, Board of Education

*William J. Kearney*

Superintendent



## Introduction

Strategic Planning is the process of determining what an organization wants to be at some point in the future, and how it will get there. In the current environment where schools are challenged to do more with scarce resources, planning for the future is more important than ever. An effective strategic planning process results in stakeholders focusing on critical priorities that will meet the mission of a quality educational program for all students.

In March of 2013, the River Valley School District Superintendent and Board of Education made a commitment to create a three- to five-year strategic plan. The School Board created a partnership with the Michigan Association of School Boards to serve as facilitators for this project. The district, under the leadership of the School Board President and Superintendent, completed a process that was data-driven, inclusive of district stakeholders and focused on the priorities that will help the district succeed.

There were several criteria relative to the strategic planning process established by the School Board and the Leadership Team:

- The process must be inclusive where all stakeholders have an opportunity to provide structured input.
- The School Board must be an integral part of the process by providing input, support and commitment.
- There must be clarity in the respective roles of the School Board, administrators, staff, parents and community.
- There is alignment between the strategic planning process and current strategic initiatives, and critical issues facing the district.
- Timelines, responsibilities and reporting schedules must be built into the planning process.
- There must be ongoing communication about the planning process with all internal and external stakeholders.

This strategic plan is a living document. It will serve as a ‘road map’ for future planning, resource allocation, staff development and decision-making over the next several years.

As part of the planning process, the mission and vision statements were revised. Based on the renewed vision and mission, strategic goals and objectives were developed. Regular monitoring of progress and renewal is critical to the plan’s success.



## **The Strategic Plan Process**

This overview describes the planning process, including the survey, data analysis, planning team roles and responsibilities, and timelines.

### **Stakeholder Input**

Input from students, parents, community and staff were gathered through a comprehensive electronic survey as well as a series of community and staff forums. The community engagement process was conducted to:

- Identify and assess strengths
- Gauge values and perceptions of the community
- Provide an opportunity for input
- Identify areas for improvement
- Gather data to use as a decision making tool
- Develop communication plans and tools

A community forum, two staff sessions, one administrator session and one board of education session were conducted at various locations in August 2013. In addition, over 250 individuals responded to the electronic version of the survey. In all, well over 250 people provided input for the planning process. The high response rate indicates that the school community cares about the future of the district and desires to engage in the process of creating the future (see Attachment 1 for summary).

### **Local Area and School Demographic Data**

An analysis of district demographics and quantitative data was completed. The analysis included educational and financial trends over the previous five years (2007-2012) in comparison with comparable districts and state averages (see Attachment 2 for the data analysis summary).

### **Strategic Planning Team**

A Strategic Planning Team was formed to take a primary role in developing the strategic plan. The team consisted of 35 parent, community, board and staff members selected with input from the Board of Education and key stakeholder groups. The team participated in a retreat workshop as well as additional committee meetings to develop a renewed mission statement, vision, beliefs and strategic goals. During the retreat, the team reviewed and discussed relevant quantitative and qualitative data as essential elements in the formation of work products contained in this document (see team members on page 5).

***Collaborating with the River Valley School District Board of Education, administration, staff and the entire community really illustrated their level of care for the school, the community, and most of all, the students.***

***—Scott Morrell, MASB Senior Facilitator***

### Strategic Planning Team Attendees

1. Patrick Bertrand - Teacher
2. Patrick Breen - Administrator
3. Bob Brown - Transportation
4. Cheryl Capiak - Administrator
5. Jeanne Carter - Secretary
6. Heidi Clark - Administrator
7. Chris Dillard - Parent
8. Michael Ehlert - Board of Education
9. Gail Freehling - Parent
10. JC German - Board of Education
11. Viki Gudas - Community Member
12. Kris Harrington - Parent
13. Rylee Haughey - Student
14. Brad Hoekstra - Teacher
15. Pam Kaniuga - Teacher
16. Will Kearney - Superintendent
17. Cheryl Kersey - Parent
18. Dylan Lange - Student
19. Amanda Macias - Parent
20. Bill Marske - Community Member
21. Isaac Maze - Student
22. Elizabeth Maze-Emery - Parent
23. Annde McDonnough - Teacher
24. Kelly Moore - Teacher Assistant
25. Jack Pawlik - Board of Education
26. Bob Payne - Administrator
27. Shelly Reese - Teacher
28. Dan Schaser - Teacher
29. Tammie Schmidt - Secretary
30. Angela Sokolowski - Parent
31. Nikki Springer - Parent
32. Natalie Swarmes - Food Service
33. Vickie Wagner - Board of Education
34. David Whitlow - Board of Education
35. Amber York - Teacher Assistant



## Retreat Workshop

A retreat workshop was held on November 2, 2013. The session covered:

- An overview of the strategic planning process and timelines
- Superintendent report of current and planned initiatives
- An analysis of demographic, quantitative and qualitative data
- A review and renewal of the mission statement
- The development of a vision, values and beliefs
- The establishment of strategic goal areas
- Assigning planning team leaders to be part of a “goal committee” to develop action plans for each goal and objective, including responsibilities, timelines and measurements

## RVSD 2013-18 Strategic Plan

### Vision Statement:

Describes what you want to happen in the long term. It's a statement about your hopes and expectations for the future. The vision statement below was developed following the Strategic Planning Team Retreat Workshop:

*The River Valley School District will:*

- *become an exemplary learning community that supports innovation and is committed to continuous improvement;*
- *be a place where a collaborative community develops curricula, instructional strategies, interventions and assessments to ensure all students learn;*
- *address the academic, social, emotional and physical needs of all learners; and*
- *prepare all students for college and career achievement through a high-quality learning environment at all grade levels.*

*To reach our goal, we will increase the percentages of elementary, middle and high school students who perform at the proficient levels in core academic subjects, as measured by state and standardized assessments.*

### Mission Statement:

Establishes, in the broadest terms, the purpose of a school district. It should answer the question “What ultimate end will the district pursue and in the broadest sense, how?” The following mission statement was developed after the Strategic Planning Team Retreat Workshop:

*The mission of River Valley School District is quality education.*



## Beliefs

The basic beliefs of the district—those things that we believe of utmost importance, providing guidance for how we behave and relate to others.

Administrators and staff will impact student achievement by implementing eight Key Practices that provide direction and meaning to comprehensive school improvement. **The Key Practices are:**

- ✓ High Expectations: Set higher expectations and help all students meet them.
- ✓ Academic Rigor: Guide students in completing an academic core that accelerates their learning, challenges them to achieve at higher levels and appeals to their interests.
- ✓ Career/Technical Studies: Provide opportunities for all students to engage in career/technical studies and to use technology in academic courses.
- ✓ Students Actively Engaged: Provide varied learning activities to help all students link challenging academic content to real-world applications.
- ✓ Teachers Working Together: Provide all teachers time to work together to plan, develop and conduct high-quality learning experiences and to share student work that meets standards.
- ✓ Guidance: Base guidance activities on the belief that all students matter and that they need long-term, personal relationships with adults at the school who will work with them and their parents to set learning goals and to make plans for further education and careers.
- ✓ Extra Help: Provide a structured system of extra help and quality time that will enable all students to complete an accelerated program of study and to meet rigorous and consistent standards.
- ✓ Data: Use data on student achievement and school and classroom practices to revise curricula, instructional strategies and interventions.

## Values

### ➤ CORE VALUES FOR MIDDLE / HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

#### ***MUSTANG “PRIDE”***

- Plan for your future
- Raise your expectations
- Inspire progress
- Dare to try
- Expect to excel

### ➤ CORE VALUES FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

- Personal best
- Care for others
- Love our school

## **2013-2018 Strategic Goals**

Strategic Goals: Areas of priority importance in which the district will focus their work (1-5 years). Strategic goals achieve the organization's vision, mission and beliefs. Objectives are SMART—**S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**elevant and **T**imely.

The Strategic Planning Team, at the November 2<sup>nd</sup> retreat, developed goal statements and specific objectives. The goal areas are:

### **2013-2018 Goal Areas**

***Student Achievement***

***Staff Professional Development***

***Learning Environment/Facilities***

***Community Relations***

Following the retreat, goal teams and goal team leaders were charged with developing specific goals based on strategic goal areas identified by the team.

### **Goal Area 1: Student Achievement**

**Goal Statement:** Our schools will implement a relevant, rigorous curricula utilizing research-based instruction practices to improve student achievement, thereby preparing all students for college, career and life challenges in a competitive global economy.

**Objective:** Provide educators with opportunities to engage in collaborative learning activities focused on curricula, instruction, and assessment to increase student achievement.

- Strategy A: Develop a master schedule that provides for grade level teaming and small group interventions.
- Strategy B: Provide workshops, conferences and collaborative opportunities for teachers to improve instructional delivery to help students work toward higher achievement.
- Strategy C: Provide adequate staffing to allow for intervention classes as needed.

**Objective:** Create and implement actions to strengthen the academic relationship between the student and teacher through differentiation strategies to effectively challenge all students to master core content, strengthen critical thinking, promote creativity, increase communication, utilize collaboration, and integrate technological literacy.

- Strategy A: Assessments designed and implemented to measure student mastery of essential standards so we can determine individual needs.
- Strategy B: Students will meet or exceed district essential standards at grade levels and courses.
- Strategy C: Provide supplement books/materials for both teachers and students to increase student achievement.



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## **Goal Area 1: Student Achievement** (Continued)

**Objective:** Design and implement an individualized instructional plan that provides intervention, extension and enrichment to address every area of each student's education.

- Strategy A: Support elective classes, lunchtime programs/clubs and after-school programs that reinforce essential standards-based education.
- Strategy B: Continue to develop and implement Response to Intervention (RtI) Model.

## **Goal Area 2: Staff Professional Development**

**Goal Statement:** The district will provide staff with relevant, research-based training to improve cross-curricular instruction where technology is an integral part to improve student achievement.

**Objective:** Provide educators with opportunities to become more proficient in cross-curricular instruction, so that staff and students will be engaged in the 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom.

**Objective:** Continue to collect and analyze data to increase student achievement.

- Strategy A: Review current professional development offerings through RESA.
- Strategy B: Development an alliance with a local university.
- Strategy C: Constantly cycle back to professional development that took place to ensure the district is implementing strategies with fidelity and training new teachers on past professional development.

### **Goal Area 3: Learning Environment/Facilities**

**Goal Statement:** Improve Learning Environment and Facilities

**Objective:** Internally address specifically the social, psychological and/or emotional root causes of disruptive classroom behavior.

- Strategy A: Hire a social worker; or
- Strategy B: Re-evaluate job descriptions and possibly redistribute responsibilities of existing qualified staff to allow them to be primarily utilized for this purpose.

**Objective:** Extend accessibility to our learning environment.

- Strategy A: Make Middle/High School “open for business” to students from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
- Strategy B: Provide academic supervision/assistance from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. at Middle/High School.
- Strategy C: Reinstate after-school daycare at the elementary level.

**Objective:** Expand educational opportunities in recreation and arts to the community and commuting staff, while improving current offerings to students.

- Strategy A: Provide the location for and the leadership to write and submit a grant application to The Pokagon Fund for the purpose of designing and building a community recreation and arts facility on the RV campus.

**Objective:** Promote vocational exploration within the framework of courses currently offered.

- Strategy A: Designate a coordinator to increase interest in and promotion of a technical track to career preparation by facilitating on-the-job training opportunities for students in conjunction with currently available technical courses through the BCCTE.

## **Goal Area 4: Community Relations**

**Goal Statement:** To Increase engagement between the River Valley School District and the community.

**Objective:** Develop marketing materials.

- Strategy A: Develop printed school brochures to place in local businesses and public areas.
- Strategy B: Develop content and rent a billboard promoting RV in public area.

**Objective:** Improve communication.

- Strategy A: Feature a current student/alumnus in local newspapers and newsletters.

**Objective:** Conduct community events within the school buildings.

- Strategy A: Sponsor community wide events.
- Strategy B: Bring in a dinner/show event initially to attract a diverse audience.
- Strategy C: Feature one sporting event that provides free admission to the community.
- Strategy D: Provide public access to exercise in school buildings.



## **Goal Area 4: Community Relations** (continued)

**Goal Statement:** Attract new families to choose River Valley School District as their school of choice.

**Objective:** Develop and implement an active and ongoing marketing campaign.

- Strategy A: Highlight current student successes in local media (newspapers, radio).
- Strategy B: Highlight alumni successes in local media.
- Strategy C: Develop renewable energy efforts at RVSD.
- Strategy D: Promote RVSD relevant and up-to-date website through social media.

**Goal Statement:** Develop and strengthen local business connections to River Valley School District.

**Objective:** Strengthen community and business connections and ownership of River Valley School District.

- Strategy A: Team up with community non-profits for community service opportunities.
- Strategy B: Offer cooking classes with local chefs.
- Strategy C: Host a Harvest Fest.
- Strategy D: Re-establish FFA.
- Strategy E: Develop work study/intern program with current RVSD students and local businesses.
- Strategy F: Sponsor local job fair to unite qualified students with local businesses.
- Strategy G: Sponsor regularly scheduled field trips to local businesses.

## Strategic Plan Implementation

The implementation plan will be developed in a collaborative manner by the superintendent and key staff members. Alignment with the current District Improvement Plan will be an integral part of the implementation plan. The district's priority goals/objectives identified during the strategic planning retreat will be translated into action plans with measurements, timelines, responsibilities and a timeline monitored by the Board.

Recommendations for keeping the momentum of the process are the following:

1. Develop communication plan
  - Community
  - Staff
2. Develop timeline for reports that is monitored by the Board
3. Develop action plans for each objective with:
  - Measurements
  - Timelines
  - Responsibilities
  - Resources
4. Identify annual timeline
  - Mid-year progress report
  - Annual plan update

# Attachment 1 – Input Summary

## Strengths

### Personnel (Human Resources)

- Teachers
- Staff
- Administration
- Board

### Programs

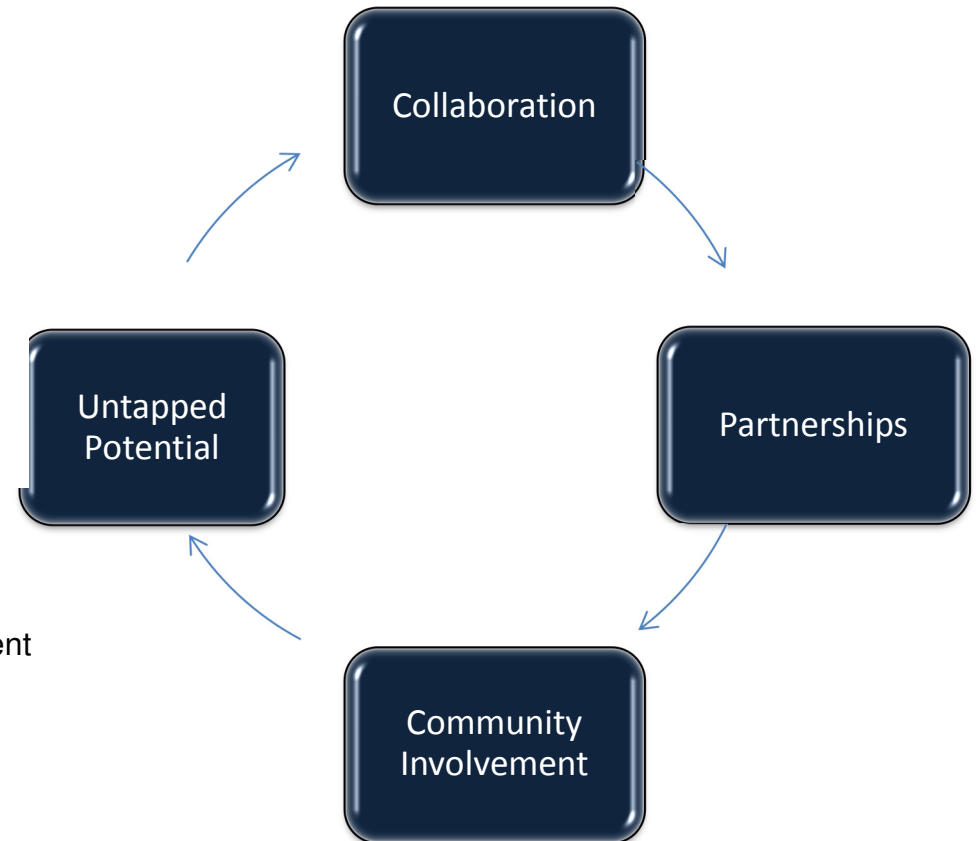
- Sports
- Music
- Band
- Art
- Technology
- Curriculum

### Culture

- Respect
- Loyalty
- Pride
- Open-minded
- Innovation
- Fiscally sound
- The Pokagon Fund
- Students valued
- Facilities/Property

### Community

- Close-knit
- Alumni
- Community involvement
- Parental involvement
- Safe environment



# Attachment 1 – Input Summary – Cont'd

## Opportunities for Improvement

### Culture

- Communication
- Collaboration
- Creative thinking
- PR
- Student achievement
- Listen to parental/ community input
- Regain trust of community
- Maintain student enrollment
- Reduce paperwork and meetings

### Facilities/Financial

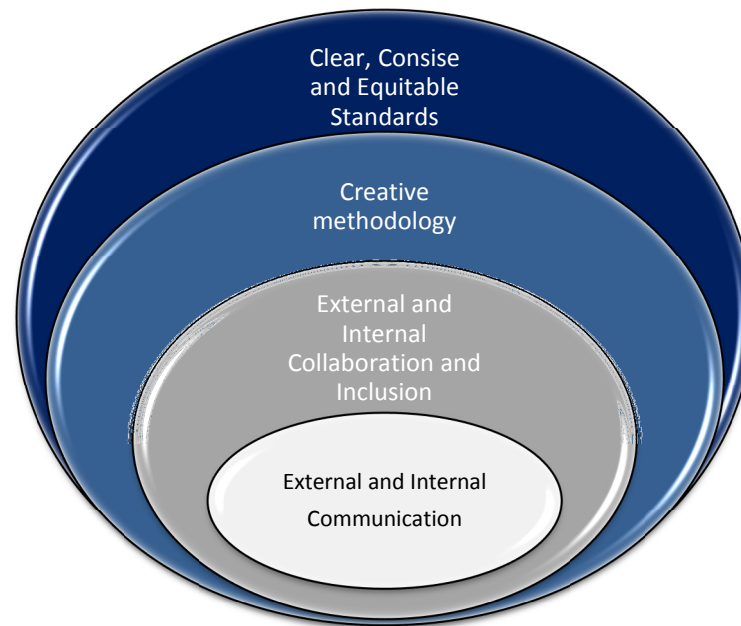
- New Elementary building
- Technology
- Renovations
- Scholarship funds

### Programs

- Course offerings for high achievers
- Online/Digital courses
- College prep
- Vocational training in high school
- Mentoring
- Improve Test scores
- Electives in middle and high school

### Community

- Community engagement
- Parental involvement
- Partnerships



# Attachment 1 – Input Summary – Cont'd

## Financial Allocations

### Facilities

- Technology/21<sup>st</sup> Century
- New elementary school
- Building maintenance/infrastructure
- Heat/Ventilation/Air Conditioning

### Culture

- Safety
- Student achievement
- Marketing

### Classroom

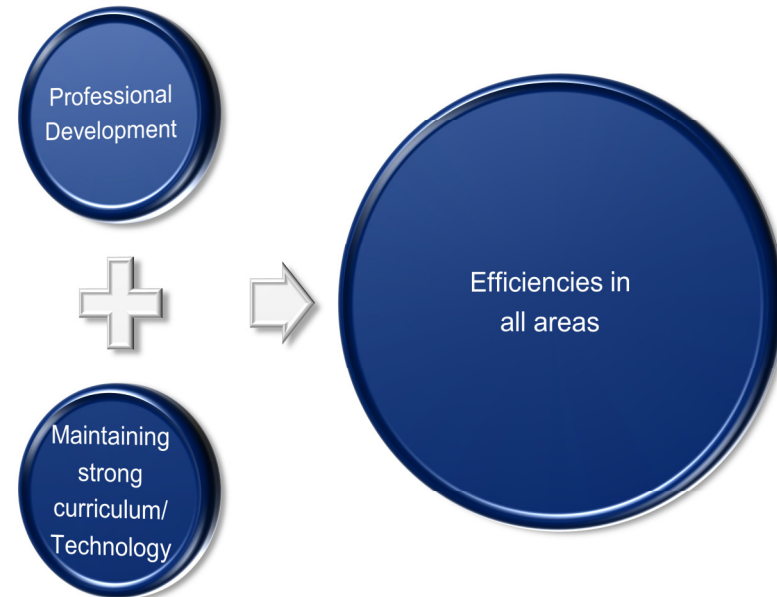
- Supplies
- Electronic tablets

### Other

- Transportation
- Teacher salaries

## Programs

- Classroom supplies
- Professional development
- AP/College Prep courses
- Online/Digital courses
- Sports and Clubs
- Vocational education
- Math programs
- Hands-on programs/Applied academics



# Attachment 1 – Input Summary – Cont'd

## Vision

### Students

- Exceed state expectations
- College ready
- Life-long learners
- Well-grounded

### Programs

- Technology driven
- Advanced programs
- Building trades
- Foreign language

### Branding

- School pride
- District of choice
- Leading academically
- Safe/Nurturing environment
- Positive perception

### Involvement

- Stable enrollment growth
- Cohesiveness
- Community partnerships
- Parental involvement/collaboration



## Attachment 2 – Data Summary

### Data-Driven Strategic Planning: River Valley School District

Based on analysis of data in this report, the following points are highlighted concerning River Valley School District:

- In general, the data revealed that when compared to state averages and the reference districts selected for this report, River Valley School District emerges as a district maintaining reasonable academic performance. Some grades struggle in Math and Reading, while Science is a strong subject for the district.
- Enrollment at River Valley has been steadily decreasing over the past five years, with an average reduction of 21 students per year since 2009. (B-2)
- The percentage of River Valley students eligible for lunch assistance in 2013 was in the middle of the referenced districts and 8.3% above statewide average. There was an increase of 39% in free lunch assistance in 2009-2010 leveling out thereafter as of 2013. (B-3, B-4)
- River Valley's 2012 4-year cohort graduation rate was among the lower of the reference districts, though still above the statewide average. (B-5)
- The percentage of district-resident children enrolled in public preschool was the lowest of all the referenced districts. The percentage of K-12 enrolled in public schools was within the range of most the referenced districts and above state average. (B-9)
- The River Valley School District's median income range is within the range of the referenced districts, but falls below state average by nearly \$2,000. (B-10)
- Demographics at River Valley have changed slightly since 2009, with an increase of multi-racial students and American Indian students, and a decrease of white students. (B-12)
- River Valley students appear to be struggling in math, with all students (except 5<sup>th</sup> grade) performing below statewide average on the MEAP. (C-1, C-4, C-8, C-12, C-16, C-20, C-26)
- River Valley's 5<sup>th</sup> grade students were above state average in all subjects and ranked the highest in science over the referenced districts. (C-8 - C-11)
- River Valley's 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students performed well in science, ranking above state average in 2012, with the district's 11<sup>th</sup> grade students barely missing state average by .03%. (C-10, C-22, C-29)

## Attachment 2 – Data Summary – Cont'd

- River Valley's 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade students performed well in social studies, ranking above state average in 2012, with the district's 11<sup>th</sup> grade students barely missing state average by .01%. (C-14, C-24, C-30)
- The average Composite ACT score at River Valley in 2012 was above the reference districts and above the statewide average. (C-32)
- Total instruction spending at River Valley ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> of the reference districts in 2012, and above the per-student average. Total instruction spending has continually increased over the past five years. (D-1 – D-2)
- Business and administration spending per student at River Valley ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> highest of the referenced districts and above state average. Spending has increased 45.5% since 2008. (D-5 - D-6)
- River Valley's total General Fund expenditure per student in 2012 was the second highest of the reference districts and above the state average. Spending has increased 43% since 2008. (D-7 - D-8)
- The potential revenue per millage of property tax levied in the River Valley School District as of 2012 was the second highest of the reference districts for homestead properties, and the third highest for non-homestead properties. Both figures were above the state average by 117% and nearly 400% respectively. (D-9)
- River Valley's General Fund reserve, expressed as a percentage of expenditures, has been in the negatives the past two years despite cutting of expenditures in 2013. (D-10, D-11)
- Student-teacher ratio at River Valley is amongst the lowest of the referenced districts and well below state average. The student ratio has decreased by 5 pupils since 2008. (E-1 - E-2)
- River Valley had the second-lowest average teacher salary of the reference districts in 2012, 36% below the statewide average. Average teacher salaries have decreased over the past five years, with a 13% reduction since 2008. (E-3 – E-4)
- River Valley has a highly educated teaching staff with more than half of its teachers having a Master's degree. (E-5)
- Half of River Valley's teachers have been with the district ten years or longer. (E-6)
- Lastly, district personnel cooperated with our requests for data and analysis. We appreciate the time and effort expended by the Board of Education and staff of River Valley School District in the preparation of this report.

Submitted: November 2, 2013  
Scott Morrell, MASB Senior Facilitator