

REVISED, MARCH 15, 2005

2004-2005 No Child Left Behind - Blue Ribbon Schools Program

U.S. Department of Education

Cover Sheet

Type of School: Elementary Middle High K-12

Name of Principal: Mr. Mike Heffner

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

Official School Name: Rio del Mar Elementary School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address: 819 Pinehurst Drive

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

Aptos,
City

CA
State

95003-5737
Zip Code+4 (9 digits total)

County Santa Cruz

School Code Number 44-69799-6049779

Telephone: (831)-688-2053

Fax: (831)-728-6467

Website/URL: www.riodelmar.santacruz.k12.ca E-mail: Mike_Heffner@pvusd.net

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2, and certify that to the best of my knowledge all information is accurate.

(Principal's Signature) Date _____

Name of Superintendent*: Dr. Mary Anne Mays

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name: Pajaro Valley Unified Tel. (831)-786-2100 ext. 503

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2, and certify that to the best of my knowledge it is accurate.

(Superintendent's Signature) Date _____

Name of School Board

President/Chairperson: Ms. Rhea De Hart

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

I have reviewed the information in this package, including the eligibility requirements on page 2, and certify that to the best of my knowledge it is accurate.

(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature) Date _____

**Private Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, write N/A in the space.*

PART I - ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION

[Include this page in the school's application as page 2.]

The signatures on the first page of this application certify that each of the statements below concerning the school's eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights (OCR) requirements is true and correct.

1. The school has some configuration that includes grades K-12. (Schools with one principal, even K-12 schools, must apply as an entire school.)
2. The school has not been in school improvement status or been identified by the state as "persistently dangerous" within the last two years. To meet final eligibility, the school must meet the state's adequate yearly progress requirement in the 2004-2005 school year.
3. If the school includes grades 7 or higher, it has foreign language as a part of its core curriculum.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 1999 and has not received the 2003 or 2004 *No Child Left Behind – Blue Ribbon Schools Award*.
5. The nominated school or district is not refusing the OCR access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
6. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if the OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
7. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school, or the school district as a whole, has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution's equal protection clause.
8. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

All data are the most recent year available.

DISTRICT (Questions 1-2 not applicable to private schools)

1. Number of schools in the district: 16 Elementary schools
 4 Middle schools
 1 Junior high schools
 3 High schools
 7 Other
 31 TOTAL
2. District Per Pupil Expenditure: \$7203
 Average State Per Pupil Expenditure: \$6880

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

3. Category that best describes the area where the school is located:
 Urban or large central city
 Suburban school with characteristics typical of an urban area
 Suburban
 Small city or town in a rural area
 Rural
4. 1 Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school.
 4.5 If fewer than three years, how long was the previous principal at this school?
5. Number of students as of October 1 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school only:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total	Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK				7			
K	45	34	79	8			
1	42	40	82	9			
2	44	45	89	10			
3	38	46	84	11			
4	28	46	74	12			
5	36	46	82	Other			
6	43	45	88				
TOTAL STUDENTS IN THE APPLYING SCHOOL →							578

[Throughout the document, round numbers to avoid decimals.]

6. Racial/ethnic composition of the students in the school: 87 % White
1 % Black or African American
9 % Hispanic or Latino
2 % Asian/Pacific Islander
1 % American Indian/Alaskan Native
100% Total

Use only the five standard categories in reporting the racial/ethnic composition of the school.

7. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the past year: 14 %

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

(1) 41	Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1 until the end of the year.	
(2) 38	Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1 until the end of the year.	
(3) 79	Subtotal of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	
(4) 578	Total number of students in the school as of October 1 (same as in #5 above)	
(5) .1366	Subtotal in row (3) divided by total in row (4)	
(6) 13.66	Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	

8. Limited English Proficient students in the school: 3 %
18 Total Number Limited English Proficient
Number of languages represented: 8
Specify languages: Spanish, Farsi, Arabic, German, Japanese, Cantonese, other Chinese, other
9. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 4 %
Total number students who qualify: 25

If this method does not produce an accurate estimate of the percentage of students from low-income families or the school does not participate in the federally-supported lunch program, specify a more accurate estimate, tell why the school chose it, and explain how it arrived at this estimate.

10. Students receiving special education services: 10 %
55 Total Number of Students Served

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| <u>4</u> Autism | <u>1</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u> </u> Deafness | <u>1</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u> </u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>10</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u> </u> Hearing Impairment | <u>33</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>1</u> Mental Retardation | <u> </u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u> </u> Multiple Disabilities | <u> </u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |
| <u>7</u> Emotional Disability | |

11. Indicate number of full-time and part-time staff members in each of the categories below:

Number of Staff

	<u>Full-time</u>	<u>Part-Time</u>
Administrator(s)	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>
Classroom teachers	<u>25</u>	<u>6</u>
Special resource teachers/specialists	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>
Paraprofessionals	<u>3</u>	<u>8</u>
Support staff	<u>5</u>	<u>7</u>
Total number	<u>35</u>	<u>24</u>

12. Average school student-“classroom teacher” ratio: 23

13. Show the attendance patterns of teachers and students as a percentage. The student dropout rate is defined by the state. The student drop-off rate is the difference between the number of entering students and the number of exiting students from the same cohort. (From the same cohort, subtract the number of exiting students from the number of entering students; divide that number by the number of entering students; multiply by 100 to get the percentage drop-off rate.) Briefly explain in 100 words or fewer any major discrepancy between the dropout rate and the drop-off rate. (Only middle and high schools need to supply dropout rates and only high schools need to supply drop-off rates.)

	2003-2004	2002-2003	2001-2002	2000-2001	1999-2000
Daily student attendance	93%	92%	95%	95%	96%
Daily teacher attendance	98%	98%	97%	97%	N/A%
Teacher turnover rate	9%	18%	10%	6%	N/A%
Student dropout rate (middle/high)	%	%	%	%	%
Student drop-off rate (high school)	%	%	%	%	%

PART III - SUMMARY

Provide a brief, coherent narrative snapshot of the school in one page (approximately 600 words). Include at least a summary of the school's mission or vision in the statement.

Rio del Mar Elementary is a neighborhood school located along California's central coast in the close-knit community of Aptos in Santa Cruz County. Rio is one of sixteen elementary schools in the Pajaro Valley Unified School District. The school is distinguished countywide by its academic achievements, commitment to excellence, and dedication of parents and neighbors. Rio del Mar's vision is to strengthen the school's academic program and foster a positive social climate. The collaboration between our teachers, parents and students gives Rio's learners the self-assurance they need to reach our high expectations.

Rio del Mar's teachers strive for a learning community that nurtures student curiosity and discovery to help them grow academically, socially, emotionally and physically. The administrators, teachers and support staff work closely together to ensure the finest academic programs for our students. Regular meetings take place for grade-level teams and vertical articulation teams to ensure a seamless, coherent instructional program that meets our students' needs. Teachers also work diligently to ensure the continued alignment between classroom instruction, curricular frameworks, content standards, and assessments. Individualized learning plans are developed for students performing below the 50th Normal Curve Equivalency (NCE) with effective intervention strategies, including our after school tutorial and enrichment program. Rio teachers administer regular assessments to inform instruction and to determine redesignation of English language learners.

Rio's staff works closely with our parent community to continually maintain a high-level of student academic performance. Rio del Mar has two primary parent groups, the School Site Council and the Parent Alliance (Home and School Club), that are extremely active and inclusive school organizations. Through these groups, parents are directly involved in school fundraising, producing parent education events, and supporting classroom needs. For example, during the 2003-2004 school year, the Parent Alliance raised more than \$70,000 from fundraising activities and donations that went directly to classroom supplies, equipment, academic support, and enrichment programs. As well, parents consistently support the classrooms through volunteering. Each month, parents log 1,000 hours of in-class volunteer time, and by the end of this school year, we anticipate our parents will have donated over 10,000 hours .

Rio del Mar is a true community school providing both an educational and a social setting for children, their parents, the staff and our Aptos neighbors. Local businesses have a long tradition of supporting our school through sponsored events benefiting Rio. While the annual Monte Foundation Fireworks Extravaganza on the nearby Seacliff State Beach raises funds and public awareness that benefits schools countywide (including Rio), our own springtime Rio del Mar Golf Tournament and fall Harvest Festival are events attended and supported by the Aptos community at large. Both of these events are produced by the Parent Alliance.

The level of collaboration at Rio del Mar Elementary is truly distinguishing. All members of the Rio staff come together to support our students to reach their potential. Parents and school staff work together to ensure a comprehensive program that challenges our students. The Aptos community is willingly involved in the school and openly participates in strengthening it. The willingness of Rio del Mar's teachers, parents and community to collaboratively support our learners is in direct correlation with our students' successes.

PART IV – INDICATORS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS

1. *Describe in one page the meaning of the school's assessment results in reading (language arts or English) and mathematics in such a way that someone not intimately familiar with the tests can easily understand them.*

Students at Rio del Mar are assessed in multiple ways on an on-going basis. For example, each year, two summative tests are specifically used to gauge the school's overall strengths and weaknesses: the California Standards Test (CST), which is a criterion-referenced test; and the California Aptitude Test, abbreviated, Sixth Edition (CAT/6), which is a norm referenced multiple choice assessment. Results from these assessments are reported on the California Department of Education's web page (<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/>).

Rio del Mar Elementary is proudly in the top ten percent of schools in California. The CST is a state-mandated test for all students in second through sixth grade; this assessment aligns with the State Content Standards for each grade level, and yields a percent correct score for each student. Our students have consistently shown progress on the CST. For the past three years, our students' scores on the CST doubled the state average (the grade level benchmark). Results are translated into various categories of CST proficiency: Advanced, Proficient, Basic, Below Basic, and Far Below Basic. The "Proficient" and "Advanced" levels are seen as "Mastering the Standards." Each of the last several years our state test scores demonstrated growth. Rio students in grades two through six exceeded state averages in all areas assessed on the California Standards Test (CST). Last year on the CST, the state average for students scoring at "Proficient" and "Advanced" in Reading/Language Arts was 36% as compared to 69% at Rio del Mar. In Math, this is also apparent with a state average of 45% versus Rio del Mar's 76%. Looking specifically at third grade CST Math results, 95% of Rio students scored in the Advanced and Proficient levels compared to 48% statewide.

The CAT6 ranks students and measures their achievement against students across the nation. Scores for the CAT/6 are reported in National Percentile Ranking (NPR) and are broken into content categories: Reading, Language, Mathematics, and Spelling. Scores for the CAT/6 are reported as Percent Scoring Above 75% NPR, At or Above 50% NPR, Above 25% NPR. A student who scores in the above 75% category is scoring in the top 25% of students across the nation. Rio students have consistently scored highly in all areas of this annual assessment when compared to their peers nationwide. For example, in 2004, 47% of Rio's second grade students scored above the seventy-fifth percentile in Reading compared to just 20% statewide. The 2004 test results show 48% of Rio's sixth graders scored above the seventy-fifth percentile in Reading compared to just 19% statewide. Other grade-levels and academic subject show similar results on the CAT/6. Looking at the Mathematics results for 2004, 66% of Rio's fourth graders scored above the seventy-fifth percentile compared to 29% statewide. In the fifth grade, 52% of Rio's students scored above the seventy-fifth percentile compared to 20% statewide.

English language learners (ELL) are additionally assessed using the state adopted California English Language Development Test (CELDT) administered each fall. We also use the district adopted Alisal District English Proficiency Test (ADEPT) to assess oral English language acquisition and development three times each year. District and site assessments such as these provide information that is used to improve instruction and to help teachers make sound educational decisions about each student's learning. Although there are few ELLs at Rio, these second language learners demonstrate measurable growth. Seventy-seven percent of ELLs who have been at Rio for more than one year increased one or more language levels as measured by the CELDT.

Site-based assessments aligned with content standards are given to students throughout the year after concepts are taught and students are given multiple opportunities to show mastery. All of the assessments

used at Rio are extremely valuable to the staff through the wide range of the different information provided by each. The Rio staff strives to know how our students measure against the standards of our district, state, and the rest of the nation in order to focus upon the specific areas the students still need to master.

- 2. Show in one-half page (approximately 300 words) how the school uses assessment data to understand and improve student and school performance.*

Thoughtful analysis of assessments (state, district and site) fuel Rio del Mar's academic instruction. Grade level teachers establish standards-based goals for the school year by comparing relative weaknesses in specific areas and building on academic strengths. This goal setting process is directly supported by state and district results reported to our school. After establishing academic achievement goals, Rio's dedicated teachers meet weekly as grade-level teams to monitor student progress and adjust instruction accordingly. Entire staff meetings are then devoted to school-wide strategizing to support students representing all levels of achievement to help them meet and exceed the established goals.

As an example of our assessment analysis, four years ago we noticed that spelling scores were an area for improvement. After a great deal of analysis, discussion and research, a uniform, research-based spelling program was adopted, teachers were provided with training, and the new curriculum was implemented. As a result, scores have continuously improved (in 2004, 53% of Rio's fourth graders scored above the seventy-fifth percentile on the CAT/6, a 14% increase from the previous year).

Each primary grade student is assessed three times a year with Reading Results, an assessment aligned to the California English Language Arts Content Standards and designed by the California Reading and Literature Project (CRLP). For our students, this assessment helps to determine reading fluency and comprehension levels, and monitors growth throughout the year. Teachers maintain a Language Arts portfolio (of reading and writing) that follows the student throughout his/her schooling at Rio. The student portfolio allows current and successive teachers to see the student's development over time to better address learning needs.

As well, each student is assessed three times a year in various writing genre (i.e. expository, narrative, response to literature and summary). A Pajaro Valley Unified School District developed rubric and a site-adopted rubric are used to evaluate student writing. These rubrics are used for student writing evaluation and instruction, but also for students to set goals for themselves. Writing samples are collected and distributed at grade level meetings where teachers other than the classroom teacher score the writing assessment using anchor papers and adopted rubrics. This process ensures an unbiased grading response and provides insight into student performance, allowing our staff to see grade-level strengths and areas for improvement. Through this process, we collaboratively assess our student work and adjust instruction and strategies accordingly.

- 3. Describe in one-half page how the school communicates student performance, including assessment data, to parents, students, and the community.*

The Rio del Mar staff recognizes the importance of communicating school and student achievement to our community. Each year we publish a School Accountability Report Card (SARC) that allows the community to see in a snapshot such key information as demographics and academic achievement. Individual assessment results are communicated to all parents during parent-teacher conferences and through district communication. Teachers assertively work with parents to support students who are at-risk or not meeting grade-level standards through Student Study Teams, Individualized Education Plans, and 504 Plans. Disaggregated assessment results are communicated to the school community through newspaper articles; principal reports to the parent, school and community; Rio Minders, our school

newsletter; the school's web page; and the district's web site.

The Rio School Site Council sponsors parent information nights to help parents better understand their child's assessment results and ways to support student learning. For example, our Site Council invited a literacy specialist to an evening community presentation attended by both parents and their children. The presentation included strategies to improve literacy for all students and incorporated time to practice the reading strategies with their children.

Standards-based report cards are sent home each trimester. Each report card assesses the student's progress towards meeting the standards. The report cards break Language Arts and Mathematics into the subgroups listed in the standards and assessed on the CST. For example, Language Arts is broken into Reading, Writing, and Listening and Speaking; then under these headings are the descriptors of benchmark measurement (under Reading is Word Recognition, Vocabulary Development, etc). Using the report cards, teachers provide specific feedback about student demonstration of mastering content standards.

4. *Describe in one-half page how the school has shared and will continue to share its successes with other schools.*

Rio del Mar feels strongly about sharing our successful programs with other schools, teachers, and the community. Our teachers welcome the challenge of training other new and veteran teachers in their specific areas of expertise. Local universities and teacher training programs rely on Rio del Mar teachers to mentor student teachers. Every year, our staff acts as master teachers to several pre-service student teachers.

Rio teachers participate in district articulation panels within grade-levels and curricular pathways. For example, we have a staff member who participates on a district-wide writing committee that continues to revise and develop writing assessments, a new teacher serves as a member on the English Language Development (ELD) Network, while another staff member collaborates with the district Technology team.

Site-Based Curriculum Days (SBC days) are designed to allow articulation and training of teachers throughout the district, allowing our staff the opportunity to share their expertise. Just recently, each of Rio's grade-level leaders (one from each grade-level) facilitated articulation meetings with our sister schools during our most recent SBC day. Because our standards based curriculum is so strong, other schools inquire about and visit to observe our program; the Rio del Mar staff welcomes these opportunities to share our program and learn from others.

Each year, Rio welcomes Pajaro Valley Unified School District officials and administrators and teachers throughout the district to our site for a scan of our school program. Rio teachers proudly open their doors for the annual school scans.

PART V – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

- 1. Describe in one page the school's curriculum. Outline in several sentences the core of each curriculum area and show how all students are engaged with significant content based on high standards.*

Rio del Mar students experience curriculum that is both challenging and exciting. Our comprehensive curriculum is directly aligned to the California state standards. Instructional materials are district-adopted and aligned to the state standards for each content area. The staff at Rio del Mar makes decisions on supplementary materials to enhance the core curriculum.

Pajaro Valley Unified School District (PVUSD) has recently adopted Houghton Mifflin's standards based textbook for Language Arts. To augment our Language Arts curriculum, programs and strategies such as Writer's Workshop, Step Up To Writing, Reading Counts, Literature Circles, Total Reading, Zoo-phonics, and Sign for Sounds are implemented at appropriate grade-levels with individual flexibility for those students who are exceeding or not meeting grade level standards. The Rio del Mar Parent Alliance (Home & School Club) supported our students through the purchase of a primary grade, leveled reading library for all reading abilities. The Parent Alliance continues to support the leveled book library, allowing us to expand on the initial primary grade focus to now include leveled books up to the sixth grade and beyond.

The PVUSD adopted the standards based Scott Foresman math textbook. We also use supplemental programs such as Excel, Mathlands manipulatives and Math Their Way strategies to support our core curriculum in the primary grades. Our upper grade teachers use the Saxon textbook as a supplement to Scott Foresman, and integrate various technologies to support student understanding and concept mastery.

Rio's Social Studies curriculum consists of using the Harcourt Brace textbook combined with district and teacher created supplemental materials. Our teachers integrate literature study into the Social Studies curriculum. Rio students participate in multiple service-learning projects as part of the Social Studies program; for example, students complete an "I Can Make a Difference Project" as fifth graders, and first graders maintain our butterfly garden. Since there is such strong support from our parents, the Social Studies curriculum is also enhanced by field trips to places such as the Egyptian Museum, the University of California's Long Marine Lab, the Santa Cruz Natural History Museum and local missions.

Our hands-on, standards based science program is guided by the Harcourt Brace textbook. Our students participate in hands-on science activities that range from animal care, Life Lab, the NASA Space Museum, and native plant revival and life cycle studies. Taking advantage of our location on the Monterey Bay, many of our students have participated in the O'Neill Odyssey Project, cleaning up local beaches in exchange for an oceanography trip aboard a catamaran to study the Monterey Bay Marine Sanctuary.

Along with these core content areas, students at Rio participate in a Physical Education (PE) program in grades one through six. Primary grade teachers collaborate to create a cohesive and engaging program. Students in the upper grades work with a release time PE teacher who develops a standards-driven program that meet both the interests and developmental needs of our students. Our PE program is designed to instill the importance of a healthy lifestyle through fitness, nutrition and teamwork.

Rio del Mar is dedicated to providing arts programs that enable students to exceed the state's Visual and Performing Arts standards. While state-supported arts education programs have been eliminated and third-party arts providers have lost their funding sources during this current economic downturn, Rio's

teachers and Parent Alliance have joined together to ensure a seamless continuation of the arts curriculum. At each grade level, for example, students participate in annual performing events such as theatrical and musical events. Sixth graders are currently working with a chorus teacher released part-time from Aptos High School. Rio's teachers are deeply committed to hands-on arts education and are incorporating painting, sewing, beading, papier mache, clay work and book making into their classrooms. Visual arts are supported by local artists funded by our Parent Alliance.

Hands-on teaching strategies and differentiated instruction are woven throughout each area of the curriculum to enable all students to reach the high expectations we have set for them. All of our programs help to provide multiple avenues to student's access and mastery of the standards.

2a. *(Elementary Schools) Describe in one-half page the school's reading curriculum, including a description of why the school chose this particular approach to reading.*

The Rio del Mar staff's goal is for all of its students to become life-long readers for pleasure as well as for information. A comprehensive, balanced reading program is provided for all students at Rio del Mar by implementing the Pajaro Valley Unified School District's adoption of the Houghton-Mifflin (HM) Language Arts program. This program includes in a spiral format: phonemic awareness, systematic-explicit phonics instruction, a grammar component, weekly writing, spelling, vocabulary development, independent reading, comprehension strategies, print concepts, alphabet recognition, extra support, and a home-school connection.

Beginning each school year, teachers administer the Reading Results or STAR Diagnostic assessment to gain a clear understanding of the student's reading ability after the summer break. Using the assessment data, teachers form fluid ability groups, locate and create targeted instructional materials and employ instructional strategies to meet the needs of each student.

Throughout the school year, our primary teachers use Reading Results as well as the HM program assessments to carefully monitor student progress in fluency and comprehension. Upper grade teachers expand upon the HM assessments by using the STAR Diagnostic Reading Test. Rio teachers individualize and enhance the programs chosen by the district. All grades use our leveled-reader book room to support literacy development and love of reading by providing challenging but appropriate materials based upon assessment.

Upper grades also employ Reading Counts, which increases fluency and comprehension through independent reading and assessment; it also allows the students to read at their appropriate reading level. Reading Counts motivates students to read, promotes comprehension, and increases their passion for reading which is necessary for children to become life-long learners. This program is research based, sustainable, replicable, and has data to show its effectiveness.

3. *Describe in one-half page one other curriculum area of the school's choice and show how it relates to essential skills and knowledge based on the school's mission.*

Our hands-on, standards based science program is guided by the Harcourt Brace textbook. Our science curriculum is inquiry based, and allows students to explore topics of interest as they relate to the state standards. AIMS thematic units, Life Lab and an ample supply of science laboratory equipment are used to complement the science curriculum.

Our students have participated in the Busch Gulch Project, a joint effort between students, teachers and parents as well as California State University at Monterey Bay, restoring native plants to an environmentally sensitive gulch. Taking advantage of our location on the Monterey Bay, many of our

students have participated in the O’Neill Odyssey Project, cleaning up local beaches in exchange for an oceanography trip aboard a catamaran. All of our sixth grade students attend a four day outdoor school, an overnight program in the Santa Cruz Mountains teaching environmental awareness and local ecosystems.

While the activities in our science curriculum are varied, assessments show that our program is extremely successful. Although our emphasis on developing student curiosity is not measurable on assessments, it is clearly observed. The strength of our science program is reflected on the CST where 56% of Rio’s fifth graders scored in the Proficient or Advanced categories as compared to 24% statewide.

4. *Describe in one-half page the different instructional methods the school uses to improve student learning.*

Instructional decisions are based on examination of student work and the analysis of assessment results. Teachers employ active learning strategies that are developmentally appropriate, differentiated instruction to meet varying student needs, and teaching practices that reflect how the brain best learns. The staff utilizes a broad range of methods to accommodate student interests, readiness levels, and learning profiles (styles, modalities, multiple intelligences).

Instructional strategies include guided reading, cooperative learning, direct instruction, small and large group instruction, flexible groupings, literature circles, simulations, visual aides, manipulatives, modeling and demonstrations, problem-based learning, inquiry based “hands-on” learning, independent studies, investigations, tiered assignments, computer-assisted learning. Teachers employ specially designed academic instruction in English (SDAIE) strategies to support our English Language Learners.

We identify and support students who are at risk and who have special needs. While providing full access to the standards-based core curriculum, teachers tailor instruction to support individual learning plans. Our Site Council devotes a portion of our school improvement funds to provide classroom instructional aides. Coordinated student support often includes collaboration with Reading Specialist, Resource Specialist, Speech and Language Therapists, Adaptive P.E., Occupational and Physical Therapists and the school psychologist.

Rio utilizes technology to support teaching and learning. The technology coordinator, one of our teachers, and classroom teachers plan and implement standards-based, integrated, technology supported instructional units that focus on essential questions and involve authentic student performances to demonstrate understanding and proficiency. Teachers use technology to organize and manage student work and to analyze achievement data to make effective instructional decisions. Software, video, and online resources are selected to support instruction and enhance student learning. The school has two mobile computer labs which were funded by the Parent Alliance.

5. *Describe in one-half page the school’s professional development program and its impact on improving student achievement.*

Rio’s staff development goal is to create a learning community that nurtures student curiosity and risk-taking. Proposals for in-services and meetings are suggested by the teacher leadership team, which is comprised of one teacher from each grade-level, the assistant principal, and the principal. The leadership team suggests topics from the staff’s analysis of student assessment results and the examination of classroom work that come up at their grade-levels and apply to the entire school.

Our district also conducts training in the implementation of new, standards-based instructional materials and technologies as well as use of our database of assessments. The School Site Council reserves a

percentage of its funds specifically to provide opportunities for staff members to select specific workshops and seminars to meet individual interests and needs.

Each year, the Rio staff attends the Asilomar Regional Reading Conference, one of the most practical workshops that offers the latest research around literacy and best practices for developing student literacy. A cadre of our teachers attends the Computer Using Educators conferences (CUE). Rio teachers attend a wide range of mini-workshops through our district office and the county office of education to continue their professional development. Our kindergarten team attends a conference each year that is specifically designed to support them in their development of a curriculum with a solid foundation for student success from the start.

Our commitment to on-going professional development is producing a highly skilled educational team, who are well equipped to effectively address pupil needs and achieve significant student learning results. This is demonstrated by the school's record of outstanding student performance.