

U.S. Department of Education
2021 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

[X] Public or [] Non-public

For Public Schools only: (Check all that apply) [] Title I [] Charter [] Magnet [] Choice

Name of Principal Mrs. Wendy Smith
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name Gettysburg Middle School - 03
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 100 East King Avenue
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Gettysburg State SD Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 57442-1753

County Potter County

Telephone (605) 765-2436 Fax (605) 765-2249

Web site/URL http://www.gettysburg.k12.sd.us E-mail wendy.smith@k12.sd.us

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

Date _____

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent* Mr. Chip Sundberg E-mail chip.sundberg@k12.sd.us
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Gettysburg School District 53-1 Tel. (605) 765-2436

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

Date _____

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board President/Chairperson Mr. Chad Rausch
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

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

Date _____

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

The original signed cover sheet only should be converted to a PDF file and uploaded via the online portal.

**Non-public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, leave blank.*

PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION

The electronic signature on the first page of this application (cover page) certify that each of the statements below, concerning the school’s eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education and National Blue Ribbon Schools requirements, are true and correct.

1. All nominated public schools must meet the state’s performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
2. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2021 in order to meet all eligibility requirements. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
3. The school configuration must include one or more of grades K-12. Schools located on the same campus (physical location and mailing address) must apply as an entire school (i.e. K-8; 6-12; K-12 school). Two (or more) schools located on separate campuses, must apply individually even if they have the same principal. A single school located on multiple campuses with one principal must apply as an entire school.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2015 and grades participating in statewide assessments must have been part of the school for at least the three years prior to September 2019.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 or 2020.
6. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. If irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state, the U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school’s application and/or rescind a school’s award.
7. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as “persistently dangerous” within the last two years.
8. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
9. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
10. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district, as a whole, has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution’s equal protection clause.
11. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Data should be provided for the current school year (2020-2021) unless otherwise stated.

DISTRICT (Question 1 is not applicable to non-public schools.)

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 1 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 1 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 3 TOTAL

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools. Only include demographic data for the nominated school, not the district.)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located. If unsure, refer to NCES database for correct category: <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/> (Find your school and check “Locale”)

- Urban (city or town)
- Suburban
- Rural

3. Number of students as of October 1, 2020 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent at the school. Include all students enrolled, in-person, participating in a hybrid model, or online only. If online schooling or other COVID-19 school issues make this difficult to obtain, provide the most accurate and up-to-date information available:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	0	0	0
1	0	0	0
2	0	0	0
3	0	0	0
4	0	0	0
5	0	0	0
6	10	7	17
7	9	8	17
8	9	11	20
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	28	26	54

*Schools that house PreK programs should count preschool students **only** if the school administration is responsible for the program.

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 3.6 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 0 % Asian
 - 0 % Black or African American
 - 3.6 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 92.8 % White
 - 0 % Two or more races
 - 100 % Total**

(Only these seven standard categories should be used to report the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.)

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2019 - 2020 school year: ≤1%

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

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

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	0
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	0
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	0
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	52
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	<.01
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	<1

6. Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 0 %
0 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 15 %

Total number students who qualify: 8

8. Students receiving special education services: 9 %
5 Total number of students served

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional conditions. All students receiving special education services should be reflected in the table below. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <u>1</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>0</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay | <u>2</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>1</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>0</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>1</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 12
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to the nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below. If your current staffing structure has shifted due to COVID-19 impacts and you are uncertain or unable to determine FTEs, provide an estimate.

	Number of Staff
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	4
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	1
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	1
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	1

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 9:1

12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

Required Information	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016
Daily student attendance	97%	96%	95%	96%	97%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

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

Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2020.

Post-Secondary Status	
Graduating class size	0
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	0%
Enrolled in a community college	0%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	0%
Joined the military or other public service	0%
Other	0%

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.
 Yes No

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award.

15. In a couple of sentences, provide the school’s mission or vision statement.

Gettysburg School District will provide students with the education that will allow them to optimize their potential in the global society they will live and work in.

16. Briefly describe how your school has been operating during the current 2020-2021 school year (e.g., open as usual, online only, a hybrid model, etc.)? If different grade levels in your building operate in different ways, include this. If the school began with one model and switched to another partially through the year, include this as well.

The Gettysburg School District started the school year with students in the building with many COVID protocols in place. Classrooms were rearranged to achieve social distancing, masking was required, and dividers were purchased for the math classrooms. Bell schedules were adjusted, the middle school ran on a different schedule to reduce student numbers in the hallways and interaction with the high school.

17. **For public schools only**, if the school is a magnet, charter, or choice school, explain how students are chosen to attend.

PART III - SUMMARY

Gettysburg, South Dakota is in the center of the state located in Potter County. This rural community of 1,100 consists primarily of people who farm the land in Potter County or work for companies that support the farmers. This rural community is also fortunate to be the home of an updated hospital, the Avera Missouri River Health Center, that just opened in January. As in all small towns, the school is the heart of the community. The Gettysburg School District employs 40 staff, 75% of which have roots in this community. Some are generational farmers, while others moved here to teach and in turn made Gettysburg their home where they raised their kids.

The population of Potter County triples in the summers. With Lake Oahe fifteen miles to the west, many people make this their second home from May through September. Water sports, walleye fishing, and the beautiful area make this a great place to be. The months of October, November, and December bring people from all areas of the United States to Gettysburg for pheasant hunting.

The community is very supportive of our successful school. In 2013 a bond was passed with 80% vote to build a new middle/high school wing, with new kitchen facilities and an additional gymnasium. In 2014 students started school in the new building, transitioning gradually throughout the year due to phase two and three of the building project. The Gettysburg School District is one of the smallest in South Dakota but is robust due to the support of our community.

Students enrolled in Gettysburg live in the Gettysburg School District or open enroll from other districts. Open enrollment provides 16% of the students in middle school. Technology is necessary to educate students today. The Gettysburg School District took advantage of the one-to-one laptop initiative in 2006 and provided laptops to all students 9-12th grade. Additional computers were available for use in elementary and middle school, but one-to-one laptops were a must when the district transitioned to a middle school in 2017. Due to the pandemic the 2020 school year started with every student with a laptop or Chromebook to utilize for instruction throughout the day.

The Gettysburg Junior High transitioned to a middle school model by moving the 6th grade from the elementary during the 2017- 2018 school year. This change didn't just happen; collaboration made it work. The kids needed to be moved from a self-contained classroom to a collaborative working environment. The teachers accepted the change and created a culture and climate that ensured student success. A new math curriculum that aligned with 7-12 and hands-on learning in science and ELA started a trend, resulting in student progress and led to the nomination for this award. Intensive Care Unit Program (ICU) and eligibility hold kids accountable and keeps parents informed on the academic standing of students. Eligibility is posted weekly, and students are always expected to turn in work. Incomplete work is completed after/before school; zeros are unacceptable.

The Gettysburg School District has always expected more from the students. Standards for eligibility have always been set higher than those required by the South Dakota Activities Association. In a small district, students have many opportunities to participate in a variety of activities, both in fine arts and athletics. However, academics always come first. Whether it be sports or academics, achievement all ties back to leadership and staff. Learning in these times needs to be adaptable. Middle school students require guidance and need to see learning so they can make sense of it. The core teaching staff at the middle school level was willing to accept change and adapt with each day's success and failures. Administration set the middle school concept in motion; it is the teachers who made it outstanding.

These outstanding teachers took education to a new level with the onset of the COVID pandemic. In two days, e-learning schedules were created, curriculum was adapted, and zooming was the new way to educate kids face-to-face. Education changed overnight. School took place online from 9-11 A.M. and 1-2:30 P.M. five days a week. Although curriculum was presented in a different way, education continued to the end of the 2019-2020 school year.

The 2020-2021 school year began with the kids returning to the school building with many COVID

security/safety measures: social distancing, masks, plexiglass dividers, temperature checks, and staggered scheduling were in place to ensure safety. No matter the day, or the number of students out due to close contact or a positive test, education took place in the school every day this school year. Whether learning was taking place via Zoom or face-to-face, education has prevailed in the Gettysburg Middle School during this pandemic.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

The curriculum of our school is designed to build on students' foundational skills from the elementary level and to prepare students for high school coursework. Our educational philosophy centers upon seeking to create active, engaged learners while simultaneously maintaining flexibility in our approaches so as to best meet the ever-changing needs of our students each year.

As a small district, the district offers a single section for all core classes: ELA, math, science, and social studies. The ELA classes are designed to teach reading and writing in complement, along with language and public speaking skills. In accordance with South Dakota State Standards, students engage in a variety of writing styles. Our writing curriculum is focused on helping students embrace the messy, revisionary nature of writing and encourages them to see writing truly as a process. Modeling techniques have also been highly successful in helping students grow as readers and writers. Discussion based approaches to teaching literature, reflecting the principles of Webb's depth of knowledge, help build student interest and engagement.

Additionally, students participate in a quarter reading class each year. The goal of this course is to provide students more opportunities to read and help them understand reading as an active process rather than a passive undertaking. Students hone their active reading skills and complete projects, hands on activities, and engage in discussions to gain confidence in their identities as readers. Texts are selected based on student choice to promote engagement. However, students are encouraged to explore a variety of genres, styles, topics, and writers.

College Preparatory Math, CPM, is the math curriculum used in the middle/high school. This inquiry-driven curriculum requires students to go beyond rote memorization and the mere regurgitation of mathematical procedures. Within this curriculum, students explore mathematical concepts in teams, engage in critical thinking exercises, and verbalize their reasoning to group members. This student-led curriculum is designed to incorporate the eight mathematical practices so all students can become mathematically proficient.

In science students actively explore integrated scientific concepts, addressing South Dakota Science Standards. Utilizing project-based learning, engineering design and critical thinking skills, enabling students to be active participants in their learning. This allows for the development and creation of interdisciplinary projects that highlight technology and community resources. Additionally, science classes focus heavily on literacy skills; writing is incorporated daily.

GMS social studies classes include Ancient History, World Geography, and Early American History. The history of the world in the early ages is explored in the 6th grade. The five themes of Geography frame the instruction in 7th grade. Students develop a rich awareness of how culture, movement, political and physical features affect the diversity of the region and impact the world as a whole. Eighth grade Early American History uses an inquiry driven approach and extensive primary source work to examine the development of our nation from before the American Revolution to the Civil War period. All social studies classes also emphasize current events and literacy standards. The new curriculum allows greater access to resources that introduce historical, economic, and government concepts in engaging and age-appropriate ways. Online resources, which include access to the textbook, videos, and interactive practices have been utilized during the past year to adapt to social distancing and e-learning.

Our teaching staff uses formative and summative assessments to improve students' performance and school experience. Formative assessment is seamlessly woven into daily instruction. Teachers use formative assessment routinely to gauge student understanding to make instructional decisions. While formative assessments take many forms, the emphasis on embracing new programs in the age of COVID has further encouraged our teaching staff to use technology resources to gather data.

and math each year and science in the 8th grade. Our middle school team analyzes data at the start of the school year in order to set departmental goals, address achievement gaps, and examine other patterns that emerge. Interim versions are provided by the state to allow teachers to assess student progress on individual standards and concepts throughout the school year. Teachers administer interim assessments as they complete units, gathering data about student achievement. This allows for lesson plan revisions and individualized student interventions.

Curriculum, instruction, and assessment looked different during GMS's e-learning last spring. Content and curriculum remained the same, utilizing more online resources and more activities incorporated to maintain engagement. Academic rigor and content coverage was important; however, maintaining student-teacher and student-student contact, as well offering the stability of a regular schedule, became paramount. During this time, the staff's priority was to support the physical and mental health of the students.

1a. For secondary schools (middle and/or high school grades):

Gettysburg Middle School recognizes the multitude of paths available to students on their journey to college and career readiness. It is our belief that middle school students be provided opportunities that prepare them to make decisions in high school that will further prepare them to "graduate college, career and life ready" (SDOE goal). One robust approach to achieving this goal is providing Career Technical Education (CTE) courses. The decision to provide the current CTE pathways is in response to a decision-making partnership between school, parents, and community partners aligning our CTE program with Gettysburg's industry and economic needs.

Middle school career exploration and healthy lifestyles courses are offered through the Family and Consumer Science (FCS) program. This program allows participation in Family, Community, Career Leaders of America (FCCLA) giving students hands-on application of the FCS curriculum, student leadership opportunities and the value of community and civic duty. Introduction to information technology is offered one-quarter per year for 6-8th as a requisite to the business management and administration approved pathway available in the high school. The agriculture classes provide a summer Pig Project opportunity for any middle school student as an introduction to the available agriculture pathways in the high school. Career planning, utilizing SDMyLife, is provided once a month by the school counselor for each student 6-8th grade, establishing a pathway to graduation incorporating curriculum selection, proper course alignment, interest inventories, personality, and ability assessments.

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

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Gettysburg Middle School offers a variety of elective courses to provide a well-rounded educational experience. Students attend general music class every other day and have the opportunity to take instrumental music. Students participate in a guidance class bi-weekly focusing on character, growth, and development.

The goal of daily physical education classes is to provide students the ability to be physically active for a lifetime. Computer class is required for all students. While attending computer classes daily for a quarter, they focus on using Microsoft Office applications.

Students have a quarterly rotation schedule taking FCS, reading, success, and computers. The success class was implemented this year to help 6th and 7th grade students transition to middle school. Organization skills, study habits, learning styles, as well as many other academic supports are the focus of this course.

During the school closure due to COVID-19, students would attend classes on Zoom and were assigned coursework to complete. As the pandemic continues, the band and choir classes made modifications. Students in band use "masks" for their instruments and are also spread out in the gymnasium to maintain

social distancing. Choir also takes place in the gymnasium with students wearing a mask while singing. The Christmas concert was held virtually, so families could safely see the students' hard work.

One class that was not able to continue was Exploration Hour. In this class, students were exposed to a variety of real world experiences. Some activities that students participated in include field trips to the salmon spawning station and ethanol plant, caroling at the local nursing home, baking, arts and crafts, and theater. Next year, Exploration Hour will be reinstated, and an agriculture class will be added to the 8th grade rotation.

3. Academic Supports:

Being a small learning community enables our educators to efficiently differentiate instruction and quickly identify, as well as respond to, students in need of support. With average class sizes around 18 students, teachers are able to know their students' interests and learning needs well, and then develop responsive lesson plans and activities. For example, cooperative grouping strategies in math are used to cultivate the most positive learning opportunities in classrooms with diverse individuals. The ELA classroom regularly uses up to six versions of an assessment in order to ensure students are being assessed at an appropriate level. Creative projects and hands on lab activities in science allow students with different abilities to be successful. Knowing our students' backgrounds, abilities, interests, and learning styles allows our teaching staff to tailor our daily learning activities to meet student needs.

Additionally, continuous communication between teachers throughout the day about students' behaviors and performance allows teachers to make informed teaching decisions in the moment. The GMS team can identify if a student's behavior has persisted over multiple class periods or if a behavior/action appears in isolation. For example, these quick email check-ins allow the team to effectively and consistently follow behavior plans implemented by the SPED staff.

Regular and proactive communication with parents is also very important to our team. Developing relationships and communication lines with parents, enables our principal and teachers to best partner with families to meet students' evolving needs. Laying the foundation for positive parent communication early in the school year allows us to encourage positive parent participation and this makes student issues, if they do arise, easier to address.

The GMS team-- including teachers, counselor, and principal-- meets regularly to discuss students' social, emotional, and academic needs. In fact, the student body is truly small enough where the team can talk about each student one by one in order to ensure that every student—even an individual who doesn't necessarily present as an outlier—can receive focus.

Furthermore, the GMS team utilizes our schoolwide Student Assistance Team (SAT) when more intensive help is deemed necessary. This team of K-12 staff members meets every two weeks to discuss students referred by teachers or parents. The team examines data, discusses observations, proposes possible interventions, and then develops a detailed action plan. The GMS team frequently uses SAT to utilize the expertise of other knowledgeable staff members in order to best support students.

Finally, each day our GMS team holds before and after school ICU tutoring. Staying for our personalized ICU program is not a punishment. Rather, this 1-on-1 tutoring opportunity allows teachers to work with students who have missing work, those with poor performance, or those who want extra help. In this after school time, teachers are able to assist students, but also forge stronger connections with kids and help address other concerns that might be interfering with student success.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

The Gettysburg School staff emphasizes keeping students engaged and motivated academically, socially, and emotionally. Engaging students in the learning process motivates them to practice higher level critical thinking skills. Some of the key strategies used to keep students engaged and motivated include problem of the day or anticipatory set for lessons, having students work in cooperative learning groups, and completing activities developed by the student council to promote the well-being of our students.

When students arrive in a classroom, most are provided an anticipatory set or problem of the day. These hooks are used to get students' attention, activate prior knowledge, and mentally prepare them for the lesson for that day. Teachers also use a variety of methods during their anticipatory sets to engage students. Jigsaw, think-pair-share, and number talks are just a few examples of these methods.

Cooperative learning groups are another strategy used in multiple classrooms. When students work in small groups to solve problems, they are encouraged to collaborate on the task, allowing students to develop new ways of thinking. It also maximizes their own understanding as well as the understanding of others by requiring them to verbalize their reasoning. Teachers use group roles to hold students accountable during their cooperative learning groups.

The Gettysburg Student Council also puts on activities for the school in order to promote social and emotional development. The school does not have an art program, so the student council provides opportunities for the students to express their creativity. For example, the students took a ceiling tile and decorated it to express themselves. These tiles are hung in the school hallway and commons/lunchroom. The middle school also has a kindness wall where students write nice comments about each other and display them in the hall.

During our online learning time, we recognized the importance of really connecting with our students and checking in with them daily. We started the virtual learning day with a class called Middle School Adventures. It was a way to engage the kids and get them excited for a day of e-learning. Middle School Adventures included the following: fun questions for the students to answer, jokes, light-hearted information, announcements for the day, and the Pledge of Allegiance. Zoom sessions for the four core classes followed, with elective and study hall Zoom sessions in the afternoon. Maintaining structure and offering normalcy was a priority. After study hall, optional Zoom sessions were a time for homework, but other times, it was just to allow students a time to talk about how they were doing. We found all these strategies helped students be successful during online learning.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Historically, GMS has a dedicated group of parents and community members who are actively involved in the learning and growth of the students. Utilizing volunteers has expanded the educational opportunities. Prior to going online in March 2020, Exploration Hour was an opportunity for students to learn new skills not available in the current curriculum. Community members' talents and expertise were tapped throughout the year to provide a variety of experiences for all students.

In an effort to tie classroom curriculum with real-life skills, business owners and community members volunteer to share within the classroom. For example, expertise from local scientists is utilized to judge and provide feedback to students who participated in the Science Fair, employees from the local electrical company were involved in question and answer sessions about pros and cons of green energy in the area, and students visited with the Mayor on what steps to take to begin a recycling program in town, just to mention a few.

March 2020 online instruction began, and communication with parents was pivotal. GMS is a one-to-one school; however, pre-COVID, the devices did not leave the school. Once the decision to go online was

made, the school had to determine internet accessibility for all students. The local internet provider was immediately onboard to assist in providing access and hotspots. The school checked out devices, so the online transition was smooth. The next concern during online learning was the health and well-being of our students. It was important for GMS to keep a consistent schedule; the students attended classes each day beginning at 8:45 A.M. and concluded at 2:30 P.M. At 8:45 A.M., students checked in on Zoom for morning announcements, birthday wishes, fun facts, and even morning exercise. The principal had daily communication with students and parents when students were not in class or were struggling with completing and/or succeeding with class work. GMS teachers had an afternoon study hall for students who needed extra assistance. Throughout online learning, the counselor maintained her regular counseling sessions with students, weekly guidance with whole classes, and was in constant contact with teachers to monitor students' mental health needs.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

Gettysburg Middle School creates a positive environment where teachers feel valued and supported by treating educators as respected collaborators and by offering focused opportunities for professional development.

Our administration has an open door policy, and teachers work closely with administration to ensure the smooth operation of the school. The principal is frequently present in the hallways, and she greets each teacher every morning. She knows staff members' families and supports her staff's professional decisions. Holding regular, yet efficient middle school team meetings allows teachers to communicate concerns and opinions. It also allows the principal to communicate the reasoning behind policy decisions.

In a typical school year, the district's approach to professional development centers on using our limited development time to meet the evolving needs of our building. In previous years, this has involved providing opportunities for teachers to learn more about teen mental health, holding data retreats, or improving our use of technology. The staff also values that our administration recognizes the importance of providing time for team collaboration and departmental curriculum mapping. The school district also encourages teachers to seek out their own professional opportunities, by providing a stipend for up to three days of professional development during non-contract hours. For example, the math teacher participated in South Dakota Math/Science Leadership.

In 2020-2021, professional development opportunities have primarily focused on responding to the pressing challenges of COVID. This year there has been an overwhelming amount of resources presented to teachers, but the goal of Gettysburg's administration is to filter through these opportunities and provide its teachers access to the strongest, most relevant resources. A revised school schedule allowed for extended professional development time to work on utilizing our LMS (Schoology), and maintaining hybrid lessons.

When students were online learning, the administration utilized teacher feedback to formulate policies. The administration routinely surveyed teachers and gathered information about the efficacy of procedures. Additionally, the teaching staff developed, and later modified, schedules for e-learning. The decisions to utilize Schoology Enterprise as our learning management system and other technology programs were made in consultation with teachers. Finally, many teachers were on the summer task forces that proposed policies for returning back to in person learning. Teachers' voices were eagerly sought out, their experiences were listened to, and their expertise was valued.

Also, during this online learning time, many paraprofessionals and support staff were not able to perform normal duties due to the online nature of our instruction. As a result, the administration helped organize the support staff, so these staff members could assume professional responsibilities (such as attendance check-ins with parents) that allowed teachers to focus on adapting lessons to an online platform.

4. School Leadership:

Gettysburg School District is a K-12 district serving 230 students. The superintendent works closely with the school board in making policy and budgetary decisions and has direct oversight of the K-5 system. The

principal has direct oversight of the 6-12 system and collaborates with the superintendent, giving direction for policy/procedures which support learning throughout the K-12 system. Flexibility has been the message this year from the administration. The school board has made decisions on a month-to-month basis, administrators have listened to the needs of teachers, and teachers have gone above and beyond to provide flexible learning environments for students.

Beginning March 2020 with online instruction, the middle/high school principal was instrumental in providing a cohesive transition from classroom to online learning. She immediately deployed her instructors to create an online schedule that supported the specific needs of both middle/high school staff and students. Time and resources were also given to instructors for collaboration and peer instruction of new technology utilized during COVID. Her communication with students, parents, school leaders and teachers were exemplary, providing communication for all 6-12th parents and students via email, school reach messaging, webpage, local newspaper, and the school LMS. During COVID, GMS maintained an online ICU. The teachers created a list of students who needed content specific assistance, the principal would contact parents and students. This communication resulted in a solid partnership between the school and families, supporting in particular students missing classes or underperforming.

The summer following online learning, a team of teachers, parents, administrators, and community members were brought together to reflect on the year and began making comprehensive decisions about the upcoming school year. During that time, surveys to all involved parties were sent, collected, and evaluated. The data collected, along with team input, informed the decision-making for Fall 2020. We started full in-person instruction in August 2020, with several school-wide safety precautions. These included social distancing, masking, change of bell schedule to limit the number of persons passing, a cleaning routine, and classroom seating arrangements. The administration was in close collaboration with local and state health departments and followed a district adopted Return to School plan. As the number of cases increased, flexibility in the schedule was needed. The school board, in direction of the administration, approved a daily 2:30 P.M. release. This allowed time for teachers to assist those students who had fallen behind during the pandemic, as well as the students who were in quarantine, so they could work one-on-one with teachers via Zoom.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

Gettysburg is a rural, agricultural community. As a result, honoring our students' backgrounds often takes the form of supporting our students' identities as small town, farm kids. This is demonstrated by supporting schoolwide FFA activities, library and media options aligning with student interests, community and local business classroom partnerships.

As previously mentioned, Gettysburg Middle School has a weekly program entitled Exploration Hour. The goal of this time is to provide students with unique learning opportunities that feature lessons and opportunities outside of the traditional class day. These experiences hope to connect students with their community and to help them feel pride in the town where they come from. Although COVID has prevented us from fully implementing this program this year, the goal in the future will also be to connect students with resources and opportunities not traditionally available to them in our small community.

While Gettysburg's student body is predominantly Caucasian, our school exists in a state rich with Native American heritage and within a diverse country. Our school values having a culturally-responsive curriculum and recently implemented a new social studies curriculum with that goal in mind. By maintaining culturally-responsive and time-sensitive lesson plans across curriculums, we strive to respectfully recognize the values of the local demographic while integrating diverse perspectives from outside our community. Our learning community aims to create respectful, informed citizens who understand how diverse groups have shaped modern American society and its history.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

The Gettysburg School District uses a variety of strategies to uphold student success, both academically and socio-emotionally. One of the most instrumental practices is the school-based, teacher-run ICU program. This program was first intended to follow The Power of ICU formula then was modified to meet the needs of students in the Gettysburg Middle School. The program supports students who are failing academically, on a trend of failing, or needing any additional assistance to gain and pursue academic success. ICU is marketed to students, not as a punitive activity, but instead as a way to elevate themselves. This is accomplished by allowing some student choice for ICU time and encouraging teachers to use this time to cultivate personal connections with students.

After online learning began in March 2020, teachers noticed that some students were not engaged, failed to show up for class, struggled with completing assignments in a timely manner, or needed socio-emotional support. As a result, the decision was made to continue ICU in an online format.

The ICU list is generated in Google Docs by teachers throughout the day; this was also a great communication tool between the GMS teachers when identifying possible patterns in student behavior while online. The students on ICU reported to the afternoon study hall on Zoom. If individual lessons needed to be taught, breakout rooms were utilized. The principal also sent daily emails or texts to parents about their child's progress. Zoom ICU took place every day; it was a time to not only complete academic work, but to also support emotional well-being.

District decisions were made late summer 2020 to alter the school schedule and purchase a district-wide learning management system (LMS). The LMS enhanced the implementation of ICU by providing a cohesive, robust communication system with students and parents. It also improved the delivery of lessons and classwork for both in-class and online students. Continuing to support students, the district approved a 12:50 P.M. Friday release schedule to expand the after-school ICU time which included providing assistance to students in-class and online.

In October, school attendance declined due to COVID related absences. Teachers faced the challenge of providing quality instruction to students both in-school and online. ICU again remained instrumental in meeting students' needs. Teachers approached the administration to allow for a 2:30 P.M. release each day allowing the extension of ICU by one hour to better support our students. As the COVID numbers declined, the 2:30 P.M. dismissal was eliminated. The GMS team continues to evaluate the needs of the students and adjust the ICU program to meet their needs. This flexible program has been the most instrumental tool to assist students' academic and social-emotional needs.