

**U.S. Department of Education**  
**2016 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program**

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Dr. John Filippi

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

Official School Name Alan B. Shepard Middle School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 440 Grove Place

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

City Deerfield State IL Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 60015-4219

County Lake County

Telephone (847) 948-0620 Fax (847) 948-8589

Web site/URL http://shepard.dps109.org/ E-mail jfilippi@dps109.org

Twitter Handle https://twitter.com/109Shepard Facebook Page https://www.facebook.com/ShepardMiddleSchool/ Google+ \_\_\_\_\_

YouTube/URL \_\_\_\_\_ Blog http://shepard.dps109.org/one-school-one-blog/ Other Social Media Link \_\_\_\_\_

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\*Dr. Michael Lubelfeld E-mail mlubelfeld@dps109.org  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Deerfield Public Schools District 109 Tel. (847) 945-1844

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. Nick Begley  
(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, write N/A in the space.*

## Part I – Eligibility Certification

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The signatures 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. The school configuration includes one or more of grades K-12. (Schools on the same campus with one principal, even a K-12 school, must apply as an entire school.)
2. The public school has met their state's accountability requirements (i.e., avoided sanctions) in participation, performance in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics, and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate) using the most recent accountability results available for the year prior to nomination.
3. To meet final eligibility, a public school must meet the state's accountability requirements (i.e., avoided sanctions) in participation, performance in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics, and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate) for the year in which they are nominated (2015-2016) and be certified by the state representative. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
4. If the school includes grades 7 or higher, the school must have foreign language as a part of its curriculum.
5. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2010 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
6. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, or 2015.
7. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's application and/or rescind a school's award if irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state.
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

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Data should be provided for the most recent school year (2015-2016) unless otherwise stated.

### DISTRICT

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

### SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located:
- Urban or large central city
  - Suburban with characteristics typical of an urban area
  - Suburban
  - Small city or town in a rural area
  - Rural
3. Number of students as of October 1, 2015 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

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	77	85	162
7	94	90	184
8	84	83	167
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	255	258	513

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 3 % Asian
  - 1 % Black or African American
  - 5 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 88 % White
  - 3 % 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 2014 – 2015 school year: 0%

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

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2014 until the end of the 2014-2015 school year	0
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2014 until the end of the 2014-2015 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, 2014	541
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.000
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	0

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 1 %  
4 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):  
Spanish, Cantonese

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 1 %  
Total number students who qualify: 6

8. Students receiving special education services: 15 %  
75 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. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- |                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| <u>7</u> Autism                 | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness               | <u>14</u> Other Health Impaired                |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness         | <u>19</u> Specific Learning Disability         |
| <u>18</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>13</u> Speech or Language Impairment        |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment     | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>2</u> Mental Retardation     | <u>2</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |
| <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities  | <u>0</u> Developmentally Delayed               |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 2
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	3
Classroom teachers	28
Resource teachers/specialists e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	24
Paraprofessionals	13
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	4

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 18:1

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

<b>Required Information</b>	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012	2010-2011
Daily student attendance	96%	96%	96%	97%	98%
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 2015.

<b>Post-Secondary Status</b>	
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. 2008

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

To provide educational experiences of the highest quality that engage, inspire and empower each student to excel and contribute in a changing world.

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

## PART III – SUMMARY

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Alan B. Shepard Middle School, located in Deerfield, Illinois, serves more than 500 students in grades six through eight. Named for Alan B. Shepard, the first American in space and the fifth man on the moon, the school has encouraged students to meet Admiral Shepard’s challenge to “shoot for the stars” since 1961. We continue to strive to meet that challenge today. Our mission outlines our purpose: we exist to provide educational experiences of the highest quality that engage, inspire, and empower each student to excel and contribute in a changing world.

## PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

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### 1. Core Curriculum:

At Alan B. Shepard Middle School, students in grades six through eight experience top-notch, research-based, interdisciplinary instruction delivered by a team of passionate expert educators. District 109 has placed great emphasis on developing professional learning communities (PLCs), which has allowed teachers to collaborate to develop and align curriculum to Common Core State Standards (CCSS), as well as content-specific standards as we move to standards-based reporting. Through our PLCs, core teachers have created a shared online system that include pacing guides by quarter, unit learning objectives, standards-based rubrics, and District Common Assessments. Core teachers regularly work with resource teachers to differentiate materials in order to provide adequate support and extensions for students. They also meet frequently with instructional coaches to examine data collected from local formative and summative assessments, which drive decision-making about appropriate future instruction and activities.

Shepard administration and teachers recognize that students are more than just their test results. We work diligently to educate the whole child, creating relevant instructional experiences that emphasize curricular standards and effectively use our 1:1 technology, meeting individual students' needs and interests, and, ultimately, preparing our students for what the future holds.

Our school provides a comprehensive approach to literacy skills, integrating informational, argumentative, and narrative writing, as well as speaking and listening skills, across a variety of genres and mediums. The English language arts program is standards focused; teams emphasize applying skills on complex texts including literature, poetry, and informational articles. Technology is incorporated as students collaborate, revise, and publish work in various online formats. Advanced seminar classes enrich the depth and complexity of students exceeding standards, as teachers push for deeper analysis on demanding content. Struggling students receive scaffolded support from small, co-taught differentiated groups and as-needed direct instruction from special education teachers and reading specialists.

The mathematics program at Shepard Middle School is a cumulative, skills-based system that constantly builds on foundations of previously learned content. With differentiated classes created to meet students' needs and advance exceptional learners, each individual has personalized scaffolding and goals. Using inquiry-based projects, students take leadership over their own learning, often participating in "flipped" classrooms or furthering their own knowledge through independent, online study for exploration and enrichment. Students connect to and solve real-world problems with mathematical applications. High standards are continuously combined with opportunities to receive individualized support.

Shepard's science program aligns not only to CCSS, but also to the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). Scientists in sixth through eighth grade experience inquiry-based instruction and hands-on learning in state-of-the-art science labs. Teachers meet the individual needs of students, making scientific learning relevant to their lives as they explore physical sciences, life sciences, earth/space sciences, engineering, and technology. Student-led labs and activities also have interdisciplinary connections and emphasize self-discovery, while encouraging students to think critically as they explore and examine current, real-world scientific issues in our world today.

By aligning the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Standards with the CCSS, Shepard's social studies program provides students with opportunities to learn from the past and gain awareness of modern global issues while preparing for the future. Students embark on learning through engaging simulations and debates, reading or listening to first-person narratives, and participating in authentic learning experiences connected to our community and the world at large. Students regularly have opportunities to examine primary documents and credible sources through close reading and research. Cross-curricular connections are also emphasized with a focus on critical thinking and analytical writing.

Shepard's focus on high standards and interdisciplinary connections through cooperative teams allow students to receive consistent instruction that guides them towards college and career readiness skills.

Teachers review curriculum to provide students important reading and mathematics instruction in all classes, connecting content to real-world situations and project-based simulations that allow students to demonstrate mastery of standards with college or career tasks. Skills are not taught in isolation, but rather there is an emphasis on consistent proficiency and mastery demonstrated throughout all curricular areas, especially regarding high-level reading skills that allow students to analyze, decode, or research complex information.

Shepard Middle School has created a powerful, collaborative community with strong goals for itself and its members. Due to the exciting, interesting, and thorough curriculum, students are constantly pushing themselves to succeed. Students want to be at Shepard, parents want to send their children here, and teachers know it is a place that encourages success. Shepard continually seeks to fulfill its mission to engage, empower, and inspire all students.

## 2. Other Curriculum Areas:

As part of an engaging, inspiring and empowering curriculum that promotes well-rounded students, Shepard Middle School students participate in three “encore” classes in addition to their core instruction of language arts, math, science and social studies. We offer courses in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math), CMA (Communication Media Arts), music, art, band, orchestra, physical education and world language (Spanish or French). Students in sixth and seventh grade rotate through STEM, CMA, music and art each quarter of the school year. Eighth grade students have the opportunity to choose which of these practical arts to pursue in their final year at Shepard so they can immerse themselves in their greatest interests (a passionate musician can take music all four quarters, for example), or continue to sample the variety of academic areas.

**STEM/CMA:** With great excitement, Shepard unveiled new classrooms and new curriculum for STEM and CMA programs in August 2014. Teachers received extensive training from Creative Learning Systems, a pioneer of the SMARTLab™ (both facilities and instruction). STEM and CMA classes offer students the opportunity to choose different projects and learning paths. STEM students choose “learning launchers” in areas such as hydraulics, robotics, alternative energy, and software engineering. In CMA, students develop creative expression through projects using digital communications, computer graphics, and music and video production. Both courses provide an arena for problem solving, critical thinking, and exploration, cultivating self-awareness and encouraging self-reflection.

**Music:** The music program offers fun and engaging learning experiences that include performing, creating, and analyzing music. Music skills are developed through vocal and instrumental instruction and integrated with technology to enhance skills. Eighth grade students have the opportunity to take a musical theater workshop or digital music. The musical theater workshop helps students build their confidence and stage presence in front of an audience. They learn blocking, staging, choreography in addition to the evolution of Broadway, the theatre industry, and audition techniques. Digital music helps student interested in modern methods of music composition, recording, and production using computers, digital audio software, and electronic and acoustic instruments pursue their passion. In this class, students write and arrange music using digital programs in addition to creating music and a storyline for a film.

**Physical Education:** Physical Education is part of the daily required curriculum where instruction in various skills in addition to good sportsmanship are provided. Lessons on health and nutrition are weaved into the curriculum to help students ensure they are developing good habits that lead them to a balanced life that includes lifelong wellness.

**Art:** Drawing, painting, and pottery are just a few of the areas of focus during art instruction. Students work both collaboratively and independently to understand, create, and reflect on their work. Self-expression and an appreciation of the arts and culture is encouraged through choice in assignments.

**Band and Orchestra:** Shepard Middle School offers grade level band and orchestra as an encore class during the school day. Participation in the program includes attendance at one small group lesson which rotates through the school day to offer instrument specific skill instruction. Any sixth, seventh and eighth grade student enrolled in band, orchestra or chorus may audition for the jazz ensemble. A skill requirement is

necessary for ensemble members to pass as a means of entrance into the band. These skills ensure jazz band members are compatible with one another in regard to skill level and work ethic. Band and orchestra students perform concerts for parents throughout the year, and also perform at community events, such as the Deerfield Education Foundation's annual fundraiser at a local restaurant.

World Language: World language classes provide students the opportunity to acquire second language skills and increase their ability to collaborate and communicate on a global scale. Students are instructed in the areas of speaking, listening, reading and writing in the target language, in addition to learning about other cultures and traditions. Students are encouraged to apply their communication skills by participating in conversations with native speakers. World language teachers seek out Skype and Google Hangout opportunities with classrooms around the world.

### 3. Instructional Methods and Interventions:

At Alan B. Shepard Middle School, teachers use multiple tools to ensure that the instructional methods implemented in the classroom allow for optimal learning for each student. Thorough and targeted differentiation is deeply ingrained in daily instruction, from whole-group instruction to station work to individual attention. Borne of a strong belief that flexible grouping across classrooms can meet the needs of all levels of learners, Shepard staff continually evaluate the progress of their students with in-depth and frequent review of assessment data.

Instructional methods are guided, in part, by the use of MAP test data to set goals and inform instruction. Using a teacher- and student-created template, growth targets are set by students based on the strand with the most need. This goal-setting template follows the student throughout their career at Shepard Middle School.

Clear District-created guidelines, and the frequent review of student data, allow teachers to move students fluidly through tiered interventions that support the individual learner. A school interventionist assists teachers in documented Tier I interventions and supports students in Tier II and III interventions while using the STAR assessment as a progress monitoring tool.

Through our District PLC model, teachers collaborate to create quarterly common assessments through School City in reading, writing, and math. The PLC model also allows teachers to analyze and adjust instruction to ensure all students are meeting common core standards.

To encourage and increase best practices in instruction, Shepard Middle School has two instructional coaches to assist in teacher planning, student differentiation, and instructional support. Coaches are leaders in instruction in the classroom, as well as the conference room, and set the example for the instructional methods teachers use daily.

The adoption of a 1:1 Chromebook environment beginning in August 2014 has empowered teachers and students. Teachers quickly embraced 1:1 teaching techniques, seeking out professional development opportunities to learn how to most effectively use technology to enhance their teaching. Internally, District 109 has hosted tech camps and ed camps and offers classes through "Deerfield University," all with a focus on instruction. Teachers also have embraced Twitter as an avenue to increase their instructional repertoire, participating in Twitter ed chats that allow them to connect with leading educators worldwide.

With this instructional expertise, student creation and collaboration in demonstrating exceptional knowledge of the standards has increased with the adoption of these devices. Teachers and students quickly moved from substitution as a use of technology, through the SAMR model, to redefinition - and the Shepard instructional environment truly has been redefined.

### 4. Assessment for Instruction and Learning and Sharing Assessment Results:

Shepard administers national and District-wide assessments to ensure academic growth for all students. Teachers and staff review test results, and analyze the data to gain a clear understanding of how to help each

student, whether they are scoring in the above-average or the below-average range - or even if their scores fall where expected.

Three times throughout the school year, Shepard administers the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment. Results of this assessment show how students perform within the school, throughout District 109, and nationally. Teachers review the data to determine if students need Response to Intervention (RtI) support. If students qualify for RtI, they receive targeted instruction to focus on improving academic understanding and achievement in low-scoring areas. MAP allows for student ownership of their academic progress. After each MAP test is complete, students view their math and reading scores and create specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-oriented (SMART) goals in reading and math. In order to help achieve their SMART goal, students choose areas on IXL and Study Island to practice their skills. These two online programs help enforce skills that are seen in both the curriculum and on the MAP assessment. Parents also receive the breakdown of the MAP data so they can clearly see their child's progress, understand when interventions are necessary, and help support their child at home.

At the end of each quarter, both math and language arts teachers give a District Common Assessment (DCA) to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and to drive future instruction. The DCA assesses all Common Core State Standards taught during the grading period. Students' test results are categorized into "Exceeds Standards," "Meets Standards," "Approaching Standards," and "Not Meeting Standards." Teachers meet in grade-level meetings to discuss overall trends and share best practices for teaching each standard. Teachers use a computer program called School City to compare data within and across the two middle schools in District 109. From the data, the current curriculum's effectiveness is evaluated and changes are suggested for the following year. Teachers also use the common assessment to identify whole class, small group, and individual areas of weakness that require reteaching. The test identifies "STOP Standards" in which less than 60% of tested students are not meeting standards. These standards are retaught in a whole-group or small-group setting.

Assessments are not a singular focus at Shepard, but are an integral part of instruction, used to inform how each teacher can work to meet each student's individual needs.

## **PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS**

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### 1. School Climate/Culture:

At Shepard Middle School, we recognize that the school’s culture and climate set the table for student growth and achievement. Students must feel that they belong, matter, and are safe physically and emotionally to achieve their full potential. And, for teachers to create conditions that support positive student climate and culture, staff must feel highly satisfied and engaged in their role. At Shepard, we take intentional steps to build an environment that students and staff want to run to each day.

The work to support a strong climate/culture begins with a commitment to a shared set of values. With stakeholder input, school leaders identified six values to which all members of our school community must commit. These values include a commitment to work as a team, persevere, hold ourselves accountable, exhibit respect, be trustworthy, and achieve balance. These values are posted on the front door as students, staff and visitors enter Shepard, and are hung on posters and displayed on stairs throughout the building. By viewing the challenges of our work through these lenses, students and staff can better focus efforts to achieve our vision to be a nationally renowned middle school where learning is balanced, collaboration is strong, and every student feels safe and valued.

While shared values provide focus for our work, they do not directly inform improved climate and culture. To achieve this goal we employ two annual surveys that measure student and staff perceptions of the school’s climate/culture. The HUMANeX staff survey and student engagement survey provide students and staff with voice to articulate the school’s greatest areas of strength, and also areas where we can most improve. Through a collaborative process, staff identify strategies to maintain our strengths and improve on our weaknesses. The result is a responsive climate/culture that grows stronger each year through specific new actions. These actions have included improved transparency to staff regarding business decisions, expanded efforts to provide positive feedback to staff, and efforts to personalize student learning activities so students feel they can explore and express their learning in ways that are most meaningful to them.

Of course, the feedback we solicit from students and staff does not only inform new action; that feedback serves to strengthen a number of strategies and programs we have in place to support a strong climate/culture. Activities like peer buddies, Peace Week, Mix-it-Up Day, student pep rallies, teacher teaming, and many others are strengthened by listening to those that lead and benefit from them each day--our students and staff.

### 2. Engaging Families and Community:

Shepard Middle School fosters a strong partnership with its families and with members of the greater community to increase student achievement and well being, and generate school improvements.

It’s important for students to understand how government works, and also important for government officials to see, firsthand, success in schools. In the past year, four legislators visited Shepard: Governor Bruce Rauner, U.S. Congressman Robert Dold, Illinois Senator Julie Morrison, and Illinois Representative Scott Drury. These elected officials toured new science facilities, held Q&A sessions with students, and spoke to school staff. Other local officials attended the community event held to showcase new classroom and lab facilities for science, STEM and communication media arts classes.

Employees of local organizations and corporations have contributed time and talent to benefit Shepard students. Deerfield is home to several science-related corporations as well as many smaller companies and entrepreneurs, and the school and District have reached out to them to participate in the education of Shepard students, as volunteers in numerous classroom events and projects (including as judges of “Shepard Shark Tank”), as guest teachers, and as science fair judges.

The Parent-Teacher-Student Organization (PTSO) is an active volunteer group that supports the school, staff and students by organizing events and fundraisers, including the Career Fair and Health Fair, where

parents and community members set up booths for students to actively learn from working professionals. Through generous PTSO support, the school has been able to fund improvements including an upcoming \$100K improvement in the library media center. Parents also are involved in school improvement as part of the Parent Advisory Board, which meets regularly with the principal to discuss how best to understand and address issues related to facilities, programs, academics, and social-emotional development.

Philanthropy is ingrained in Shepard's culture; students lead initiatives that connect them to the community and help them understand its social issues. Students have participated in clothing, food, and book drives, as well as various fundraising efforts.

Communication is key in building community interest, trust, and support. The principal shares information with families in a regular newsletter, Shepard News & Notes, which includes general school information, upcoming events, and news from the PTSO. The school uses Twitter (@109Shepard) to connect with the community -- local and global. Tweets from that account scroll on the Shepard website, which also hosts two key communication tools: a video that shows the Shepard culture; and a blog (1 School 1 Blog), that includes posts from teachers, staff and students.

### 3. Professional Development:

District 109 and Shepard administration realize that teachers are its best resources. Leaders work to provide experiences that foster professional learning and growth -- and engage, inspire and empower each staff member.

At the annual District 109 Teaching & Learning Conference -- a full-day inservice -- teachers, instructional coaches and administrators lead sessions ranging from standards-based grading to creating a flipped classroom, to effective classroom management (and so much more). Sessions are led by teachers so the presenters are completely aware of the needs of staff in attendance, and have an in-depth understanding of the school culture and student population, ensuring that sessions are meaningful to the adult learners. Other institute days have included a Tech Camp with topics related to teaching in a 1:1 environment, and an EdCamp, a participant-driven learning experience where teachers decide what they want to learn, and get together with others who want to explore that topic.

Teachers and administrators meet bi-weekly with cross-town middle school colleagues in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to create Understanding by Design (UbD) units and standards-based common assessments. PLCs also regularly review standardized testing results to learn from each other what is working and where we can improve.

New staff members meet regularly as a cohort, and each teacher is assigned a veteran mentor teacher. First- and second-year hires meet monthly with their mentor to review important information from grading practices, teacher-parent communication and emergency procedures at the beginning of the year, through testing protocols, to end-of-the-year procedures. Every new Shepard teacher has a veteran friend to support and encourage them!

Furthering formal education is highly encouraged at Shepard. The District informs all staff about graduate course offerings and professional programs through emails and a monthly staff newsletter. Teachers have received ELL endorsements and National Board Certification through District-created cohorts, and many administrators and teachers have--or are currently pursuing--a doctorate in education.

Perhaps the most exciting innovation in professional development is Deerfield University (DU). DU offers a multitude of opportunities for Shepard teachers to learn both online and at in-house classes offered at the District 109 administration building. There are six online "campuses" covering topics such as Project Based Learning, Tech Tools, and Lesson and Unit Design. On the "DC Campus," teachers attend face-to-face workshops such as "Personalized Learning," "Classroom Management" and "Picnic in the PARCC." Every class includes an activity to be completed by the teacher in his or her own classroom, and requires a written reflection. Teachers earn CPDUs as well as "badges" and credit that can be applied towards various incentives ranging from gift cards to an iPad mini.

Shepard has created a culture of learning and growth, not only for students, but also for staff.

#### 4. School Leadership:

Shepard's leadership philosophy is built on a foundation of service. With each decision and action, we strive to serve our school community in support of our mission to provide educational experiences of the highest quality that engage, inspire and empower each student to excel and contribute in a changing world. Our leadership team is comprised of thirteen members: three administrators and ten teachers who work together to ensure the entire school community never loses sight of that mission.

The model for service-oriented leadership starts in the principal's office. The principal models openness to feedback from students and staff on a regular basis. Work in this domain has served to inform his leadership practice, but it also models for staff how to open themselves to constructive feedback so they become more responsive to the stakeholders they serve. Staff and students have regular opportunities to provide anonymous feedback on the principal's leadership through culture/climate polls that ask respondents to comment on the principal's specific leadership, communication, and management behaviors. Respondents are also provided an opportunity to offer unstructured feedback in the form of open-ended responses. The principal carefully reviews the survey results and uses the data to improve his leadership; he also shares unfiltered responses to stakeholders, demonstrating that the principal values and uses constructive feedback and models a growth mindset.

The strong focus on listening also characterizes the building leadership team's work. The leadership team meets weekly to discuss programs, policies, and other issues that impact the work of staff and the experiences of students. Together, this group weighs the possible outcomes of decisions on the school community, and takes action consistent with the best interests of whom they serve. It is important to note that once the team makes a decision, listening continues. The leadership team is purposeful to design and implement feedback loops to ensure they monitor the progress and impact of programs and policies.

The leadership team's focus on listening also involves two-way communication. While the team is focused on hearing what stakeholders have to say about their experience at Shepard, they seek out opportunities for growth and improvement. The leadership team participates in the analysis of community satisfaction and student achievement data, and works to communicate the data and to provide leadership for improvement at the team and department level. The result is an increased sense of collaboration, improved school community satisfaction, and improved academic outcomes for students.

## Part VI – INDICATORS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS

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We take so many actions in our pursuit of excellence; however, Shepard's commitment to continuous improvement rises to the top as the most effective practice to leverage success for students, staff, and the community of Shepard Middle School.

Our indicators of academic success are high by almost any measure. We outpace similar schools in culture as measured by the HUMANeX INSIGHTeX survey, academic achievement on the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers is among the highest in Illinois, and our staff and students frequently receive recognition--National Board Certified teachers, State-level athletic recognition for students, and individual academic recognition--for outstanding achievement.

However, we always strive to be better. When you walk into the Shepard office, you are met with a quote from Jascha Heifetz--a famous violinist whose commitment to outstanding musicianship carried him to Carnegie Hall in the early 20th Century. It reads, "There is no top. There are always further heights to reach." These words embody the focus on continued growth at Shepard Middle School. Staff, students, parents and community members view our work as an institution through a lens of continuous improvement; we always seek new ways to innovate, improve, and grow as educators, and learners and as caring, contributing members of our community.

Continuous improvement involves four critical phases at Shepard Middle School; we listen, learn, lead, and then repeat. Listening involves developing an unbiased understanding of our strengths and areas for growth. We survey staff, students, and parents for their perceptions of our school on a variety of topics--technology integration, student engagement, leadership, and culture, to name just a few. We also carefully study the variety of assessments that show student academic progress.

When our strengths and areas for growth have been identified, we work to learn about approaches that will serve to improve performance in identified areas. Teachers look at individual student progress to determine how they can better meet each student's needs; teams use the data to create effective student groupings; the entire staff reviews data regularly to assess our work as a whole. We benchmark our school's achievement data against peer schools and districts. We connect with communities of educators -- internally, locally, nationally and worldwide -- and we review current research in education to select high leverage strategies for innovation, growth, and improvement. Once identified, we lead change in our school, relying as much on teacher, student, and community leadership as we do on leadership from those in formal administrative roles.

Finally, we repeat the process. We take stock of what has helped to improve our school, and we reassess for new areas for growth that may have emerged. This feedback loop ensures we always work to reach new heights.