

**U.S. Department of Education**  
**2017 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program**

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Mr. Andy Anderson

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

Official School Name Conrady Junior High School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 7950 West 97th Street

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

City Hickory Hills    State IL    Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 60457-2327

County Cook County

Telephone (708) 233-4505    Fax (708) 430-8964

Web site/URL http://www.npd117.net/Domain/8    E-mail aanderson@npd117.net

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. Jeannie Stachowiak    E-mail jstachowiak@npd117.net  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name North Palos School District 117    Tel. (708) 233-5739

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 Dr. Tom Kostas  
(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. 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 and all subgroups, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
3. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2017 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.
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 2011 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: 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, or 2016.
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 has not been identified by the state as “persistently dangerous” within the last two years.
9. 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.
10. 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.
11. 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.
12. 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 (2016-2017) unless otherwise stated.

### DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 4 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 0 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 5 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, 2016 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	194	179	373
7	184	174	358
8	153	156	309
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	531	509	1040

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 1 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 2 % Asian
  - 6 % Black or African American
  - 16 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 72 % 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 2015 – 2016 school year: 7%

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, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	31
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	32
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	63
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2015	947
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.067
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	7

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 9 %  
94 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):  
Albanian, Arabic, Bengali, Bulgarian, Croatian, Czech, German, Greek, Gujarati, Ilocano, Korean, Lithuanian, Malayalam, Mina, Pashto, Pilipino, Polish, Romanian, Russian, Slovak, Spanish, Telugu, Turkish, Urdu, Uzbek, Vietnamese, Yoruba.

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 56 %  
Total number students who qualify: 587
8. Students receiving special education services: 12 %  
120 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.

- 5 Autism
- 0 Deafness
- 0 Deaf-Blindness
- 8 Emotional Disturbance
- 3 Hearing Impairment
- 5 Mental Retardation
- 1 Multiple Disabilities
- 2 Orthopedic Impairment
- 18 Other Health Impaired
- 52 Specific Learning Disability
- 15 Speech or Language Impairment
- 0 Traumatic Brain Injury
- 0 Visual Impairment Including Blindness
- 11 Developmentally Delayed

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 7
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	2
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects	32
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	34
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a licensed professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	14
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	7

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 31:1
12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

<b>Required Information</b>	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012
Daily student attendance	96%	95%	96%	96%	96%
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 2016.

<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 X

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.

Be the Best for the 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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Conrady Junior High recently celebrated 50 years of serving the densely populated southwest suburban Chicago communities of Palos Hills, Bridgeview, and Hickory Hills, Illinois. While the school district is officially comprised of 30% English learners, 80% of students in this North Palos K-8 school district come from homes where English is a second language. In this multicultural school environment, the school provides bilingual education in Arabic as well as transitional language programs representing high numbers of Polish and Spanish-speaking newcomers to the United States. 56% of students at Conrady come from homes of low socioeconomic status. The demographics of Conrady's current student population is in stark contrast from when the school opened its doors in 1965.

In 2010, Conrady was the lowest performing of five schools in the district. With new leadership and an organizational overhaul of restructuring the school from a traditional junior high into a middle school format, it did not take long to see improved results. 2013 marked the year when the school met Illinois' Annual Yearly Progress at the highest level in the school's history. In 2014, the Conrady community was honored to receive designation as a National Title I Distinguished School. Despite challenges of homelessness, poverty, big educational gaps, and language barriers, in 2016 this school of approximately 1,050 students became the flagship school of North Palos with the overall highest student academic performance data in district. Conrady ranked number one on the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) composite score in Illinois when compared to other schools of similar low socioeconomic demographic.

For the academic success at Conrady to be attributed to one single program, initiative, or intervention is difficult to pinpoint. Instead, we believe the overarching annual establishment of and focus on academic goals to be the driving force for all work within the school. Administrators, teachers, and students themselves set goals. Specific students are targeted for intervention programs based on academic performance. Interventions available for students include Plan Time Tutoring, Academic Student Success Enrichment Teams (ASSETS), reading intervention, double-blocked math classes, and various blended learning programs supported by a Chromebook for every child. Social and emotional learning occurs through the school's extensive extracurricular program of athletics, fine arts, technology, academic competition, travel, and interest-specific clubs as well as the school's continued work with the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program. Reflections of perspectives and responsibility are embedded throughout the school.

The Conrady master class schedule is a hybrid model that includes a daily double block of all English Language Arts classes, a single or double-blocked math class dependent upon student need, daily single periods of exploratory and intervention classes, and an every other day block schedule for science and social studies. The school provides common plan periods for special education and general education co-teachers, in addition to common plan periods for same content area teachers at each grade level. Professional learning communities are scheduled for the core academic areas according to middle school teams.

The Title I recognition in 2014 not only validated the relentless hard work of students, parents, and faculty, but also motivated staff to realize the power behind one of our core values: Be the Best for the World. Teachers have continued to analyze how to work more efficiently and effectively to meet the never-ending challenge of motivating students to be successful. Since the "distinguished" award, Conrady has seen an increase of site visits from other schools inquiring of curriculum, methodology, inquiry of technology integration, and graduate level action research. The number of Conrady teachers who present at area and state workshops and serve as consultants in other school districts continues to increase. The National Title I Distinguished School Award provided the staff of Conrady Junior High opportunities of leadership to pay it forward and increase awareness and drive to continue raising expectations even higher and improve quality. To be recognized as a National Blue Ribbon School would not only be an honor and another validation of the dedication and determination of our school community, but would also provide a new platform of leadership opportunity among schools by being associated with the well-known National Blue Ribbon Schools program.

## **PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

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### **1. Core Curriculum:**

The English Language Arts curriculum at Conrady Junior High school has been developed around the PARCC Model Content Framework with four units of study. These units of study are centered around an essential understanding. Each unit reflects a balance between informational, literature, writing, and language standards. Students read rigorous texts that showcase these standards and promote critical thinking. All grade levels have common teacher created midterms and quarterly assessments that highlight the standards taught during each quarter. The students also engage in two on-demand writing tasks each quarter to demonstrate their increasing writing ability. We also utilize digital commenting to provide feedback by teachers and peers based on common rubrics. The teachers provide daily explicit instruction in vocabulary that focuses on academic vocabulary, affixes, and important words found in their texts. We are currently working on incorporating inquiry lessons in our Honors classes to extend these students' learning beyond the standards through an engaging extension. Our ELA teachers have increased use of digital formative assessments tools to identify areas of weakness as well as mastery to aid in individualizing instruction. An example of extended learning at Conrady is illustrated by an Honors Symposium created by an eighth grade English language arts teacher and an eighth grade social science teacher. Nearly 90 students between the two teachers accepted a challenge to work beyond the scope of class requirements over the course of three months to explore a topic of interest originally encountered in class. Students create their own project and presentation completely outside of class, no grades, purely self-directed by intrinsic motivation, and present their work to other students and parents on a Friday evening with the intent to impress themselves, their peers, and their parents with quality work. The freedom of students to choose their own extended learning topic provides a level of engagement with the core curriculum well beyond original expectations during the school day.

The math curriculum at Conrady Junior High School has been structured based on the Common Core State Standards. The curriculum reflects a scope and sequence that considers Task Types, Sub-Claims, and Mathematical Practices. The curriculum map focuses initial attention to major content standards, with emphasis on reasoning, application, and modeling throughout every unit. All grade levels have teacher created common unit assessments and rubrics. Lessons are created to challenge students and invite them to apply their mathematical knowledge in real world situations. Technology plays a large role in determining students' mastery of material. Our Technology Instructional Coordinator shares applications, during Professional Learning Communities, for teachers to gather formative assessment data that drives instruction and intervention in their classrooms. Foundational skills are reinforced using Khan Academy and other digital platforms. The self-created curriculum uses names of teachers as well as problem scenarios practical to student lives in order to increase engagement through establishing a clear purpose of learning.

The Science Department has adopted an integrated Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) model, based on the Illinois Learning Standards for Science. The Disciplinary Core Ideas of: Life Science, Earth and Space Science, and Physical Science are shared amongst all three grade levels, where learning builds throughout the journey at Conrady. Students are asked to apply Science and Engineering Practices and Crosscutting Concepts in every unit of study. Students diligently build their science knowledge through trial and error and the inquiry process. They engage in discussions about claim, evidence, and reasoning while participating in investigations. Students are expected to collectively communicate and work with peers to design models, make observations, reflect on effectiveness, and question their product. Problem based learning units are in development. The types of problems being solved through research cannot be answered with a Google search. As a result, the degree of student engagement increases with the understanding of real life practical application. Science classes went to a block schedule three years ago in order to afford extended time to complete hands-on laboratory learning without interruption.

The Social Science curriculum at Conrady Junior High school is currently being restructured based on the new Illinois Social Science Standards based on the work of the C3 Framework. Teachers are working in grade-level teams to develop common rigorous assessments based on enduring understandings that connect historical events with more contemporary issues. Each instructional unit is being developed with 5 lenses in

mind: inquiry, civics, geography, economics, and history. Our Social Studies teachers also regularly incorporate the Common Core Reading History standards to address literacy within their content area topics. They have also been developing and implementing inquiry lessons to increase engagement and application of what the students are learning. The new units of study have a specific focus on giving students the opportunity to take informed action on a problem such as writing a peace treaty for the countries at war in the Middle East or identifying potential solutions to the issues presented by North Korea. Another example of civic learning and engagement of students is illustrated by teachers hosting debates between their two classrooms with a moderator and judges who determine winners. Students research their civil topic, state their stance, and argue for or against a controversial contemporary issue within the school or community. Students also participate in surveys of political issues and party affiliation, actively engage in mock elections and lesson on digital citizenship.

## **2. Other Curriculum Areas:**

Visual and performing arts is offered to students in grades 6, 7, and 8. Band meets daily during the school day and once per week after school. Vocal music is an extracurricular activity while guitar class is a part of our exploratory quarterly class rotation that meets daily for 9 weeks. Visual arts is offered in two nine-week quarters per year per grade level in addition to an after school art club that meets throughout the year. The visual and performing arts curriculum fosters the development of creativity, listening, observing, critiquing, synthesizing, analyzing, interpretation, revision, teamwork, discipline, and application with constant feedback for improvement. The arts at Conrady are well-received by students and respect for the discipline is evident in good student behavior and acknowledgement of quality talent at annual all-school assemblies and art showcases throughout the year. While dance and drama are not embedded within the school day curriculum, the school invests resources, personnel, and teaching of the art forms via extracurricular competitive dance teams, declamations, drama club, and an annual play.

The PE and Health curriculum at Conrady Junior High reflects a focus on wellness and physical fitness. Students in grades 6, 7, and 8 participate in PE for 42 minutes daily. The PE department has worked over the last two years to update their curriculum to incorporate the philosophies that the Illinois State Board of Education has proposed with the Enhance PE initiative. These changes include opportunities for regular physical fitness, integration of technology and standards-based grading practices. Students regularly participate in team-building activities in which they develop social skills of cooperation, demonstrating respect, and self-awareness. Additionally, the PE department assesses students two times a year using Fitnessgram and sends these reports home to families. Students receive health for six weeks each year in grades 6, 7, and 8. The health curriculum is in the process of being revised to also reflect the focus on the shifts proposed by Enhance PE. The vision for health education is for student life-long wellness and healthy habits.

Spanish is offered to students in grades 7 and 8. Nearly 25% of each graduating class tests out of high school Spanish I and enrolls in either Spanish II or Honors Spanish II as high school freshmen. The Spanish course mirrors the high school course and provides students with the literacy skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing in a foreign language. Students complete the first semester high school curriculum during 7th grade in an exploratory class that meets daily and the second semester high school curriculum course is taken during the 8th grade year in the same exploratory class format. Culture is another key knowledge component of this course.

Conrady Junior High launched its one-to-one Chromebook initiative three years ago and all students in grades 6, 7 and 8 utilize the devices on a daily basis. The 2016 ISTE Standards for Students are the central focus of professional development and lesson design in order to build digital and media literacy skills. Using a variety of collaborative applications, students work with peers to engage in authentic and real-world learning experiences. Students use various multimedia tools and applications to publish work online and seek feedback to further develop their skills. All students learn about safe, responsible and ethical use of technology by engaging in Common Sense Media's digital citizenship curriculum. They self-monitor academic performance, organize assignments and share their work using the Schoology Learning Management System in all classes. Teachers also utilize a variety of web-based formative assessment tools to provide timely feedback and on-the-spot support to students in all subject areas.



Conrady offers students an opportunity to engage in Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) through the Project Lead The Way Gateway curriculum. In Design and Modeling, students learn about engineering practices, using the design process to develop solutions, measurement and dimensioning skills for sketching and modeling. The Introduction to Computer Science course teaches students about coding, programming, software and hardware development. Innovation and creativity are at the heart of the Flight and Space course, which asks students to design, build and test a glider applying their knowledge of Aeronautics. The Green Architecture course teaches students about sustainable architecture and minimizing the environmental impact of buildings. All Project Lead The Way courses challenge students to problem solve, thinking critically, work collaboratively and address real-world problems. The Gateway curriculum is offered at all three grade levels and each module meets daily for a duration of 9 weeks.

### **3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:**

Conrady Junior High teachers meet weekly with the administration and curriculum team leaders in a Professional Learning Community (PLC) to answer four questions: 1. What do we want students to learn/be able to do? 2. How will we know that they have learned it? 3. What will we do for those that haven't learned it? 4. What will we do for those who have already learned it? PLCs serve as an opportunity for teachers to review student data, discuss instructional methods and strategies, and plan interventions.

the general education teachers to design curriculum, assessments and instruction. Additionally, they participate in the grade level PLCs. The instruction in these classrooms is not planned to be separate or at a lower level. These students take the same common assessments and use many of the same instructional materials as their English speaking peers. The teachers work to modify, differentiate, and address the learning needs of English Learners while holding students to the same learning standards.

## **PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS**

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### **1. School Climate/Culture:**

The climate and culture of Conrady Junior High School is one of collaboration, supportive in learning from mistakes, and celebratory for genuine high level success. Students often engage in academic competitions within classes and among classes. Whether using Kahoot interactive digital quiz platform or participation in "Challenge Days" prior to Winter and Spring Breaks, students are eager to engage in healthy academic competition. More and more open-ended and problem based learning is occurring within the school. This approach is resulting in a higher level of student curiosity, engagement, and intrinsic motivation. Students enjoy academic debates between classrooms, exhibit student-led discussions, and also work with academic assessment rubrics resulting in students wanting to exceed the targeted goals.

Examples of extrinsic motivation include pizza parties, being recognized at a Board of Education meeting, monthly student recognition by teams, being featured in the school newsletter or on the school webpage, receiving Jaguar Paws for exhibiting good effort, and opportunity to participate in Conrady's "Parade of Champions" for students who meet their established goals on the Northwest Education Association's Measure of Academic Progress (NWEA MAP). Programs such as National Junior Honor Society, Geography Bee, Spelling Bee, Sertoma Essay Writing Contest, Anti-Defamation League's Essay on Freedom contest, and Khan Academy competitions provide motivation for a select group of students. "Good News From Conrady" postcards are handwritten by teachers and mailed to homes of students who demonstrate good behavior, outstanding effort, and/or excellent achievement.

Social and emotional growth is centered around the axle of the Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) program grounded on being Respectful, On Task, Act Safe, and Responsible (ROAR). The school provides the opportunity for re-teaching of behaviors that are contrary to the school's values. Philanthropic opportunities occur through support of the Ronald McDonald House, St. Jude Children's Hospital, Stand Up for Spencer, and contributions to cancer research organizations. MERIT Club is a five-part citizenship program to improve the respect, character, and praise of the school and produces monthly videos, daily announcements, and annual projects. Dress up spirit days are established periodically throughout the year in connection with Student Council. National Junior Honor Society supports the drive for community service and leaving the world better than found.

The school culture creates an environment where teachers feel valued and supported as evidenced in the "Recognize a Star" program where fellow staff, students, and parents access the nomination portal via the district's website. The Conrady Leadership Team (CLT) plans monthly treats and positive reinforcement messages through genuine handwritten note cards with comments unique to each staff member. Staff also have the opportunity to publish their admiration and gratitude to their peers through a Google platform document entitled "The Brag-About". The Parent-Teacher-Student Association (PTSA) furnishes an annual "Staff Appreciation Luncheon" in addition to CLT providing a "Star-Studded Staff" luncheon each year. Videos are created where students say thank you for the positive influences teachers have on their lives. Teacher opinions are valued and feedback is regularly solicited through various surveys on topics such as scheduling, standards-based grading, and technology.

### **2. Engaging Families and Community:**

The Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) is the strongest connection between Conrady, its families, and the community. Greatest success has been found around specificity. For example, fundraising activities always do better when funds are being raised for a stated purpose. Solicitation for help is always greater when tasks are clearly articulated. General solicitation never yields the same result as when people rally around a clearly identified event or task.

When student and teacher representation at PTSA meetings became non-existent, the school created a partnership between Student Council and the PTSA. Student Council teacher sponsors became liaisons with parents of the PTSA Board. Student representatives from Student Council began attending evening PTSA meetings and bringing their parents. The synergy resulted in successful campaigns by joining forces for a common goal. This structure has facilitated stronger relationships with staff, parents, and students. The

partnership, too, has given parents additional insight and perspective of the challenges staff face when working with children from a multitude of homes and varied upbringing. Since Student Council and the PTSA have been working together, attendance at monthly meetings has been higher than ever.

Two campaigns to highlight engagement of families and community via the PTSA and Student Council partnership are Fall Bash and Stand Up for Spencer. Fall Bash is an optional costume party on a Friday night in late October with music, dancing, refreshments, and games. In order to attend, kids must not only meet the required academic grade eligibility criteria, but also may not have any missing homework for the first quarter of the school year. The result is an established awareness of importance in completing homework. The evening is completely supervised by parents and two school administrators. Stand Up for Spencer is an example of a joint fundraiser for a charitable cause. Spencer was the name of a Conrady alumnus who underwent a double-lung and heart transplant. The school community raised over \$2,500 to help offset out-of-town expenditures of the family not covered by insurance.

Career Fair has proven to be a natural avenue of outreach to parents and the local community regarding face-to-face interaction between business leaders, politicians, healthcare, and tradesmen. Parenting Partner workshops, the local libraries, the local community college and the school's relationship with the local high school are additional examples of family and community engagement.

Parents and the community are informed of opportunities via social media, academics through a secured learning management system Schoology, major events via the marquee, special invitations through personalized phone calls, general announcements in newsletters, and text messages via School Messenger for various communication needs. The Schoology learning management system mentioned affords students and parents with a central location of electronic learning materials, resources, and a dashboard of academic progress. Most all teachers use Schoology for assessment and some utilize the program for keeping electronic portfolios of student work.

### **3. Professional Development:**

Professional development needs are identified through review of student performance data, professional observations, professional learning community conversations, and legislative mandates.

Teachers are rarely sent out in a "train the trainer" model. Instead, our teachers are subbed out during the school day and experience the same training for all colleagues to hear the same message and interact with one another regarding the learning. As a result, upon identification of professional development needs, administrators begin seeking out expert consultants with proven results who might fit our need. The process is multifaceted by reading peer reviewed journal articles, attending local workshops and conventions, finding people through word of mouth, and utilizing professional discussion forums. After formally interviewing consultants, checking references, and review of their work, the administration works collaboratively with the chosen consultant to develop a plan that includes both short-term and long-term goals.

Training usually begins with an initial all-day workshop followed by job embedded coaching, observation, and debriefings that occur a month or so later. Building principals participate in all aspects of training and spend entire school days with consultants as they work with teachers. Professional development initiatives are identified annually and have follow-up activities that include a revisit of student performance data, professional observations, professional learning community conversations, and sometimes rubric development to measure the degree of successful implementation.

Professional development for administrators not only happens while consultants work with teachers, but also through a district-wide format. Relatively recent examples include the Black Belt Course for Building Leaders presented by the Center for College and Career Readiness as well as Life Orientations and a refresher course of Professional Learning Communities presented respectively by Illinois Association School Business Officers and Solution Tree. In each of these scenarios, all principals, assistant principals, team leaders, and district office administration trained together, implemented takeaway learning at the building level, and followed up with each other during regular district level leadership meetings.

Teachers and administrators both have access to graduate course reimbursement funds. Administrators also experience out of district workshops and administrative academies as a part of vetting experts, licensure, or for updates regarding pending legal mandates.

Conrady builds into its master schedule time for professional development to occur within the school day during time designated for professional learning communities. Early student release and extended staff hours on the first Wednesday of each month along with institute days and summer training sessions aid in the self-efficacy of staff.

Professional development always supports established school goals and improvement plans. The impact on the capacity of teachers and administrators is measured by the cyclical pattern of the Plan, Do, Study, Act approach.

#### **4. School Leadership:**

Serving as the overall instructional and managerial leader of the building, the principal establishes vision and expectations while involving all stakeholders under a philosophical Baldrige Systems approach of site-based management. Teamwork is the heart and soul of how we operate. Staff members have a choice of either being a team player or know they will need to get off the bus. Teams develop through distributive leadership with trust and delegation. The “divide and conquer” mentality, in connection with supports of having a plan and knowing guidance is available as needed, allows the organization to not be dependent upon any single individual. Shared responsibility enables for all to succeed or for all to accept responsibility when goals are not met. Education is a people business and thus “rules of thumb” become the foundation to fostering independent thinking and problem solving of complicated situations rather than strict rules and policies, even though rules and policies are a necessary component of governance. When appropriate, students and parents come into the arena when those perspectives are relevant and purposeful. Ultimately, academic achievement is the driving force behind all policies, programs, relationships, and business of our organization.

The main hub of leadership lies with the Conrady Leadership Team (CLT). This team consists of the principal, assistant principal, math/science team leader, English language arts/social science team leader, technology instructional coordinator, and dean of students. CLT members contribute to weekly meeting agendas regarding items pertinent with all aspects of the school. The majority of the work, though, is about teaching and learning.

Both team leaders and the technology instructional coordinator work directly for the assistant superintendent of teaching and learning yet support the building administration. Their roles include detailed implementation of curriculum development and delivery, conducting professional learning communities, coordinating professional development, assessment review and development, intervention programs, integration of technology, as well as the organization and analysis of student performance data.

The assistant principal serves as the building’s testing coordinator, creates class schedules for new enrollments, assists the principal in conducting teacher and support staff evaluations, leads professional learning communities, is responsible for the after school intervention program in addition to all of the other multi-faceted aspects of being a building administrator.

The dean of students oversees chronic truancy, discipline, the Positive Behavior Intervention Supports program, and revision of handbook policies.

The administrative leadership team is quite proud of the positive working relationship established with the local teacher and support staff unions, the Parent Teacher Student Association board, as well as Student Council sponsors and co-athletic directors. Active listening and living out the established core values in responding to issues and needs of all stakeholders have proven to benefit the students of Conrady Junior High School.

## **Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

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We often find ourselves saying there is a reason and a strategy behind everything we do at Conrady. The reason we hold our assemblies on the days prior to breaks or shortened days is strategic. Shortened days and days prior to vacation periods are days when students seem to be less focused and thus great days for academic competitions between classrooms and assemblies to occur.

Classroom instructional time is heavily protected in order to maintain focus during the day. Announcements and intercom use occurs only at the beginning or end of the day. Speech, occupational therapy, and social work pullout is done during study hall time or during non-core class time. Non-curricular community type of activities or initiative awareness is done during lunch periods. An in-house master calendar is used to list all assessments, professional development, and activities that occur during the school day in order to strategically place each item in a manner to reduce disruption or conflict.

The school makes every attempt to keep kids in school. We are not quick to suspend students. Instead, social workers, the dean, and teacher teams work hand in hand to develop behavior intervention plans in order to keep kids in class as much as possible. Parents are sometimes enlisted to spend the day with their own child in order to ensure proper behavior and engagement in learning. Grant monies are used to enlist the services of clinical psychologists to work with students, parents, and staff with our most challenging students.

We are currently engaged in an extensive review of grading practices in transitioning to a formalized system of standards-based grading where the emphasis is on learning instead of points. This is a strategy focused on academic success.

Plan Do Study Act processes are regularly practiced in pursuit of continual improvement. North Palos School District 117 has a well-established Quality Review Process. In a systematic approach to reviewing student achievement data, goals are established, strategies are developed, and a cyclical pattern of growth and improvement occurs.

Providing a quality education to all students is done with integrity. The school is strategic in first moving over the kids who are on the bubble of approaching proficiency and being proficient as a way to maximize resources and to help the greatest number of students at a given moment in time. In doing so, additional resources become more readily available to then assist students whose academic achievement gap is greatest.