

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

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Mr. Jonathon Thomas

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

Official School Name Valhalla High School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 300 Columbus Avenue

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

City Valhalla State NY Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 10595-1300

County Westchester County

Telephone (914) 683-5014 Fax (914) 683-5003

Web site/URL http://vhs.valhallaschools.org E-mail jthomas@valhallaschools.org

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. Brenda Myers E-mail bmyers@valhallaschools.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Valhalla Union Free School District Tel. (914) 683-5040

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. Robert Ierace
(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

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

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):
- 2 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 1 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 4 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	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	46	64	110
10	54	65	119
11	58	86	144
12 or higher	61	65	126
Total Students	219	280	499

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 2 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 9 % Asian
 - 9 % Black or African American
 - 21 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 58 % White
 - 1 % 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: 4%

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	14
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	8
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	22
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2015	506
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.043
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	4

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 2 %
10 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):
Spanish, Haitian-Creole, Mandarin Chinese

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 13 %
Total number students who qualify: 64

8. Students receiving special education services: 12 %
60 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.

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

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 11
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	Number of Staff
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects	29
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	17
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a licensed professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	2
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	6

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 17:1
12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

Required Information	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012
Daily student attendance	97%	97%	97%	97%	96%
High school graduation rate	100%	96%	99%	92%	97%

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.

Post-Secondary Status	
Graduating class size	125
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	77%
Enrolled in a community college	21%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	1%
Joined the military or other public service	1%
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.

Valhalla High School is a public school with a private school feel that accepts young students as children and helps them become young adults ready to face the challenges that await them.

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

Valhalla High School is a public school serving approximately 500 students in grades 9-12 from the towns of Mt. Pleasant, North Castle and Greenburgh. The three communities represent a wide socioeconomic range, which is reflected in the student population. Families range from traditional blue-collar workers to white-collar executives and all families support the school completely. Valhalla High School students are concerned with being part of a community, not just being high school students.

Valhalla's diverse student population is a part of what makes it special. Students of all races, ethnicities, religions and sexual orientations come together without labels to become Vikings. In Dr. Beverly Tatum's book, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*, Dr. Tatum describes an image of "Walk[ing] into any racially mixed high school and you...see[ing] black youth seated together in the cafeteria. Of course, it's not just the black kids sitting together-the white, Latino, Asian Pacific..." (1997) This image does not exist in Valhalla! The cafeteria reflects the images of the school as a whole - students of all groups sitting together.

While Valhalla High School is relatively young - with our first class graduating in 1963 - we proudly carry on many wonderful traditions that celebrate student success, diversity and much more. It is these long-standing traditions that define who we are as a school and a community and that set a tone for our students.

Our diversity is celebrated in a multitude of ways. The Whitney M. Young, Jr. club is a diversity club designed to recognize and bring together the many cultures that comprise our school and our community. For 40 years, the club has enlightened students and community members. The annual dinner is a student-run event that brings awareness to audience members. Recently, the students in our College Spanish classes created the Hispanic Heritage Night, a program that celebrates all of the Spanish-speaking nations and our students from those nations. This has become an annual event as well as a capstone project for the seniors in our College Spanish classes.

One of the longest running programs in Valhalla is the Valhalla International Fund (VIF), which brings cultural awareness to all. For over 50 years, the VIF has hosted students from other countries and provided scholarships for Valhalla High School students to live and study abroad. The club's motto, "Making the world smaller, one student at a time," truly represents the focus of bringing cultural awareness to Valhalla and the world. During the annual VIF weekend, exchange students attending other high schools from Long Island to New Jersey, come to Valhalla and live with our families and students. During this time, Valhalla truly becomes a cultural "melting pot" as students from all over the world share experiences, learn about their similarities and develop lifelong friendships. The weekend culminates in the annual VIF dinner, which allows the community to meet our new friends, revel in great conversation, explore delicacies from many cultures and simply grow closer.

Involvement and making connections, creates a stronger bond to the school and school community and helps students grow personally, socially, and academically. In a school with fewer than 500 students, we offer over 30 clubs and activities along with over 20 JV and Varsity sports. We are proud to boast a participation rate in extra- and co-curricular activities of over 85%. Students connect with Valhalla High School and we, in turn, make sure we are providing opportunities that meet their needs and interests. The high school must be about more than getting off the bus, attending classes and getting back on the bus. It must be a safe haven, a place to grow, an opportunity to explore, and so much more. It is our goal to continue creating an environment that is just that. One that keeps students on campus rather than chasing them off.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

Valhalla believes in educating and supporting the whole child. Of course in a school that begins with academics. Whether it is the core or other curriculum, instructional focus is built around critical thinking, collaboration, communication, creativity and curiosity. Lesson design, texts, assessment development and classroom discussions incorporate relationships to current events, known situations and information and student interests. Creating these relationships allows for a clearer understanding of content and connections to the real world. In every department, real-world communication skills are a norm. Several years ago, the school district undertook a writing initiative that focused on enhancing writing skills in all content areas in a K-12 continuum. This focus on literacy in all content areas has had a great impact on enriched student understanding and long-lasting learning. In addition, as students begin to write in all contents, the connections between the content areas becomes stronger and more recognizable.

In the English program, teachers bring in texts from a wide variety of authors that allow students to hear many voices, including those that may represent themselves, their culture and backgrounds. Adding more female and culturally diverse authors has been a focus of the department. Additionally, the department teaches thematically and not textually, thus allowing students choices in the texts they read that align to the theme. We believe that students who have a choice in their reading and curriculum are more engaged, more focused and more committed to the learning. It is here, in the English program, where students deeply develop their writing skills. Students will write for a variety of reasons and in a variety of styles. All freshmen participate in a semester long writing seminar to support the writing process, and develop skills that can be transferred to other classrooms and beyond.

Even though New York State only requires three years of math for students to reach graduation goals, students in Valhalla are encouraged to and complete four to five years of math study. In order to make that happen, the math department has developed multiple math curricula to meet the needs of all of our students. Struggling students will receive additional support through ongoing math labs, while accelerated students are challenged with both Advanced Placement and college level courses. In all levels of math, teachers have incorporated real world problems and assess students on their applied knowledge while reducing the reliance on “drill and skill” teaching methodologies. Here too, literacy has become a norm as students are required to interpret problems, define solution processes and use writing skills to explain and answer problems.

Like math, only three years of science is required for graduation, and, like math, our students pursue science programming for four and five years, often accumulating as many as six credits in the sciences. Here again, the department has worked diligently to define programming that meets the needs of all students, reaching them at all levels. Beyond that, the uniqueness of programming is also taking into account when designing new courses that address student interests and connections to real world issues. A range of courses are offered, from Integrated Science, where students investigate astronomy, forensic science and other topics that change from year to year based on student interests to College Environmental Science in which students examine social, political and economic impacts on our environment while receiving college credit for their coursework. Ultimately, it is the goal of the science department to develop inquisitive scientists who will carry on that desire to explore, ask questions and investigate their findings.

While every department is responsible for incorporating socio-cultural education in the curriculum, it is the foremost responsibility of the social studies department. It is here that the goal of educating citizens is met head on. Through the curriculum of world and U.S. history, along with government and economics, students learn from the past as they judge the present and prepare for the future. Beyond the “basic” history classes, students explore more unique areas where they can evaluate themselves and societies, as well as delve deeper into history through different lenses. Sociology, psychology, history through film and global issues are just a few of the courses that allow students to further explore the world.

Students enter high school as a child and must leave as young adults. This is our responsibility as high school educators. In the classroom, through the courses we develop and in multiple other ways, Valhalla students are continually preparing for life after high school. Providing all students with strong interpersonal

communication skills, offering electives that advance real-world awareness and incorporating critical thinking skills and peer collaboration into courses are universal approaches to post-graduate success. Dual-enrollment courses and online learning opportunities allow students to expand their learning horizons. Ultimately, students develop a work ethic and the ability to organize and prioritize.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Valhalla High School has a thriving arts program that encompasses both the fine and performing arts. Students in grades 9-12 fully participate in the arts programs and are able to grow and be supported as artists. The faculty in both the fine and performing arts departments are both educators and professional artists who are able to bring their “real world” understanding of how the arts work, how they are created, how they are represented and how Valhalla students can work to reach those levels of success and ability. Throughout the course of the year, Valhalla art and music students participate in multiple formal presentations, many of which are adjudicated by individuals with professional and university backgrounds. Most importantly, all of the fine and performing arts programs are open to all students regardless of background, ability, limitations, etc. Students are encouraged and supported through the process by both their teachers and their peers.

The Valhalla physical education and health program is designed to meet the needs of all students. The staff in the physical education and health department take their role seriously and design programs that address all students. In the physical education program, teachers focus on team skills to allow students the ability to grow teamwork, cooperation, strategy and camaraderie, as well as life skills, such as yoga, tennis, etc. to allow students the ability to develop lifelong physical activity skills and better understand how their bodies work. In addition, teachers look for new and exciting opportunities for students, which have included ice skating, kick boxing and curling. Additionally, all students are taught hands-on CPR and AED response. Ultimately, it is the goal of the physical education department to make sure all students learn and know how to remain physically active both in high school and beyond.

The Valhalla health program is designed to educate and provide students with the information, knowledge and skills necessary to lead an optimal healthy lifestyle. It is a skills based curriculum that addresses real life situations. The goal of this curriculum is to produce health literate citizens prepared to be critical thinkers and problem solvers, responsible and productive citizens, self-directed learners and effective communicators.

While a small school, students still have the choice of pursuing either Spanish or Italian and can do so through a college level in both languages. While the early focus is on language acquisition, the teachers also bring culture, literature, history and the arts into the learning process. It is as important to learn about the peoples as it is to speak the language. In pursuit of that goal, teachers have reached out to schools in other countries to interact with our Valhalla students and we have established Skype relationships with those schools. This allows our students to interact socially and linguistically with peers in another country, and allows those international students the opportunity to do the same with our students.

While one year of a language is required of all students for graduation, a large majority of Valhalla students pursue the language well beyond that first year and many have gone on to participate in international programs that have enhanced their language and culture skills.

Focus on 21st Century learning is a goal of the Valhalla Board of Education. Students take a course in computer applications when they enter the high school where they learn everything from presentation skills to coding and design theory to cyber safety and security. All students complete the 9th grade with the same set of technology tools to make them successful as they continue their academic journey.

The use of laptops, having a Bring Your Own Device policy and providing multiple technology tool options for teachers has truly grown student and teacher ability to incorporate technology in their learning.

Additionally, within the technology curriculum, students may continue their studies in the areas of Game Design, Mobile Apps Design, and on through College Computer Science courses. Students will gain skills

in engineering, design, logic, problem solving and responsibility. Many of the projects have the students working in areas of humanity and social awareness, such as a robotics project where students had to develop a device to assist the physically disabled.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

In Valhalla it is understood that every student is different and comes to school with their own set of needs, learning styles and social history. Every member of the high school staff works hard to follow the “Golden Rule for educators as shared by Alabama’s Principal of the Year, Mr. Danny Steele, to “teach every child the way [we] would want [our] own child to be taught.” Building strong relationships, meeting students where they are and focusing on the whole child are foundational to teaching and learning in Valhalla.

A multitude of tools are utilized to meet these lofty goals. Each one of them designed to support the academic growth and potential of our students. This begins with the classroom environment itself. Valhalla focuses on maintaining small classroom environments, which allows teachers to know each of their students and support their individual needs. This environment leads to instruction that is tailored to students and allows students to become a part of the lesson. Students are comfortable in their classes and willing to take chances, speak up and participate fully.

Valhalla has worked diligently to include all students in all academic programs. Inclusion is our goal and supporting all students in the learning environment our purpose. In order to meet the needs of all of our students, teachers focus on differentiation in their lessons. Providing differentiated lessons supports a wide range of students including accelerated and advanced students, students with special needs and struggling students, to name a few.

Every classroom teacher, through professional development, peer support, mentoring, department strategy meetings, etc., is equipped with a “toolbox” of teaching skills aimed at supporting the learning of all students. Teachers are able to pull the right tool out of the “toolbox” to meet the needs of the lesson, the class or the student. While cooperative learning strategies may have been around for some time, Valhalla teachers have taken the opportunity to enhance those skills and apply them to their teaching strategies. Additional tools, such as Thinking Maps, technology and others, provide teachers with the ability to meet multiple needs, develop lessons for all students, create more student-centered learning environments and design unique and accessible assessments. Ultimately, lessons and assessments are created to appeal to a variety of learning styles and strengths.

In Valhalla, we recently evaluated the assessments given to students and adjusted our approach to student assessment. Students and teachers are no longer held to a structured mid-term week with traditional multiple choice and long answer exams. The time has been returned to the classroom for learning and the assessments have become more aligned to real world applications. Projects, presentations and collaborative group work have taken the place of the “traditional” 2-hour desk exam. We also moved away from state-driven standardized exams beyond those required for graduation, and have moved to assessments that are designed by Valhalla classroom teachers for Valhalla students. Here again, we focus on assessments that will both engage the students in the learning and assess applied learning.

Throughout the year, classroom assessments take on many different styles. Oftentimes, teachers will provide students choice in the assessment method they believe will allow them the best opportunity to showcase their knowledge. Here again, the focus is on assessing applied knowledge using more realistic measuring tools. Assessments look more like what employees will be responsible for in the work force. Students are asked to work collaboratively to meet a goal and or deadline as well as creatively to find new answers or to design more eye-catching presentations.

A shining example of Valhalla’s real world assessment is our 20% project in senior English. Students work collaboratively on projects, designs, research or other areas of their choosing. Through this work they learn about mentorships, applying for approvals, iteration, writing and presentation. Students have written novels, created and presented school-wide safety assemblies, written plays and run fitness programs for students and staff, just to name a few of the unique learning opportunities. In Valhalla, it is our belief that this type of learning and assessment has much greater value both in the short term and long term.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

Promoting the academic and social-emotional growth of our students is paramount to student success. Valhalla believes in supporting the whole child and accepts the responsibility of molding not only academic students, but citizens of society. At the beginning of each school year, the principal meets with the new 9th grade class and explains to them that they are entering the high school as children, but will leave as young adults, and it is our responsibility to help them make that transformation.

In the classroom, teachers utilize multiple skill sets to keep students motivated, engaged and thinking. Whether they are using cooperative learning activities, technology, problem-based learning, inquiry design or others, both students and teachers understand the purpose and value to the practice. Additionally, new classroom designs and classroom furniture add to the opportunity for greater engagement.

Helping the students make the transition to young adults involves supporting the whole student. It starts in classrooms that are “safe.” This means that students are comfortable speaking out, answering questions and contributing to the lesson without fear of ridicule or shame. We support the character of our students through the Student of the Month award that recognizes the unheralded “good deeds” done by students. Our incoming students are provided support through the acclimation process by our Peer Leaders - older students who act as big brothers and sisters to our ninth graders. We are extremely fortunate to have a supportive counseling office that provides a small student:counselor ratio.

Lastly, supporting our students can only happen if our teachers know they are a vibrant part of the system. In Valhalla, decisions are implemented after collaboration and joint decision-making processes. Additionally, just as with students, Valhalla celebrates the successes of our teachers in many ways. Teachers have full ownership of their classrooms, fully understand the expectations placed on them, and are given the freedom to design and develop curriculum and lesson plans as they see best meets the needs of their students and their purpose. Furthermore, several teacher leadership positions exist that both support the growth of teachers as leaders and provide teachers with mentoring, modeling and support within their own ranks.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

The Valhalla UFSD is committed to building and supporting successful strategies for working with families, higher education and community members. We recently conducted a district—wide survey of our families receiving special education services. One hundred percent of the respondents cited they strongly agreed that they are partners with the schools, that we seek parent input and we consider cultural sensitivities when planning for our students. Our district offers multiple opportunities for parent involvement and ongoing communication. We use daily updates on social media and the district’s website and app. Parents have access to a parent portal where they can view their child’s progress on a regular basis. We also hold regular Instructional Support meetings, team meetings and parent conferences with parents, teachers and service providers to help support the needs of our students and their families.

Parent volunteers are a regular part of the work at Valhalla High School. We have parent partnerships with the Valhalla Athletic Boosters, Valhalla International Fund, Valhalla Friends of the Arts, the Valhalla Foundation and the Valhalla PTSA. The activities of our volunteers include fundraising to support extra programs, resources and international travel. Our partners also host information nights to help families know more about college life and the application process, school budget priorities and capital projects, and academic programs like literacy nights, science symposiums and musical performances.

The district holds Learning Cafes for parents and community members to share areas of focus and to gather input. One very successful Learning Café was held on the high school course catalog and provided parents with the opportunity to learn about the course options provided to our students as well as asking parents if the courses align with their needs and support a successful trajectory from high school to college.

We work closely with area universities and place student teacher and social worker interns in our district. We also collaborate on professional development and have a professor from Pace University working with our high school teachers on a multi-year initiative to build a stronger writing program. We also partner with Pace University to support our computer science teachers and we have joint local chapter in the National Computer Science Association.

Our science research students work with businesses and research centers throughout Westchester to develop comprehensive research projects. We annually hold a STEAM conference with students at the PepsiCo Research facility and scientists from PepsiCo support our science curriculum development projects. Our students regular fund raise and donate their time for area services like the food bank and the children's hospital and they make being a caring about their community a focus of their work.

3. Professional Development:

The district's professional development plan is focused on supporting every teacher and leader as they build their professional learning network. Improving our curriculum, instruction and assessment is a regular part of work. The district begins by setting multi-year district-wide initiatives. We then provide teachers and leaders opportunities to select areas of focus both with their collaborative learning projects and with their alternative evaluation projects. We also have teachers and leaders as members of planning committees throughout the district. For example, our Instructional Council, a team of teachers and leaders, regularly meet to develop and revise the professional evaluation system and the professional development plan. New initiatives are developed through a piloting process and then teachers take on leadership roles to support their colleagues with hands on learning, curriculum design and implementation support.

We have teachers who are designated as Technology Integration Liaisons and Instructional Support Liaisons. They guide the professional development in technology integration and help professional learning for their colleagues. The support is delivered teacher to teacher through team meetings, workshops and online resources and tutorials. Our instructional liaisons support our instructional program and support Thinking Maps, Kagan Cooperative Learning and Keys to Comprehension.

The High School is divided into department teams where they focus on implementing the learning standards in their specific discipline and build curriculum for 21st century learning where collaboration, communication, critical thinking and creativity are foundational to our program and course design.

We supplement all of professional learning with outside nationally recognized consultants that regularly meet with teachers and do small group sessions and classroom modeling. We also work with the Tri-States Consortium to align our work and they conduct comprehensive audits of our progress and provide feedback for next step. Ongoing audits with outside experts assists in the ongoing evaluation of or professional development and the impact of our work.

Another focus of our professional development is leadership development. The administrators in the district set annual goals, meet regularly to review district priorities and initiatives, participate in regional teams with other administrators and meet with outside consultants. This year they worked with a national consultant on scheduling and completely revised the annual schedule development process. The also read new books on educational issues and facilitate shared learning opportunities with their colleagues. This way they continually review new ideas and practice the tools and strategies being observed with our teachers.

4. School Leadership:

The Valhalla Leadership is a group of dedicated leaders who give 110% to the students and families of Valhalla. The entire administrative team of the district consists of 11 people including the superintendent and they are a small but mighty team who work together daily to ensure all K-12 initiatives are seamless and coherent. We pride ourselves on being creative and innovative and we use a wide range of problem solving strategies to support the powerful work of the district.

The district runs a distributive leadership model where each leader, not only is responsible for their primary programs and school buildings but they are also responsible for facilitating major district-wide initiatives. For example, the high school principal not only serves as the principal, but he also facilitates the English, Social Studies and Fine Arts Departments and he leads the district-wide Technology Advisory Committee and works with teachers to roll out all new technology integration initiatives, grants and professional development

The Director of Student Success is working with a district-wide team to update our guidance plan and our Athletic Director facilitates the Health and Wellness Committee. Working together on our strategic priorities and initiatives gives everyone shared ownership of the process and the outcome and improves communication to faculty and families across the district.

In addition, each outside parent group or committee is supported by a member of the leadership team. They help our parents with communication, problem solving and regularly facilitate meetings and presentations. All of the members of the Leadership Team are highly visible and regularly work two or three nights a week and are at parent and student events, performances and ceremonies.

All of our leaders also participate in weekly Learning Walks. Improving instruction and focusing on student achievement is a critical focus of our leadership priorities. During the Learning Walks triads of administrators visit 4 classrooms for about ten minutes each and gather data on evidence of classroom engagement. They then debrief the visit as team using the Danielson 3c Criteria for Student Engagement. From the Learning Walk, we develop feedback for each teacher celebrating their success and offering opportunities for growth. The conversations also help us hone our skills in defining strong instruction and providing feedback that supports new learning.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Valhalla High School prides itself on providing goal-oriented programming that addresses the needs of the whole student. We understand that in order for students to be academically successful, it is incumbent upon us to support the whole student. Students who feel safe, are connected to the school, and are a part of the learning process will find greater success in all areas of their lives. We believe that if we put the student first, everything else will follow.

In Valhalla we believe in supporting and educating the whole child. Allowing the students to grow as artists, athletes, musicians, academicians and more provides them with a 360 degree view of learning and growth, and the opportunity to see how each of these areas impacts the others. In addition, Clubs are designed to appeal to students' interests and many speak to the service or character side of our students allowing them to evaluate themselves and grow as successful members of our society. Students in Valhalla know that coming to school is not just about attending classes, taking tests and getting grades. There is much more to do and, therefore, a greater connection with the broader school community.

In the classroom, the 5 C's lead our teaching philosophy. Teachers emphasize Critical Thinking, Collaboration, Communication, Curiosity and Creativity in all they do. Student engagement in the classroom is centered around this simple, yet important philosophy. The development of lesson plans, assessments, projects and more is designed to incorporate the 5 C's and thus facilitate learning that lasts beyond the next exam and opportunities for growth beyond the subject matter. It is here that teachers are able to integrate lessons on character and personal growth into the content. By using the 5 C's as a guideline for instruction, both teachers and students develop skills that require deeper learning.

Providing choice to our teachers and students allows us to create learning opportunities that support the individual. Teachers have freedom to design curriculum that is tailored the class and student needs, abilities and skill sets, as well as choosing the tools (Thinking Maps, cooperative learning models, Socratic methods, etc.) they feel best suit the lesson and class, while students are given choice in assessment type, text, courses and so much more. This philosophy of choice in teaching and learning allows both student and teacher to use the most direct line to academic success.