

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. Mitch Craft

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

Official School Name Sheridan Junior High School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 500 Lewis Street

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

City Sheridan State WY Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 82801-4310

County Sheridan County

Telephone (307) 672-9745 Fax _____

Web site/URL http://scsd2.com/schools/sheridan-junior-high E-mail rebecca.adsit@scsd2.com

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

Date _____

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent*Mr. Craig Dougherty E-mail craig.dougherty@scsd2.com
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Sheridan County School District #2 Tel. (307) 674-7405

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 Mrs. Ann Perkins
(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):
- 6 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 2 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 2 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 10 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	131	139	270
7	130	118	248
8	139	114	253
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	400	371	771

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 2 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 0 % Asian
 - 0 % Black or African American
 - 4 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 91 % 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	32
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	19
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	51
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2015	729
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.070
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	7

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

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 34 %
Total number students who qualify: 267

8. Students receiving special education services: 11 %
91 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.

- 9 Autism
- 0 Deafness
- 0 Deaf-Blindness
- 3 Emotional Disturbance
- 0 Hearing Impairment
- 6 Mental Retardation
- 4 Multiple Disabilities
- 1 Orthopedic Impairment
- 21 Other Health Impaired
- 36 Specific Learning Disability
- 11 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: 1
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	3
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects	34
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	26
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a licensed professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	20
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	5

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 231:1
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	95%	95%	95%	95%	95%
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.

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

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

The fundamental purpose of Sheridan Junior High School is to ENSURE that ALL students LEARN.

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

The Sheridan Junior High School student body is comprised of 768 students in grades 6-8. The Sheridan community is economically diverse, with over 35% of SJHS students qualifying for free or reduced lunch. Approximately 91% of our student body is Caucasian and 9.2% of our students are of other ethnic groups. Since its opening in 2005, the school has seen a 10% increase in enrollment. Sheridan's population has grown due to a healthy economy and job opportunities that draw young families to the community.

Sheridan Junior High School is a twelve-year-old building situated on a hill overlooking Sheridan's historic downtown. The school benefits greatly from its central location as the Sheridan County YMCA, WYO Theater, Fulmer Public Library, Historic Kendrick Mansion, Kendrick Park, Carriage House Theater, and central business district are all within a few blocks of SJHS. Sheridan has maintained its small town atmosphere; it is a community that looks out for its citizens.

SJHS students and families benefit from partnerships with the Sheridan County YMCA, Sheridan Recreation District, numerous club sports organizations, and local youth theater groups. Many additional organizations assist the school in meeting the diverse needs of our students within and beyond the school setting. Our community is blessed with the financial resources offered by many private foundations.

Parents are a vital part of the educational team at SJHS. The Parent Advisory Group meets monthly to engage in relevant school issues. Annually, SJHS hosts a back to school night, and Parent/Teacher Conferences are held each fall and spring. Teachers use the Infinite Campus gradebook, allowing parents to access student class records through the Parent Portal. The school also maintains a website, offering information to students and parents for their convenience.

Sheridan Junior High School is, above all, a collaborative community of educators with a singular focus on student learning. In the fall of 2008, SJHS began its collaborative journey by establishing building-wide norms, a school purpose, and commitments on the part of all staff members. Our school purpose is simply to ensure that all students learn.

The collective focus on student learning at SJHS is driven through systematic, focused team collaboration. Content teams design collaboration around the four critical questions of a professional learning community (PLC): 1) What do we expect students to learn; 2) How will we know if they've learned it? 3) How will we respond when students struggle? 4) How will respond when students need a challenge? Collaboration is ensured through daily common planning times. Through this deliberate and systematic process, student learning has steadily improved at SJHS[e] and we have been recognized as one of the top schools in Wyoming for many years.

Maintaining a positive student climate is also an important, major focus at Sheridan Junior High School. Proactive approaches to teaching and supporting appropriate behavior are interwoven into the school's fabric. Staff also work to celebrate student success and reward students who choose to do the right thing. For years, the school has focused on kindness, challenging students and staff alike to "Be Boldly Kind" on a daily basis.

Sheridan Junior High School received praise from Dr. Anthony Muhammad during a PLC audit and was subsequently selected as a national PLC model school by Solution Tree. SJHS staff have been asked to present at conferences around the state, and schools from across Wyoming frequently visit SJHS to learn best practices in the PLC framework. SJHS is also home to the 2016 National Distinguished Principal for Wyoming and the 2017 Wyoming Teacher of the Year.

Sheridan Junior High School works to maintain a rigorous, supportive approach to education that engages students at the highest possible levels.

Through the professional learning communities model, every teacher team embeds opportunities for both intervention and enrichment connected to the essential outcomes. This approach has moved the school well

beyond a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching that meets the needs of learners and challenges every student at the appropriate level.

Over the past several years, using common language embedded in our work, SJHS has focused heavily on non-cognitive factors, such as perseverance, grit, organization, mindset, etc. The non-cognitive curriculum, HACS (Habits for Academic and Citizen Success), was designed by SJHS staff specifically for students, with a monthly theme to help build successful attitudes and habits among students. In addition, SJHS counselors model and teach mindfulness practices to students.

The icing on the cake at SJHS is the after school offerings, which build student capacity and challenge students in many areas. In addition to excellent athletics programs, including interscholastic competition in seven different sports, our school offers a wide variety of after school programs focused on STEM and the Arts. On an average day at SJHS, there will be a minimum of six programs running after school, providing students with snacks, transportation, rich learning experiences, and positive mentorship.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

Leadership at SJHS allows for the direction of curriculum implementation to be largely department-driven. Within each grade level and each department, teachers work weekly with their colleagues (usually groups of 3-5 teachers per collaboration group) to build shared knowledge regarding state standards, district curriculum guides, the content and format of high-stakes assessments, and the expectations of teachers at the next level to clarify the essential knowledge and skills all students must acquire to advance. School leadership can and does work with each collaboration group from time to time to ensure each team has the necessary support to operate at its most effective level.

Collaborative teams have unpacked the Common Core State Standards and have clarified the specific proficiency standards students must achieve on each skill and the criteria they will use in assessing each student's proficiency. They have practiced applying the criteria to ensure consistent, reliable assessment of student learning. They help students understand the criteria and students use the criteria to monitor their own learning.

In accordance with the Common Core State Standards, SJHS provides an English language arts curriculum that supports, challenges, and motivates students. At the eighth grade level students take English and at the sixth and seventh grade levels all students take two fifty minute courses, Literature and Composition. Through thoughtful text selection and by teaching explicit reading strategies, students comprehend rigorous, grade-level texts. Leveled questioning, ranging from basic comprehension questions to craft and structure analysis to vocabulary development, encourages students to apply critical thinking skills to foster a deepened understanding of the texts, and students respond to texts through discussion. Through teachers' use of anchor texts and modeling, students learn to solidify their writing, incorporating effective organization and logical idea development. Students engage in writing apprenticeships, continually improving their craft. Continual feedback through the use of rubrics and varied formative assessments drive student learning and inspires students to use the writing process as they draft texts that includes narratives, informational, and argumentative pieces. SJHS's English language arts curriculum encourages all students to become independent readers and writers.

The SJHS science department builds foundational skills through the Wyoming Science Standards and makes adjustments to meet these newly adopted standards. Our science teachers actively embed critical thinking, analysis, engineering and application into our instruction of these standards. Our teachers seek out learning opportunities that encourage students to be active producers of scientific thinking and skills rather than passive consumers of facts. Our teachers work together to empower students to think, collaborate, and communicate like scientists, developing, testing and revising solutions to real world problems. The sciences also incorporate literacy skills such as argumentative skills, using claim, evidence, and reasoning. They embrace the challenges that adopting these new standards present.

SJHS has fully adopted the Common Core State Standards for Math. In sixth grade, there's an emphasis on ratios and rates. The seventh grade curriculum builds on student knowledge of ratios and rates to develop the ideas and understanding of proportionality, and then the eighth grade curriculum has students compare proportional relationships with linear, non-proportional relationships. Grade level PLC's meet at least once a week, but usually more to establish common assessments composed of computation as well as application problems. Each PLC develops a common timeline for instruction and implements plans for addressing intervention when students don't understand concepts. Each grade level has worked hard to find activities that develop conceptual understanding rather than just teaching algorithms. Each unit incorporates learning tasks to challenge students and develop purposefulness that helps them to become savvy consumers, to have awareness, and to question the world around them.

At SJHS, we have a document based history curriculum that aims at deep historical understanding. Sixth grade Social Studies covers Ancient History and Cultures that includes religious traditions. Seventh grade covers American History, starting with Colonial History and ending with the Early Republic with imbedded

Geography and Economics, and eighth grade picks up from the Early Republic to the turn of the Twentieth Century and United States Government. At all levels, SJHS history teachers are committed to engaging students in authentic historical inquiry. We believe that a democracy needs citizens who can ask questions, participate in decisions and hold decision-makers accountable on any level. Our curriculum aims at historical understanding because to understand the past is to understand a time fundamentally different from our own. History helps us to think different. To imagine a better future we must be able to think differently.

To reach college and career readiness, the CCSS were developed with the goal that students would be ready for any post-secondary options. Within our instruction, students are provided ample opportunities to collaborate, critically think, be creative, and communicate. Students leave with skills to ensure success at high school so that they can be college and career ready.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

A common criticism of American education is that students spend too much time listening to adults and consuming information, as opposed to collaborating and engaging in active and creative processes. At Sheridan Junior High School, we have put significant effort and resources into designing and implementing programs that allow students to be active and engage in the creative process. We have worked hard over the years to refine a master schedule that maximizes electives exploration while allowing students to specialize in specific areas of interest.

Sheridan Junior High School offers outstanding Fine Arts programs to students in grades sixth, seventh, and eighth. In Music, all students can participate in Orchestra, Band, and Choir programs that all perform at the top level in their respective festival competitions. We also offer quarter-long courses in piano and guitar. For Visual Arts, all students have access to nine different courses each year in a variety of mediums, including courses in painting, drawing, architecture, sculpture, and ceramics, all packaged in creative formats that engage students at high levels. With six Fine Arts classrooms, five full time teachers dedicating their professional lives to this essential aspect of student learning, and over 75% of students in Visual Arts and/or Music classes, Arts education is thriving at SJHS.

All SJHS students are required to participate in PE and Wellness courses each of their three years in the school. The required curriculum focuses on building healthy habits, developing personal fitness plans, and understanding the key components of well being. In addition, the school offers a wide variety of elective courses, including Individual and Team Sports, Adventure Activities, and CrossFit, to name a few. Our PE and Wellness facilities are incredible, including two classrooms, weight room, cardio room, three gymnasiums, an indoor Adventure course, outdoor track and field, and a pool. These courses are very popular, and the four full-time PE faculty continually upgrade their curriculum to help students grow in their pursuit of personal well being.

The foreign language offered in our school district is Spanish. Because state Hathaway Scholarship guidelines allow students to begin foreign language instruction in 8th grade, SJHS is able to offer Spanish I coursework to our students. Spanish I is a very popular elective course for 8th graders in our school, with enrollment exceeding 100 students most years. We have a full time Spanish teacher who collaborates with the high school team to deliver quality, engaging instruction in this area.

Student learning in technology is ever-evolving at SJHS. Because we are a 1:1 Chromebook school, students learn the fundamentals and use technology as a learning tool each day in core classrooms. Students also take Computer Basics as 6th graders to build foundational skills. Elective courses in technology are currently in a state of evolution, moving from applications-based courses to a focus on computer programming and coding. This shift has been enthusiastically received by students, who have signed up in droves for coding courses such as App Inventor and Python 101.

Career & Technical Education (CTE) coursework at SJHS plays an important role in educating our students. Options include coursework in Agriculture, Family & Consumer Science, and Industrial Technology. Our CTE programs are highly sought after by students and parents alike, primarily because they open the doors for students to actively create. To drive opportunities for creativity, we have acquired a 3D printer, CNC

laser engraver, CNC three-axis rotary mill, and VEX robotics equipment, among other amazing technology. Students flock to courses in cooking, careers, animal science, and woodshop. Our biggest challenge in this area is scheduling students when demand exceeds the supply.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

To ensure that all students learn, SJHS puts our commitments into action; through common grade-level, department planning times, along with summer work and staff development days, staff work systematically through the four big questions of a PLC. To ensure equity and common curriculum (Big Question #1), we employ the concept of the Power Standard. Teachers in all content areas, core and elective, prioritize content and skills according to three criteria: endurance, leverage, and readiness for the next level.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

At Sheridan Junior High School, we believe our student culture is a direct reflection of the professional culture fostered by the adults in our building. Therefore, we work proactively to ensure that school staff maintain a professional climate of the highest caliber. To ensure this, our teachers have established a set of commitments specific to climate and professionalism. These commitments include: We work collaboratively in all aspects of our profession. We value our own professional learning alongside that of our students. We make evidence-based decisions. We implement evidence-proven best practices and change our approach when the old way isn't working. We make no excuses when students don't learn. We go to the source with problems or concerns.

Maintaining our professional culture is paramount, and building leadership monitor climate through frequent presence throughout the school and in teacher team meetings on a daily basis. We also collect and respond to staff feedback regularly through surveys and other means, further strengthening ownership of our commitments. In addition, the staff's constant desire to read and engage in professional dialogue about the latest research in best practices is what makes the culture of our building unique.

Of equal importance, we work to foster a positive learning environment among our students. SJHS adopted the Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports (PBIS) philosophy in 2007 and we continue to follow this model as it applies to teaching expectations/procedures, school-wide consistency, building in supports/interventions, and analyzing behavior data. We acknowledge positive student behavior through our Bronc Bucks incentive system and take multiple opportunities to recognize and reward students who demonstrate our school-wide expectations. We teach weekly lessons to all students focused on behavior and attitudes, and we encourage our students to participate in a variety of positive and culture-building activities ranging from athletics to clubs to after school programming. In addition, we have designed a scope and sequence for noncognitive factors such as organization, growth mindset, perseverance, ownership, motivation, curiosity, and grit. A growing body of research suggests that these factors have significant influence over student achievement and future success. We have identified a theme for each month and students experience lessons that teach and reinforce the concepts.

We take opportunities to celebrate student and staff success. Examples of this include ice cream socials for attendance, student of the month awards, preferrals (a positive referral), and Riding for the Brand cards where staff recognize each other for furthering our mission.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Sheridan Junior High School makes involving parents and the community a priority. One way we seek to involve parents and community members is through our Parent Advisory Committee that meets once a month. During these meetings, administration and school staff present information to parents and seeks parent input and feedback. In addition, we survey parents throughout the year on a variety of topics and use their feedback to help make school-wide decisions.

We believe that providing information to parents and our community is key to student success. We have a monthly newsletter that is sent out to parents through our Parent Portal and is also linked into our school website. The newsletter contains stories about events and activities taking place at school and provides readers with a calendar of upcoming events. Additionally, we use an automated calling system and our Parent Portal system to remind parents of important dates. Teachers are easily accessible for parents, making sure to return emails or phone calls the same day. Our school counselors serve as a liaison for parents, setting up meetings with teachers and problem solving issues with parents whenever needed. We hold parent/teacher conferences twice a year and encourage all parents to attend. Additionally, we host a variety of afterschool and evening events for students and parents, including athletic games, music performances, Science Symposium and fun family events like our annual Turkey Bingo.

The Sheridan community is highly supportive of our school. Local businesses and organizations are extremely generous and donate frequently to our school, including donating prizes for our PAWS raffles or donating funds to purchase new supplies or materials. In return, our student council and Sheridan National Junior Honor Association work closely with charitable organizations as a way to give back to our community. This year alone, our student body donated over 1000 pounds of food to the local food bank and have raised several thousand dollars to give to families in need. We have developed partnerships with Sheridan College, our local institution of higher education. Most recently, the Art Department at Sheridan College partnered with our two art teachers and provided a unique and educational art experience for our Sheridan Junior High School students. SJHS students and college students worked on collaborative art pieces that were then put on display at Sheridan College. Partnerships not only benefit the students at Sheridan Junior High School, but greatly benefit our community!

3. Professional Development:

The research of Linda Darling-Hammond, John Hattie, and others has revealed that teacher quality has greater impact on student learning than all other factors combined. However, research on professional development in education reveals that traditional professional development approaches do not improve student learning because they are neither sustained nor embedded. With this in mind, SJHS has set out to offer professional learning that is in fact embedded, sustained, and that directly impacts teacher and administrator capacity.

Our most powerful professional development is systematic teacher collaboration. All SJHS teachers are members of department-specific collaborative teams. We have worked systematically to facilitate groups as they establish norms and then work through the four critical questions of a PLC. The school devotes several staff development days each year to improving collaboration, updating best practices, and providing structured implementation time. Regularly, we send teams of teachers to trainings focused on collaboration, helping to solidify our staff's knowledge base in the basics of PLC philosophy and fundamentals. Teachers and administrators continue to grow through collaboration around focused topics such as standards, assessment, data, and intervention.

SJHS staff also engage in on-site graduate level coursework. Through an arrangement with the University of Wyoming, our teachers participate in a variety of book studies and courses focused on professional topics. We have conducted school-wide book studies as well as topic or department-specific studies. Teachers then apply their learning in classrooms and report back to their cohorts. At any given time, there are multiple graduate level courses with dozens of participants running simultaneously at SJHS, all focused on improving teacher and leader capacity.

To grow the capacity of our new teachers, SJHS has developed a rigorous and supportive mentorship program. Teachers new to SJHS participate in a three-year program based on the gradual release of responsibility. Learning Together was designed by administrators and instructional coaches. During year one, first semester is focused on classroom management and relationship building, and second semester zeroes in on modeling in the classroom, specifically the Workshop Model for gradual release of responsibility. Year two focuses on research-proven instructional strategies and feedback, with year three moving toward observing colleagues and applying learning in the classroom. Our new teachers also work with mentors and the cohort to conduct observational rounds, film their own classrooms, and grow through regular, focused group discussion.

4. School Leadership:

SJHS operates under a shared leadership philosophy, consisting of a principal, assistant principal, a half-time assistant principal who is also a half time activities director, four part-time instructional facilitators, and roughly ninety staff. The SJHS administration's approach is to build the capacity of staff and empower them to take ownership of many school functions. For example, meeting weekly, principals decide who will evaluate and supervise each department, who will handle student issues at each grade level, and who will supervise students at specific times of day. These assignments are dynamic and administration makes ongoing changes based on the realities within the building.

This approach, one of motivating instead of managing, has allowed our building leaders to engage in activities that actually impact student learning. Everyone is a member of multiple teams within the school and play active roles in curriculum, assessment, and intervention. Leadership also works to empower teachers and staff to help drive implementation of new initiatives, management of student supports, and development of programs like the new mentoring program. Because the approach is rarely top-down, the result is an organization filled with empowered teachers and staff who take great pride and ownership in building a highly successful school.

Administration assesses its staff through a combination of informal feedback and formal evaluations. In each evaluation, administration sets goals for the staff member, no matter their position or skill level. At minimum, the administration asks each teacher to set two goals. One goal must be specifically related to increased student achievement. For instance, 90% of students test proficient or advanced on common formative assessments. The second goal must be with respect to Charlotte Danielson's "Framework for Teaching." The first goal is quantitative and aimed at improving the direct performance of students. The second goal is targeted toward modifying the means by which students may reach that first goal. This ensures staff is continuously trying to improve their classroom practice.

In addition, instructional facilitators work with new teachers in year one and year two of a three-year mentoring program designed to improve teacher quality. This consists of collaborative meetings that focus on best practices on classroom management, instruction, engagement, and assessment. Other aspects include professional studies, frequent observation of other teachers and teams, one-on-one support, and the creation of individual teacher's goals.

Under this approach, SJHS has made tremendous gains in student learning as evidenced by state and local assessments.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Professional Learning Communities are at the heart of what we do at Sheridan Junior High School. Working collaboratively to ensure that ALL students learn is what makes Sheridan Junior High School so successful!

One great strength of the SJHS Professional Learning Communities model is that our content teams continually work to address the four critical questions of a PLC: What is it we expect our students to learn? How will we know when they have learned it? How will we respond when some students do not learn? How will we respond when some students already know it?

During their weekly collaborative meetings, our teams return to question 1, working to ensure a guaranteed, viable, rigorous curriculum for all students. The team approach has yielded consistency across teachers and allows our teams to establish high standards and curriculum that yields great results both in our common assessments and statewide testing.

Critical questions 3 and 4 specifically help us address struggling students and those who require a challenge. Our teams design intervention and enrichment opportunities based on formative data. In all classrooms, teachers differentiate instruction and create leveled activities to challenge students at their level, and teacher teams regroup students following formative assessments. We have built a master schedule that allows us to stack core classes, ensuring that there are always at least two sections of core classes offered simultaneously. Class stacking allows teachers to regroup students for intervention and enrichment, with each teacher taking a leveled group of students and focusing directly on their unique needs.

Our culture of learning not only applies to our students, but is embraced by our staff. The educators at SJHS are dedicated to their own professional growth and are provided multiple opportunities for job-embedded learning as part of their professional practice. We have an extensive new teacher mentoring program that provides ongoing professional development and coaching to teachers during their first three years at SJHS. Additionally, we offer book studies for college credit and provide ongoing professional development at our monthly staff meetings. Lifelong learning is a shared commitment amongst all staff at SJHS.