

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 2018 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 2012 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: 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, or 2017.
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 (2017-2018) unless otherwise stated.

DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 11 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 2 High schools
 - 1 K-12 schools
- 15 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
 - Rural or small city/town
3. Number of students as of October 1, 2017 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	15	13	28
1	22	12	34
2	14	18	32
3	10	13	23
4	11	13	24
5	11	12	23
6	7	6	13
7	8	9	17
8	6	3	9
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	104	99	203

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 8 % Asian
 - 2 % Black or African American
 - 4 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 79 % White
 - 7 % 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 2016 – 2017 school year: 2%

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

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

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	0
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	4
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	4
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2016	198
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.02
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	2

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

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 8%
Total number students who qualify: 17

8. Students receiving special education services: 12 %
25 Total number of students served

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

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <u>1</u> Autism | <u>1</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>4</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>4</u> Developmentally Delayed | <u>4</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>10</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>0</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 8
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, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	14
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	14
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	4
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	0

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 6:1

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

Required Information	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013
Daily student attendance	96%	96%	96%	97%	97%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

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

Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2017.

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

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.

Yes No

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

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

Academic excellence, character education, and fairness for all.

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

SRA is open to all students who live in Albany County. As a public charter school, the lottery system is used. Prospective students are required to complete a letter of intent by April 1. Because SRA is academically accelerated, incoming students in grades 1 through 8 are required to participate in placement testing to ensure that they are set up for academic success and placed in the correct grade level. Placement testing is not used as a screening tool to prevent enrollment. By April 15 each year, SRA holds a public lottery to fill vacant seats and notifies parents. Current students, incoming siblings of current students, and students of staff members are given preference and are not subjected to the lottery process. If parents attend an enrollment Open House or a tour they are placed in the priority lottery. This is done to ensure that families are aware of our unique programming and have a good understanding of our school.

PART III – SUMMARY

Snowy Range Academy (SRA) is located in Laramie, Wyoming, a town of 32,000 people and home to the University of Wyoming. Laramie is a diverse blend of inhabitants that includes academics, blue collar workers for the large cement plant, and those who work on the ranches surrounding the town. Snowy Range Academy's student population is reflective of this diversity.

Snowy Range Academy is the first charter school in Wyoming. The school's founders - parents from different walks of life - were interested in providing an educational option for families in the community. As charter school legislation was being passed elsewhere, the founders pushed the Wyoming Legislature to enact charter school legislation, allowing SRA to work cooperatively with the local school district as our authorizers. As the first charter school in the state, we have continued to initiate change in legislation and advocate for school choice, supporting families and educators wanting to expand educational options in their communities. Most recently, the school worked with the state to purchase a facility for our use. This has alleviated the financial burden and allows the school increased options for expansion, something the Laramie community supports. Academically, the school became a Core Knowledge School of Distinction in 2014 for our exceptional use of the Core Knowledge scope and sequence for the betterment of our students. Additionally, we have received awards from the State of Wyoming for continuously exceeding expectations on state-mandated accountability measures.

SRA is a unique educational environment that fully supports students academic and emotional growth. SRA's philosophy requires teachers to teach to the top one-third of students. This means that the pace of the classroom is dictated by the top tier. As research shows, the middle tier rises to the challenges and the bottom tier is provided with supports to be successful. These supports include flexible support of a full-time reading specialist, before-/after-school tutoring at no cost, and parent education nights so parents can better help their students at home. Additionally, we hold monthly School-Based Intervention Team (SBIT) meetings to discuss students who may be struggling academically or behaviorally and determine appropriate interventions and monitor the student's empirical response to the interventions. Parents are always encouraged to attend these meetings.

As a Core Knowledge school, the SRA curriculum challenges students academically and culturally. Core Knowledge integrates such historical topics as comparative religion, slavery, and the Holocaust. This requires our students to examine different cultures and, through the lens of our character education program, develop empathy for them. Through weekly enrichment in art, music and Spanish, students have the benefit of an interdisciplinary approach to education but also gain insight in different cultures. Given our geographical location, we are aware that not all of our students have the opportunities to go to large museums and other cultural centers. Through a variety of curriculum-based field trips, our students are exposed to these opportunities. Most notably, our middle school students go to Denver and go to the Denver Art Museum and watch a symphony, opera, or musical each spring.

Additionally, we use Saxon Math and have accelerated it one full year. Capitalizing on their abilities to learn and do so much at that age, our students leave kindergarten having finished first grade math. When a student enters 6th grade, we review the student's academic and developmental capabilities and, if appropriate, allow students to begin pre-algebra as 6th graders. Our approach to language arts, the Spalding Method, encourages students to learn to read through writing and phonics. This also requires students to read trade books starting in kindergarten - not basal readers - allowing them to truly engage in literature. The emphasis on writing continues throughout our academic program with book reports and book analyses due throughout the year. Students in grades 4 and up are encouraged to visit the Writing Center throughout this process. Modeled off of a university writing center, students sign up for appointments, provide a focus for the meeting, and then receive guidance and support on their writing. This has significantly improved the writing for many of our students.

As a small school, SRA is a close-knit environment that supports the emotional and social needs of our students. We know all of our students very well and have strong relationships with the parents. This allows for consistent and regular communication with our families about the needs of students and support any

concerns at home. In addition to our character education program, SRA teaches bully prevention starting in upper elementary school to ensure that students know what bullying is and how to prevent it. This year the school is hosting a School Counseling intern from the University of Wyoming to better support the emotional needs of our students.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

Snowy Range Academy (SRA) uses the Core Knowledge program in all grades, kindergarten through 8th. When the initial charter was written over sixteen years ago, the founders believed that Core Knowledge was the most rigorous and inclusive scope and sequence that addresses the needs of students while fulfilling the purpose of public education by creating a strong and informed citizenry. Since then, further research has shown that Core Knowledge is one of the best programs for closing the equity gaps in US education. In 2014, Snowy Range Academy became a Core Knowledge School of Distinction as designated by the Core Knowledge Foundation. This accolade ensures that SRA uses the Core Knowledge Sequence with fidelity and exemplifies what it means to be a Core Knowledge School. The Core Knowledge Sequence is distinguished by a planned progression of specific knowledge in history, geography, mathematics, science, language arts, and fine arts.

For reading and English language arts, the Core Knowledge sequence teaches students sayings and phrase, unique English idioms, poetry, and literature. Our students do not read out of basal readers, but engage in literature through reading trade books that are appropriate for their level. This provides students exposure to rich vocabulary and content, allowing them to make deep connections and remain engaged. Additionally, we regularly incorporate non-fiction text into and out of the reading block so that students can become proficient readers on informational text. Our students are also taught to write expository and narrative texts, with book analyzes being required of our students regularly.

Additionally, SRA uses the Spalding Method to teach students the sounds of the English language through writing and spelling so they can become better readers and writers. The Spalding Method is a phonics-based approach in which students are taught the sounds and rules of the English language. This allows them to have better word attack skills when reading and writing as they are able to decode, recode, and make meaning. Spalding also focuses on handwriting so students are able to form letters correctly and cursive is taught in third grade.

For math, SRA implements an enhanced version of the Saxon Math program that is accelerated by one year in elementary school. Saxon Math adds topics incrementally, while continually reviewing what students already know. Topics are never dropped but are instead increased in complexity and practiced every day, providing the time required for concepts to become totally familiar. The goal is to combine “automatic” confidence in basic calculation (memorizing the basic arithmetic facts of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division) while preparing students for more complex mathematical processes. SRA challenges each student to an ever-increasing level of math proficiency. This is seen through additional acceleration opportunities in sixth grade which allows students that are academically and developmental ready to begin pre-algebra.

Social studies is clearly outlined by the Core Knowledge sequence. This places a lot of emphasis on civics and understanding of democracy throughout the program. It also introduces major world religions beginning in the first grade so that students are better able to understand historical events and allow students to recognize that religion did shape the history of civilization. In addition to state history, students learn about many ancient civilizations, US history, and world history.

The Core Knowledge sequence requires science instruction beginning in kindergarten. Students learn about their environment, body systems, the solar system, electricity and chemistry, as well as many other topics. Additionally, students learn about important scientists from all walks of life and their contributions to the field while learning about current scientific discoveries. Students participate in the scientific method through extensive hands-on activities, particularly STEM-based lessons in middle school.

Preparing students for college, careers, and military services is one of the primary responsibilities of education, particularly beginning in middle school. The Core Knowledge scope and sequence, as well as the accelerated math programs, allow SRA graduates to be well prepared for their post-secondary futures.

Throughout their education, SRA students are exposed to world events and topics and are encouraged to make connections to history and their present world. They are taught to think critically and be able to articulate these thoughts in writing and verbally. By having accelerated their math learning, our students have shown significant post-secondary opportunities, particularly at the university level. Although the school is still young, we have begun to track the post-secondary success of our graduates and have found that they excel throughout college and graduate programs and into their earlier careers. When asked, SRA alums refer to the benefit of a Core Knowledge education at SRA as one of their reasons for their success.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

One of the significant benefits of the Core Knowledge scope and sequence - the backbone for SRA's academic program - is that Core Knowledge allows for the ability to integrate the arts into the program. Through collaboration and curricular maps, the classroom teachers and the special area teachers are able to ensure cross-curricular connections are made explicit to the students. This allows for an improved understanding of cultures and history. All students grade K through 8 participate in all of our special areas weekly. Students in grades 6 through 8 also have the opportunity to participate in a wide variety of electives each year.

Students in K through 8 participate in art for 90 minutes each week. Instruction is aligned to the historical time periods and cultures being studied in social studies. Students also learn about and analyze pieces of visual art and music. In art they work in a variety of mediums to create projects that dovetail with the art history. They have also started participating more in self-assessments and critiquing their work. Students also have their artwork displayed at the local art museum and throughout the school and district buildings. Middle school electives in art include yearbook, drawing, artistic design, ceramics, and independent study opportunities.

Music is also 90 minutes per week in all grades. In music students sing many songs from different eras and cultures, participate in movement and dancing, and play instruments. In addition to Orff instruments and drums used throughout the grade levels, instruments include: violins in grade 3, recorders in grade 4, and ukuleles in grade 5. Middle school electives include world drumming, guitar, Garage Band, and a collaboration with the art teacher on inventive instruments.

All of our students participate in physical education for 90 minutes weekly. PE starts off focusing on gross motor skills in kindergarten, progressing through throwing and catching, skipping, hopping and tumbling, into team sports and, eventually, lifetime sports and fitness. Students take regular PE field trips to the local rec center for swimming, skating, and fitness units. Throughout all of our PE units in all grades, the students are taught about muscle groups and the importance of health and nutrition throughout their lifetime. In middle school, students begin to work on setting health and fitness goals for themselves and are taught how to work on achieving or modifying their goals. Our middle school students also have an advanced PE elective option which allows them to enjoy our environment through more outdoor opportunities such as rock climbing and cross country skiing.

Since our inception sixteen years ago, students at SRA have participated in Spanish instruction a few days per week. Our primary students receive 90 minutes of Spanish instruction each week. Spanish is a rich and engaging special area for our students with many songs and stories shared in an effort to teach vocabulary and build aural and oral language skills. In the intermediate grades, the students are speaking more in Spanish and reading Spanish literature. They also benefit from using Rosetta Stone to help them progress with their speaking and listening skills at an appropriate and individualized level. By middle school, students have 135 minutes of Spanish weekly and participate in Spanish 1A, 1B, and 2. This teaches them conjugations of verbs, writing and reading in Spanish, as well as a variety of culturally-based activities. Students in middle school can choose different Spanish electives including Culture and Conversation.

Technology continues to be important in our ever-changing world and, although many students enter kindergarten know how to use applications on a tablet, few know how to effectively harness the power of technology. Beginning in kindergarten all students participate in Technology for a minimum of 45 minutes weekly. They learn the proper vocabulary for various components, how to type effectively, how to use the

Microsoft Office 365 program suite, and coding. Recently, SRA has begun to expand into robotics. The librarian and technology teacher collaborate to ensure that students have the benefit of media literacy through all grades. Middle school students can participate in electives that include web design and Lego Robotics.

In addition, all SRA students participate in character education weekly. This includes exposure to and discussion about the monthly character trait. Using a three-year rotation for monthly traits, we launch the trait at a schoolwide assembly and provide information to the school community in the monthly newsletter. Throughout the month students receive explicit instruction in the trait and discuss who people throughout history have exemplified the trait. For students in grades kindergarten through 2nd grade, the classroom teachers are responsible for this instruction 30 minutes weekly. In grades 3 through 5, we have a special area teacher who teaches this content 30-45 minutes per week. For our middle school students, our school counseling intern works in conjunction with the school librarian to teach character education and bully prevention for 25 minutes weekly.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

Snowy Range Academy uses a variety of instructional practices to meet the needs of our students. As a school we believe that every student is responsible for his/her own learning. This lead us to utilize direct instruction methods during teaching. Once students are exposed to content through direct instruction, they then reinforce their understanding through hands-on activities with peers. This works well for many of our students and we ensure that the students who need more support and/or different instructional approaches have their needs met through intervention.

As a small school we consistently talk about our students formally and informally. This allows us to ensure that no student slips through the gaps socially, emotionally, or academically. When we see a student start to struggle in an area, the teachers and the principal discuss what we are seeing and, as possible, discuss this with parents. We then build in different supports and intervention opportunities for the students. For example, if a kindergarten student begins to slow her progress in reading and the gap between the student and peers is growing, the classroom teacher will speak with the principal and the reading specialist to determine next steps. This would most likely include a phonics screener to see what gaps exist and meet with parents to discuss the changes in the student and develop a plan for intervention. In this example, interventions would most likely include additional instructional support to provide remediation in the areas indicated. These interventions would be provided by the reading specialist and the classroom teacher and/or aide. The student's progress would be monitored through data collection for a period of 4 to 6 weeks and changes to the intervention would be made.

We also have many students who perform well above grade level and need continued enrichment. These students are identified by the teachers in conjunction with the parents and enrichment opportunities are provided. A recent example of this is an 8th grade student who, despite core instruction more in line with high school coursework, is well above peers in reading and writing. To meet his needs and ensure his continued growth, the teacher has worked with the parents and principal to design an advanced English language arts course in which this student works on parallel coursework to his peers at a significantly higher level with higher expectations on written work.

As a public charter school, SRA is required to participate in statewide assessments. Historically these have been the MAP and PAWS assessments in reading, math, and science. MAP, Measures of Academic Progress, is an adaptive, computer-based test for students in grades K through 8 in reading and math, and in science for grades 3 through 8. This test has been administered three times per year and provided instant results to guide instructional implications. The PAWS assessment was a state-mandated assessment conducted annually in March for grades 3 through 8 in math and reading, with grades 4 and 8 participating in science. In addition, we have used DIBELS and AimsWeb to progress monitor students in K through 6 with TerraNova being administered in the fall for students in grades 1 through 8. For the 2017-2018 school year, the state has changed the assessment system, switching from PAWS to WY-TOPP. Like MAP, WY-TOPP is computer-based with instant results. It is administered to students in all grades as an interim assessment two to three times during the year with a summative assessment for students in grades 3 through

8 in April.

For all assessments, teachers, principal, and reading specialist review the student data at grade, class, and individual levels to help determine appropriate next steps instructionally. This analysis can lead to improved discussions in grade-level professional learning communities (PLCs) to help the whole class or can lead to more targeted intervention and enrichment for small groups or individual students.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

As a public charter school, SRA is very clear on our mission, vision, and philosophy. Using the Core Knowledge curriculum in a structured and joyous environment keeps students engaged in school. The content that students are learning is very engaging and keeps students motivated to learn. Additionally, one of our guiding philosophies is "high time on task." This means that the school day is academically focused and instructional time is vigorously protected from unnecessary interruptions (assemblies, etc.). Students are excited to come to school ready to learn and engage in high quality content and activities. We also make a point of celebrating learning and academics, not holidays. As a matter of policy, we do not acknowledge secular holidays - Halloween, Valentine's Day, etc. Instead, when students have finished certain academic units, they will spend an afternoon celebrating what they have learned. For example, when our third graders have finished learning about Ancient Rome, they have Roman Day complete with students in costumes, celebrating with a feast, participating in centers, and erupting individual reconstructions of Mount Vesuvius. This teaches students from kindergarten that, when they work hard, they will have the opportunity to play hard, too. Over time, this translates to students celebrating their own academic achievement and allowing SRA to be a school where it truly is "cool to be smart".

Every day, when students enter the school building, they are greeted by name by several adults. Given a 30 minute drop-off window, students are given time to check in with peers, teachers, or the principal on any academic or social issues they may have. This gives students - particularly those in higher grades - the opportunity to learn how to advocate for themselves and to feel supported as people, not simply students. Students are also provided a voice on campus. Whether it is through the annual student surveys we conduct or through Student Council in grades 4 through 8, students understand that they have the ability and forum to affect change at school. Additionally, teachers and the principal always make a point of being present with the students and listening to their thoughts, concerns, etc. as needed. This creates a positive environment where students are supported academically, socially, and emotionally.

Similar to the students, teachers are given a clear voice at school. Every two years, a staff representative is elected as a non-voting member of the school's Board of Directors. This allows for a designated staff liaison to attend monthly Board meetings and relay information to and from the staff to improve the Board's decision-making ability. The staff are also asked to participate in an annual stakeholder survey which solicits anonymous feedback on a variety of topics to determine next steps during the strategic planning process. Teachers are also encouraged to be on a variety of influential committees - the Hiring Committee, for example - and are provided say in policies and processes throughout the year. In addition to providing many forums for input and feedback, the teachers are treated with professional respect and have their hard work and dedication celebrated regularly. This includes respect for their time (no unnecessary staff meetings) an open door policy for professional and personal support from the principal and colleagues, and a high level of support and appreciation from parents, administration, and Board.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

As a school of choice, SRA tends to get a self-selected group of involved parents. While on some levels, this makes family engagement more straightforward, it also means that parents have high expectations of being, and remaining, involved. SRA is governed by a Board of Directors that is largely comprised of parents. Parents hold five seats on the Board, serving two-year terms and elected by the school community in May. Two seats on the Board are also held by community members, people invested in education but have children either too young or too old for enrollment at SRA. This means that, at the highest leadership level, both the community and the parents are involved and have the opportunity to provide direction to the school through policy creation/revision, fiscal oversight, and strategic planning.

SRA has also expanded community opportunities in recent years. As home to the University of Wyoming, we regularly seek out opportunities for collaboration with professors in education and other disciplines. Our students have the opportunity to go to the university to listen to nationally-recognized guest speakers,

use the university library for research projects, and go on certain field trips (like the cadaver lab!). It also allows SRA students to benefit from cutting-edge expertise in various fields. For example, when our second graders work on designing and building their own simple machines, we have the engineering students from the university come and help pairs of students think through their design and assist with the build. We also have the opportunity to ask professors of a variety of disciplines come to speak to classes on their research and provide expertise that would otherwise not be available to our students.

We also ensure that members of the community are well-versed in who we are as a school through various initiatives. Each semester approximately 75 undergraduate students in their first year as an education major, come through the school to learn about school choice and what educational option SRA provides the community. On a higher level, we provide annual tours to Leadership Laramie - a 2-year leadership training group for business members in the area - so they can get a better understanding of the role we serve and ways that they can get involved in education. Finally, SRA is the only school in the district that has a partnership with First Interstate Bank to provide a Mini-Bank on campus. Through collaboration with the bankers, SRA students can become Mini-Bank Board members and are taught how to run a bank. The bank then gets set up on campus one morning a week and staffed by the Board members. Not only do the students learn financial literacy, but the bankers get to see the achievements and struggles of students and families in our community.

3. Professional Development:

As a public charter school, SRA is responsible for managing our own funds which allows us to have a budget that is reflective of our school's priorities. One of these priorities has always been professional development and we ensure there is sufficient funding to provide rich opportunities for our teachers and administrators. Teachers and administrators simply need to submit a request to the Finance Committee for consideration and approval.

Having professional development funding has had a significant impact on the teachers and administration as they can better support strategic initiatives and student learning. For example, a few years ago we were reviewing our math curriculum in an effort to make sure that our students, particularly in primary grades, had a strong conceptual foundation to build off of. To help with this, we sent three teachers - kindergarten 2nd grade, and middle school - to the national conference in San Francisco hosted by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM). During this three-day conference, the teachers learned a great deal about current research and best practices and were able to return to SRA to share their new knowledge and guide our conversations. This allowed for the school to enhance our math curriculum and instruction in the right places to ensure further success for our students in math.

One of the challenges at Snowy Range Academy is location. Because we are located in southeastern Wyoming, we are geographically removed from many professional development opportunities found in larger metropolitan areas. Additionally, as a small staff with diverse professional needs it is difficult to find one trainer to bring to the school to benefit the needs of all. To address this, SRA recently began using an online professional development platform that allows teachers to pick from a vast library of peer-reviewed articles, videos, and digital books to guide their own professional learning. When the principal sees a need for a teacher through observations and evaluations, she is able to send the teacher links to that content to help them address any professional and instructional weaknesses they may have. Finally, the platform allows teachers to become experts in a variety of topics through online classes called micro-credentialing. In working with the state, teachers are also able to receive continuing education credits for their micro-credentials, further incentivizing their professional growth.

4. School Leadership:

Snowy Range Academy believes in a three-pronged approach to school leadership. The Board of Directors is responsible for providing for providing strong, effective school leadership. The school principal is responsible for instructional leadership throughout the school with teacher providing effective classroom leadership while maintaining high expectations for all learners.

The Board of Directors, comprised of parent and community members, maintains fiduciary and policy responsibility. Meeting monthly as a Board and serving on various operational committees, the Board of Directors has oversight in all matters and ensures the school remains true to the mission while responding to the ever-changing demands in education. The Board is responsible for hiring and supervising the principal and participating in annual strategic planning.

The school principal is the supervisor for all SRA employees and is responsible for the instructional, financial, and operational needs of the school. The school principal is the instructional leader, providing guidance and professional growth to all employees, and working with students to better support their education. The school does not have an assistant principal but does employ an instructional facilitator who helps provide instructional coaching and analysis of progress monitoring data with teachers. The teachers are also encouraged to not just lead within their classrooms, but to help lead the school community through participation in various committees, etc.

Every year, the school leadership team participates in strategic planning. Initially, the Board and principal review student achievement data and results from stakeholder surveys. This provides an understanding of how things are going at the school and where additional efforts are needed. Based on this, the Board outlines broad goals for the school - student achievement, leadership, technology, etc. The principal then takes these goals back to the teachers and, collaboratively, the team fleshes out the goals and determines how progress towards them will be measured. This strategic plan then gets taken back to the Board for further discussion and final approval and is then shared with the greater school community. The strategic plan is then used as the basis for all individual committees and the school budget is aligned to these strategic initiatives. By using such an intensive and visionary strategic planning process, school leadership ensures that the achievement of all students is supported and measured in a variety of ways.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

While a variety of strategies have made Snowy Range Academy successful, the single most important part of our school is our academic program. Utilizing the Core Knowledge program created by E.D. Hirsch has allowed the instructional content at SRA to be very rich and rigorous.

Children learn by building on what they already know. Thus, it is important for them to begin building foundations of knowledge in the early grades when they are most receptive to attaining an organized body of knowledge. Children are by instinct driven to construct a contextual view of the world. Thus, it is important to provide them an educational framework that assists them in developing the constructs upon which their viewpoints will be based. Core Knowledge provides the knowledge children need to be successful in life.

By specifying the knowledge that all children should share, all students can achieve equal access to that knowledge. At-risk children especially suffer from low expectations, which often translate into watered-down curricula. In schools using the Core Knowledge Sequence, however, all children are exposed to a coherent core of challenging, interesting, interwoven knowledge. This knowledge not only provides a foundation for later learning but also defines a common heritage and establishes a common ground for communication and cooperation in a diverse society. This level of shared knowledge creates a sense of community as a school and allows for increased connections between students of diverse backgrounds.

Because the Core Knowledge sequence is so rich, students are engaged when they come to school and enjoy learning and talking about what they are learning, reading, and doing. Getting and maintaining student engagement is a critical piece of student achievement. This content-rich program gives students the knowledge that they need to be successful in the community, future endeavors, and address world issues through knowledge-based schooling. Students have the requisite background knowledge to have improved reading comprehension and make connections to the world around them. By sharing knowledge, students are able to close the achievement and equity gaps in American education. Core Knowledge - the beliefs, structure, and content - is a critical piece of the SRA educational model and is the backbone for our academic success.