

**U.S. Department of Education**  
**2019 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program**

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Mr. Ric Miscioscia

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

Official School Name Joseph D. Sharp Elementary School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 300 Old Orchard Road

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

Cherry Hill NJ 08003-1299  
City State Zip Code+4 (9 digits total)

County Camden County

Telephone (856) 424-1550

Fax (856) 424-6577

Web site/URL https://sharp.chclc.org

E-mail rmiscioscia@chclc.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. Joseph Meloche

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other) E-mail jmeloche@chclc.org

District Name Cherry Hill Township School District Tel. (856) 429-5600

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. Eric Goodwin

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

The original signed cover sheet only should be converted to a PDF file and uploaded via the online portal.

*\*Non-public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, write N/A in the space.*

## **Part I – Eligibility Certification**

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The signatures on the first page of this application (cover page) certify that each of the statements below, concerning the school’s eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education and National Blue Ribbon Schools requirements, are true and correct.

1. 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, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
2. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2019 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.
3. 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.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2013 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, or 2018.
6. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. If irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state, the U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school’s application and/or rescind a school’s award.
7. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as “persistently dangerous” within the last two years.
8. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
9. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
10. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district, as a whole, has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution’s equal protection clause.
11. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

## PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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Data should be provided for the most recent school year (2018-2019) unless otherwise stated.

### DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 12 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 3 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 3 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 18 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, 2018 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	29	20	49
1	29	31	60
2	31	34	65
3	41	24	65
4	23	30	53
5	32	38	70
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	185	177	362

\*Schools that house PreK programs should count preschool students **only** if the school administration is responsible for the program.

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 30 % Asian
  - 3 % Black or African American
  - 6 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 54 % 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 2017 – 2018 school year: 7%

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.

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2017 until the end of the 2017-2018 school year	16
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2017 until the end of the 2017-2018 school year	11
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	27
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2017	362
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.07
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	7

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 11 %  
39 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):  
Arabic, Benjali, Chinese (Mandarin), Filipino, Gujarati, Hebrew, Hindi, Japanese, Korean, Malayalam, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish (Castilian), Tamil, Turkish, Twi, Vietnamese, Zhuang (Chuang)

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 11 %  
Total number students who qualify: 40

8. Students receiving special education services: 13 %  
48 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>0</u> Autism                  | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>11</u> Other Health Impaired                |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>17</u> Specific Learning Disability         |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>18</u> Speech or Language Impairment        |
| <u>1</u> Hearing Impairment      | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>0</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>1</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 5
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	20
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	12
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	15
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	3

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 18:1

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

<b>Required Information</b>	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014
Daily student attendance	96%	96%	96%	96%	96%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

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

Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2018.

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

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

Yes  No

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

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

We work collaboratively to ensure all students learn at high levels and attain the knowledge, skills, and character that is essential to student success.

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

## **PART III – SUMMARY**

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Joseph D. Sharp Elementary School is located on Old Orchard Road in Cherry Hill, New Jersey. Coincidentally, it is located on land that once harvested apples and peaches. Sharp was dedicated in 1964 during the suburban expansion of Philadelphia into southern New Jersey. Today, it nurtures a diverse, family-oriented community where parents say, "This is a great place to raise kids." It is one of twelve elementary schools in Cherry Hill. Originally, Sharp was a kindergarten through grade six school. Since the late 1990s, it has been a kindergarten through grade five school. We welcome close to 100 new students annually. Although a majority of our students live in the surrounding community, some students attend Sharp because it provides special education and English Language Learner (ELL) services. In widely diversified Cherry Hill, over 50 languages are spoken in the homes of students, and this pattern is reflected at Sharp.

Our Mission Statement encompasses our passion to always make decisions in the best interest of students: "We work collaboratively to ensure all students learn at high levels and attain the knowledge, skills, and character that is essential to student success." Sharp has had stability in leadership and personnel, with only two principals in the last twenty years and very low teacher turnover. This continuity in leadership and staff contributes to success in academics and character education initiatives. During the early 2000s, we noticed that there was some fluctuation in our test scores. Given the high degree of trust between administration and faculty, we were not afraid to ask the hard question, "How can we improve our teaching and learning to meet the needs of our children?" This led us to embrace the Primary Years Program of the International Baccalaureate Program as a schoolwide focus. The hallmark of this program is to teach units of study in science and social studies through an inquiry-based method with character education infused throughout the curricula. This was difficult work for teachers since they needed to carefully reflect on pedagogy. Teachers met monthly to write units and gather resources collaboratively. Teachers also worked across grade levels so that there was vertical articulation in our curricula. Students became more engaged in their learning because of the high level of involvement in the learning process. Parents noticed a positive impact since character education was infused in these units. By the end of the 2000s, due to financial constraints, we left the international organization, but the changes in pedagogy were permanent. As a byproduct, test scores improved and the integration of character education was now a part of the fabric of our school. The principal and teachers realized that meeting monthly was not enough to accomplish sustainable improvement. Therefore, daily Professional Learning Communities (PLC) were established to discuss data, teaching methods, and student needs. The meetings may include one or more grade levels and are facilitated by individual teachers, principal, child study team, media specialist, literacy teacher coach, guidance counselor, school nurse, or other faculty members. These daily meetings demonstrate our commitment to collaboration.

Sharp School offers a framework for success for all students. Teachers utilize a rigorous curriculum, provide differentiated instruction, and accommodate various learning styles. Each day there is an Intervention and Enrichment period (I/E) in all grades when teachers offer data-driven support and opportunities for enrichment. Additional resources are available to support instruction with personnel and programs. Students have classes in physical education, art, choral music, technology, Spanish, and library/media science. A literacy specialist and school counselor work with students, teachers, and parents. Since we have a 2:1 ratio of students to Chromebooks, teachers regularly enhance lessons with technology.

At Sharp, parent involvement is key. Parents and teachers work together to plan joint events that align with our character education core values and curricula. Parents and teachers have a PTA liaison committee that meets monthly to work together in the best interest of children.

Each morning, all of our students and teachers recite the Pledge of Allegiance. Immediately after, students and staff vow to follow the words of the Sharp School Character Pledge: "I promise to work hard and never give up, to believe in myself and try new things. I will be open-minded to others' opinions, be caring and empathetic to everyone. I will act peacefully and respectfully and look for ways I can improve the world around me." At Sharp, we continually strive for excellence in academics and character.

As a testament to our dedication to character education, our school was designated as a 2018 National

School of Character for demonstrating a comprehensive, intentional, and proactive approach to character development. To receive this award, teachers, students, and parents reflected on how our core values transfer to the blacktop, buses, and beyond.

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

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

#### **1a. Reading/English language arts:**

In English Language Arts (ELA), Joseph D. Sharp Elementary School follows the Cherry Hill School District's guidelines aligned with the New Jersey Student Learning Standards (NJSLS). Our ELA curriculum is composed of five areas: reading literature, reading informational texts, writing, speaking/listening, and foundational skills (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary development, and comprehension.) Five assessed units of study measure student growth and progress. Reading and writing are closely tied together. Students write in reading and read in writing. Teachers use a workshop model in both subjects where they model skills and strategies. Students receive daily opportunities to practice. Teachers develop rigorous and differentiated instruction for all learners through whole group, small groups, and one-to-one methods. To meet goals, teachers confer with individuals and meet with small groups for guided reading and writing. Instruction in reading includes the knowledge and skills of reading and writing about informational and literature texts. In kindergarten and continuing through fifth grade, students learn to write a variety of genres including narrative, opinion/persuasive, and expository. They access technology to learn research skills. Students engage in a multi-sensory approach to phonics and spelling. Data from formative and summative assessments consistently drives instruction. Sharp students excel in academic success. Our test scores show our students perform at a higher level than their peers. Our test scores show that the vertical articulation of the ELA curriculum from K-5 produces proficient, and often advanced readers and writers.

The home is an important connection to growing readers and writers. We invite guest readers from families as well as community members such as firefighters or police officers. Teachers volunteer during a well-attended Literacy Night to promote reading strategies and skills to the families in the Sharp community.

#### **1b. Mathematics:**

In Mathematics, Sharp follows the Cherry Hill School District's guidelines. At the forefront of our mathematics curriculum lies the NJSLS which describe what students in all grades should be able to understand and do. Standards describe how students should engage with mathematical concepts and skills. Students learn through a workshop model stressing conceptual understanding of key ideas. Students are guided to make sense of story problems, reason abstractly, make conjectures, explore the truths of these conjectures, develop mathematical models, and use mathematical tools appropriately. Guiding practices are meant to balance procedure and understanding within the strands of number sense, operations and algebraic thinking, number and operations in base 10, measurement and data, and geometry.

In grades K-2, the research-based Investigations program provides students a constructivist approach to attaining these skills and concepts. Along with frequent formative assessments, K-2 students have approximately eight end-of-unit assessments. Students in grades 3-5 use the EnVisions program that combines the use of technology with problem-based learning. In grades 3-5, sixteen topic tests are administered. All students take periodic district fact fluency assessments to track growth and automaticity of facts from year to year. This constant progress monitoring ensures students receive instruction targeted to their individualized needs through a built-in daily intervention and enrichment period. Teachers provide direct instruction, computer-based fact fluency practice, targeted skill based computer lessons, and small group reinforcement or enrichment. Computer programs such as XtraMath and IXL provide teachers with immediate data to further drive instruction. Our high achievement on standardized tests can be attributed to this spiraling of math instruction and data analysis.

#### **1c. Science:**

In Cherry Hill, the combination of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) is at the core of our science curriculum. Sharp follows the Next Generation Science Standards which focus on Science and

Engineering practices, Crosscutting Concepts, and Disciplinary Core Ideas. A key resource is the Mystery Science program which uses technology to present students with high-interest science investigations. In this program, students use elements of the scientific method such as observations, experiments, hypotheses, questions, analyses, and conclusions to gain knowledge about the natural and physical world. These mysteries spark students to solve a problem or engineer an invention. Since the New Jersey Student Learning Standards in ELA demand that students receive an equal amount of instruction in literature and informational texts, teachers are mindful to incorporate a variety of science texts in their instruction. Once a year, to encourage STEM careers, students from the Cherry Hill East High School National Science Honor Society lead Sizzling Science Day, which provides high-interest experiments to expose and attract students into STEM fields. Annually, a Science Fair is held at Sharp, when students get to pursue their personal interests through experimentation and investigation. This voluntary event sees a large number of students using the scientific method to create displays to showcase their knowledge of a science topic. Topics have included animal behavior, chemical reactions, and space observation. This event often includes whole families or groups of students since it is a project completed at home. Again, the spiraling of our science curriculum contributes to our consistently proficient or advanced proficient scores in the New Jersey state assessment in our upper grades.

#### **1d. Social studies/history/civic learning and engagement**

Our Social Studies curriculum is aligned with New Jersey Core Curriculum Standards. Our goal is to create global citizens. Topics of study spiral from K-5 in the areas of civics, government, human rights, geography, economics, and history. Teachers use online databases, literature and informational texts, service learning, guest speakers from the community, and field trips to enrich student understanding. Pebblego is one example of an online database we use for instruction and student research. First grade students learning about civics and government interview police officers, firefighters, and emergency medical personnel. They learn the roles and responsibilities of these professionals within their community and present them with care packages as a thank-you for their service. In a third grade unit about government, the mayor of our town visits and discusses the duties of his job. Fifth graders learn about Cherry Hill history from colonial times to the present and visit Barclay Farmstead, a restored colonial farm. Fifth grade students study human rights. They create and share multimedia presentations about Black History month. We integrate language arts with social studies in the teaching of Amistad units in grades K-5. The Amistad curriculum recognizes the many contributions African Americans have made to our world. A story such as "Fly High! The Story of Bessie Coleman" is read and discussed with second graders, highlighting the achievements of this African American woman pilot. Since our school is culturally diverse, we are eager to incorporate all represented cultures into our instruction. Teachers make sure that through social studies, student backgrounds are explored and honored, giving students voice to share about their cultures, holidays, and traditions. Learning about the cultures of all students contributes to a feeling of belonging, which leads to greater student achievement and positive character development.

#### **1e. For secondary schools:**

#### **1f. For schools that offer preschool for three- and four-year old students:**

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

Special area teachers, who include the media specialist as well as teachers of art, music, physical education, Spanish, and technology, work with students once or twice during a five-day cycle. These teachers develop talents and skills that contribute to our philosophy of educating the "whole child" by meeting academic, social, and emotional needs. Fostering these talents increases students' confidence in other content areas, such as language arts and math.

The media specialist provides literacy instruction and library skills to all students every cycle. At Sharp, the  
NBRS 2019

library is the heart of the school. The pure joy of an interactive read aloud is evident as students are engaged in listening to literature and informational texts. There is such excitement in the air as students check out books. Older students learn digital citizenship, including copyright and plagiarism laws, preparing them to meet the challenges of middle school. The media specialist supports teachers in areas such as science, social studies, and ELA based on conversations during collaborative PLC meetings.

Our Spanish curriculum combines knowledge of language and culture. A practical language/math lesson has fifth graders converting temperatures from Celsius to Fahrenheit in Spanish. In culture, students in grades four and five learn about Spanish-speaking civilizations and indigenous groups. When studying geography, students look at maps of Spanish-speaking countries and learn about specific land features.

The Technology curriculum includes learning basic coding and the use of Google Documents, Slides, and Google Drawing (creating hand drawn gifs and stop animations). This curriculum reinforces digital citizenship. These skills help students present their academic content knowledge in interesting, engaging ways. Students apply what they are learning to their work in the classroom.

The vocal music teacher works closely with classroom teachers to make academic connections in voice and musical knowledge. One example in voice is the relationship between music and math such as rhythms and fractions. Songs that contain alliteration and syllabication reinforce reading skills. A social studies connection is the learning of songs associated with cultural celebrations such as Lunar New Year. During Black History month, students learn music history by studying Marian Anderson, a civil rights icon. With young students, connections are made to the science curriculum by singing songs about body parts in "The Body Boogie." The entire fifth grade participates in chorus, learning poise and self confidence to perform in front of the community. Over half of our students in grades 3-5 play a musical instrument. Students take individual lessons and practice in small group settings. Twice a year, students participate in music concerts, learning the value of practice and working together toward a goal.

Our art teacher integrates art across curricular areas. Younger students enjoy an Eric Carle project that connects to their author study. The teacher uses math skills to develop mandala, a complex abstract design with radial symmetry. Other STEM connections include creation of optical illusions and the use of grid paper to create Frank Lloyd Wright designs. Third grade students combine salt with watercolor paints and discuss the chemical reaction. Art is a means to explore culture. Students create Amate bark paintings, which inspires an appreciation of art from indigenous Mexican peoples. The annual art show celebrates all students' art work, a breathtaking display of color and form.

Two times a week the students at Sharp participate in structured Physical Education activities as mandated by the State of New Jersey and aligned with the Cherry Hill curriculum. Lessons for all grades focus on wellness, health, and physical education. Research proves that students who exercise their bodies have greater ability to remember and recall facts, concentrate, and attend to learning. Cooperation, collaboration, and character education are key to the curriculum - attributes that lead to student achievement. All students participate in team building activities, movement, and locomotive skills, as well as wellness skills to develop a healthy body and mind. Schoolwide, we participate in Jump Rope for Heart and Juvenile Diabetes fundraisers, combining character education with wellness.

Students participate in life-skill lessons with the guidance counselor to develop strategies for strong interpersonal skills at home and in school. All students are instructed in the NJ Bar Foundation's anti-bullying curriculum. A yearly Red Ribbon week teaches students the importance of self-respect in making good choices. At Sharp, teachers work in conjunction with each other to help students find their voices, be it in art, music, language, body movement, or literature.

### **3. Special Populations:**

Sharp is a community school, but 14% of our student population travels across the Cherry Hill district to attend Sharp, since we provide required special programs. All students feel a sense of belonging at Sharp. With 21% of Sharp's population classified as special education based on Individualized Education Plans (IEP), support is tiered. The least restrictive environment is guaranteed, and a range of services is available.

Resource room teachers, collaborating with classroom teachers, provide support or replacement instruction so that students meet standards. Teachers and educational assistants in two self-contained classrooms provide students with intensive academic support. These students may receive mandated services such as speech or occupational/physical therapy. It is important to us that all students are incorporated into the daily routines of the general population of the school community including lunch, recess, special subjects, and assemblies.

The Intervention and Referral Services (I &RS) team consists of the principal, specialists, and experienced classroom teachers, who provide ideas and suggestions for teachers to assist regular education students. A solution may involve a new technique or resource for the classroom teacher, further intervention from the Literacy Teacher, or an evaluation of the student.

The media specialist teaches a robust Talented and Gifted (TAG) program. Students are identified for this program through the Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test (NNAT3) assessment and teacher/parent surveys. Students complete extensive research projects in the subject areas of science, math, and humanities. Collaboration and cooperation are hallmarks of this program, contributing to growth in the area of college and career readiness. Students learn the value of working together to share knowledge and to create interesting and complex projects.

Our English Language Learners (ELL) are 11% of Sharp's population. In addition, another 9% of students have recently exited the program due to proficiency in the WIDA (World-class Instructional Design Assessment). These exited students need to be monitored for two years. ELL teachers use the WIDA to identify students eligible for services, plan instruction to meet the needs of the learners, as well as to discharge them from services. One full time and one part time teacher meet the needs of this population. All ELL students are in a regular classroom with a teacher who has received continuous support as a Sheltered English teacher. Kindergarten language learners are integrated into a regular half-day classroom and then participate in an ELL kindergarten for intensive instruction in language. Students in grades 1-2 receive push-in services while students in grades 3-5 receive small group pull-out instruction.

Print, digital, and technology resources in multiple languages are available for home and school. Students have Chromebooks dedicated for use with the ELL teacher. All teachers are trained in using the Google Translate app which helps foster home school communication. We recognize and celebrate the cultural diversity of the students through read alouds, oral presentations, and activities. Monthly meetings during PLC spark ideas for connections between our school and ELL families. At our yearly International Night, we invite the community to a celebration of the arts. We are charged with meeting the needs of all our learners, and we embrace this challenge.

## PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

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### 1. School Climate/Culture:

Community members state that they specifically purchased homes here because our school is a paragon of education. Substitute teachers remark about the caring and friendly environment here. Our school has been consistent, persistent, and insistent in developing our stellar reputation for balancing success in learning with a rich character education component. Positive relationships among students and staff are the foundation. Daily PLC meetings foster open dialogue among staff members which increases respect for differing opinions. This respect carries over to our classroom relationships. To assess school climate, we take surveys collecting data from teachers and students to find out how we can improve the learning environment. The principal and teachers take part in after-school activities that matter to our students and families. These activities include something for every student such as a Fall Family Hayride or Spring Talent Show.

Teachers meet with students daily in small groups during I/E time. There is no stigma in seeking assistance. Mutual respect and trust grow between teachers and students with students taking charge of their own learning. For over ten years, Sharp students in grades 1-5 have led parent/student/teacher conferences. We were pioneers in this district-wide practice, during which all students routinely reflect on their own academic and behavioral progress. Students identify strengths and areas of needed growth and plan goals for future success. Initially, parents were amazed at the poise and self-reflection of their children. Now many parents realize these reflective practices can be promoted at home.

We teach and model a mutual respect of peers by giving students specific tools. The guidance counselor provides lessons on being upstanders, part of the New Jersey Bar anti-bullying program. The Lions' Quest program emphasizes building a school community and respecting one another. We teach a common language for dealing with conflict by using "I Messages." When students do not meet school expectations, they reflect on their own actions. In monthly assemblies, we recognize students for displaying model behavior with the acknowledgement of a paper Attitude-o-Gram. Safety Patrol has taken responsibility for ensuring younger students are supervised before school, after school, and while on buses. In-service days are dedicated to building a capacity to care. A recent guest speaker addressed the district on the topic of Koinonia - the coming together in an atmosphere of openness, trust, honesty, support, and encouragement. A simple yet effective teacher recognition award is the Frog Kisser. At faculty meetings, the current recipient awards a small toy frog to another staff member for promoting Koinonia at Sharp.

### 2. Engaging Families and Community:

Proactive Sharp families support student success in many ways. The PTA is extremely active and committed to providing resources that enhance the education and social development of all students. There are over 500 opportunities for family involvement through PTA events.

Beginning in August, the Sharp PTA sponsors a water ice night for all new families. Many teachers attend to welcome students even before the school year starts. Through the Bulldog Buddy program, we match new families with seasoned families who volunteer to guide the newcomers through the first few months of school. This feeling of community carries over the next year when these newcomers continue to pay it forward. PTA fundraising provides assemblies that address content curriculum and character education. The PTA also sponsors Literacy Night and STEM Night in conjunction with the teachers' union. Teachers develop the programs for these events, staff classrooms, and share with parents what students are learning. Often students demonstrate their knowledge of technology resources at these events.

Parents serve on the School Climate and Health and Wellness committees along with staff members and the principal. This direct connection keeps communication open. We invite community guests in on a regular basis to talk about topics such as local government, Black History and Women's History, and Caldecott award-winning books. According to a recent survey, over 97% of parents believe that Sharp has a positive school character and are happy with the faculty and curriculum. We invite parents to attend monthly

assemblies led by students connected to character education and aligned to curriculum. Students who have demonstrated positive character traits are recognized at these assemblies. A well-attended Parent Visitation Day allows parents to view what we accomplish daily. Weekly, a dedicated volunteer group helps in the library supporting the library curriculum. The PTA sponsors a winter reading challenge program, two book fairs a year, and a birthday book program. Every student visits the principal's office to choose a free book on his/her birthday.

Teachers nominate students to receive a positive phone call from the principal during the school year, and parents are delighted to receive such a call. Every year, firefighters visit the school and students from the secondary schools fulfill community service at Sharp. High school students visit to assist with Science Day. Sharp students view these students as role models for their future. A quick snapshot of activities for each month appears on the website and in the informative monthly Bulldog Express newsletter. Research shows that parental involvement has a direct correlation to student success, and we certainly see that at Sharp.

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

Joseph D. Sharp is part of the Cherry Hill School District. Cherry Hill is the twelfth largest district in the state of New Jersey. Sharp continually strives for student achievement by meeting district goals, while continuing to honor the micro needs of our school. For example, one district goal seeks to improve student achievement and decrease the achievement gaps. In the Professional Learning Communities (PLC), we use the district data platform Unify to examine scoring trends of summative assessments. We can even view specific test items to analyze student progress meeting a particular standard. This is taking the district mandate and making it our own. At Sharp, in-service is long term, sustainable, and personal. Sharp has strong staff morale with 100% of the staff viewing Sharp as a good place to work. Teachers express comfort in teaching and learning with one another.

Sharp teachers serve on district ELA, Math, Science, and Social Studies committees. These committees examine the NJSLs and revise curriculum. These teachers then turnkey the updates with the entire staff at faculty meetings, PLC meetings, and the 5 full-day district in-service days. The principal sends staff members to district workshops and conferences that pertain to curricula. Teachers return refreshed and excited to share this knowledge with others. Last year, the art teacher spent time at an in-service modeling how to create painted and personalized rocks for a rock garden in the front of the school. Her expertise and guidance, in conjunction with classroom lessons based on the "Only One You" book, resulted in a colorful demonstration of the respect for individuality of others. In the district, teachers are required to participate or teach three, 2-hour flex options that are held after school. Sharp teachers frequently lead these workshops because their knowledge and expertise are valued across the district. Two staff members attended a summer workshop in order to become conversant with the new district technology requirements. Throughout the school year, these teachers led mini-lessons to familiarize staff members with new programs such as Screencastify and Nearpod. Each teacher integrates technology into lessons using Google Classroom. The teacher evaluation model is based on Dr. Robert Marzano's growth mindset model. In this program, teachers share useful strategies to master district goals, increasing teacher capacity each year. This collaboration and shared knowledge fosters relationships among colleagues to promote student success. We nurture perseverance with the phrase "I won't give up on you" posted in every classroom.

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

At Sharp, the principal believes that continuous collaboration and clear, consistent communication are the two biggest keys to student achievement. The principal and teachers work together to prepare each learner to meet the NJSLs. Leadership is rooted in a deep respect for listening and learning from all stakeholders in our community, including students, faculty, and parents. This respect for all parties is pivotal to our success. Once information is gleaned, the principal provides opportunities to lead and cultivate shared leadership with others.

At Sharp, all teachers are in one or more PLC. These are focus groups that provide a systematic method for the principal to honor and grow the expertise of teachers. The Cultural Proficiency group shares ideas for educators to learn and appreciate students' different backgrounds. The Character Education group continues

to foster the language, culture, and climate of good character. The Aspirations Team focuses on acquiring feedback from students regarding current practices and school culture, and then using that information to further connect students to their learning. The Green Team helps students realize their impact on the immediate and greater environment. Grade level groups may review formative and summative assessments or focus on data such as PARCC, DIBELS, and district math benchmark assessments. Monthly, the principal oversees the work of all groups. For students who may need additional support, the principal anchors the Intervention and Referral Team (I & RS).

The principal follows Listen-Learn-Lead practice from the Quaglia Institute. This balanced approach supports students and teachers through three concepts: self-worth, engagement, and purpose in order to lead to greater student achievement. Our monthly faculty meetings offer opportunities for PLC groups to share and enrich the staff with their findings. Discussions with the principal lead to further insight on district policy. The principal is the instructional facilitator during annual in-service days. These days provide an opportunity for in-depth sharing of knowledge on a specific topic, ranging from academic measures to school-based initiatives to increasing professional educator capacity.

Throughout the year, the principal surveys students, staff, and families to solicit feedback regarding both school and leadership practices. The resulting data informs school-based decisions. Empirical data is extremely helpful, but the principal most often learns about students' learning and parent perspectives in conversations. Being present in both academic and non-academic settings such as weekly evening events offers an excellent chance to discuss academic and socio-emotional experiences. Receiving candid feedback from all stakeholders allows for better knowledge of student, teacher, and parent needs.

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

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Character education is infused in every aspect of the Joseph D. Sharp School. Consistently, the entire Sharp community examines our policies, practices, and procedures to make our school a warm and welcoming place where families, students, faculty, and administration channel grit and determination to experience success. Each day, students, faculty, and the principal stand for the Sharp School Character Pledge. This pledge guides everything that we do at Sharp. The words drive the routines, discipline, and development of a positive school culture. Attributes of determination, perseverance, open-mindedness, caring, empathy, peacefulness, and respect are understood by everyone in the school. We believe these words and put them into action. It is our character that defines and shapes our thoughts, feelings, and actions. Teachers create close knit communities which provide a sense of safety and belonging. When students feel safe and valued, they concentrate on their learning and therefore are academically successful. Students achieve because they receive the skills and help they need to meet and exceed grade level expectations. Sharp schoolmates from varying grade levels connect as younger and older students engage in a program that models actions based on the pledge, our Bulldog Buddies program. This program gives students the opportunity to practice positive behavioral skills and work cooperatively with one another. The older students serve as peer mentors during activities. Recently, students made cards of appreciation and delivered them to staff members. The older students helped the younger ones develop spelling, grammar, and writing skills through this activity.

Leadership positions in the Safety Patrol, the Green Team, Student Ambassadors, and the Kindness Club provide opportunities for students to further develop their character and practice service learning. Putting words into action is a trademark of our school. Students learn about a need and develop a plan to meet that need. This year, teachers will be evaluated on Marzano's Element of Examining Errors in Reasoning. In all classrooms, students are directed to think about their reasoning when answering questions. If their answer is not correct or only partially correct, they are asked to re-examine their answer in a safe and teacher-supported arena. Students are comfortable making mistakes because they are supported. Confidence builds as they become successful.

This year, we were honored as a National School of Character. The self examination that the community undertook in completing the application made us realize that our success as an educational institution came from our strong commitment to character education. Each day, we are proud to watch our students work harder to get smarter.