

U.S. Department of Education
2021 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Mrs. Jessica Lynn Miller
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name Taylorville Jr High School
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 120 East Bidwell Street
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Taylorville State IL Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 62568-1358

County Christian County

Telephone (217) 824-4924 Fax (217) 824-7180

Web site/URL http://tcusd3tjhs.ss19.sharpschool.com/ E-mail jmiller@tcusd3.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. Chris Dougherty E-mail cdougherty@tcusd3.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Taylorville Community Unit School District 3 Tel. (217) 824-4951

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. David Driskell
(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, leave blank.*

PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION

The electronic signature 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 2021 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 must include one or more of grades K-12. Schools located on the same campus (physical location and mailing address) must apply as an entire school (i.e. K-8; 6-12; K-12 school). Two (or more) schools located on separate campuses, must apply individually even if they have the same principal. A single school located on multiple campuses with one principal must apply as an entire school.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2015 and grades participating in statewide assessments must have been part of the school for at least the three years prior to September 2019.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 or 2020.
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

Data should be provided for the current school year (2020-2021) unless otherwise stated.

DISTRICT (Question 1 is not applicable to non-public schools.)

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 2 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 1 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 4 TOTAL

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools. Only include demographic data for the nominated school, not the district.)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located. If unsure, refer to NCES database for correct category: <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/> (Find your school and check “Locale”)

- Urban (city or town)
- Suburban
- Rural

3. Number of students as of October 1, 2020 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent at the school. Include all students enrolled, in-person, participating in a hybrid model, or online only. If online schooling or other COVID-19 school issues make this difficult to obtain, provide the most accurate and up-to-date information available:

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	63	73	136
6	82	93	175
7	97	100	197
8	99	103	202
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	341	369	710

*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
 - 1 % Asian
 - 2 % Black or African American
 - 1 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 93 % 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 2019 - 2020 school year: 6%

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, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	19
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	23
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	42
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	759
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.06
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	6

6. Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 85 %

Total number students who qualify: 605

8. Students receiving special education services: 16 %

114 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. All students receiving special education services should be reflected in the table below. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <u>20</u> Autism | <u>1</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>2</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>26</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>6</u> Developmental Delay | <u>58</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>4</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>7</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: 3

10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to the nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below. If your current staffing structure has shifted due to COVID-19 impacts and you are uncertain or unable to determine FTEs, provide an estimate.

	Number of Staff
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	36
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	9
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	9
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	7

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 19:1

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

Required Information	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016
Daily student attendance	96%	94%	93%	94%	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 2020.

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.

TJHS will provide a safe learning environment and inspire our students to become career-ready independent thinkers and problem solvers utilizing community resources and technology.

16. Briefly describe how your school has been operating during the current 2020-2021 school year (e.g., open as usual, online only, a hybrid model, etc.)? If different grade levels in your building operate in different ways, include this. If the school began with one model and switched to another partially through the year, include this as well.

As we neared the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, we were very much aware of the rapidly increasing COVID-19 positivity rate within the county. Although our district felt that students should physically be in the classroom, we had to be cognizant of the safety of our staff and students. We started the school year in a remote setting. Quickly we realized that some of our students had no one to advocate for them other than the adults in our building. Our staff made sure to make weekly phone calls to check on our students. Our school resource officer, assistant principal, principal, and counselors made multiple home visits checking on the welfare of our students. When necessary we provided food and clothing as well.

Even though we were in a remote status for the first semester, teachers came to school and provided online instruction from their classrooms through Google Meets. They met with students one-on-one virtually or in-person. Students who were the most at-risk (whether from obstacles at home or at school) were brought into the building for much needed individual attention.

Once we entered the second semester, we transitioned into a hybrid schedule. Group A students attended school on Mondays and Tuesdays. Group B students attended school on Thursdays and Fridays. Wednesday remained a remote learning day for all students. Staff worked from home on Wednesdays to allow for a deep cleaning of our building.

Just before spring break we transitioned once again to five days of instruction with all students in attendance. Due to our staff's continual attention to the individual student during remote learning, our transition from remote/hybrid to in-person learning was a positive move for our student population.

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

PART III - SUMMARY

Taylorville Junior High School is a rather large middle school located in Taylorville, Illinois. Taylorville School District, the largest district in land area in the state, is located southeast of Springfield and surrounded by agriculture. Our district encompasses students from Taylorville as well as students who were annexed from the rural communities of Mount Auburn and Stonington. Many larger businesses in the area have closed, causing hardship on families in these communities.

The Taylorville community's unemployment rate remains slightly higher than the state (long term unemployment in the area is 6.5%). The unemployment rate, coupled with the high percentage of low income and often single-parent families, has a negative effect on parental involvement with student learning. This low parental involvement has resulted in many students not taking ownership of their performance.

At TJHS, we understand the correlation between the community's financial adversity and students' success in the classroom. Because of this relationship, the social-emotional well-being of our students plays an even greater role in their overall educational success. We understand that our students rely on our school for much more than an education. The school is often a replacement for a home. To compensate, TJHS fosters the feeling of community within our learning environment. We want every student and staff member to feel like a part of the school family.

At the beginning of the 2018-2019 school year, Taylorville Junior High was a school facing obstacles on many fronts. Students seemed to go through the motions without participating in their own learning. For many students this resulted in poor grades and test scores. In fact, TJHS was targeted by the Illinois State Board of Education for receiving an "Underperforming" rating on the PARCC Assessment. Once in this category, schools must choose a learning partner through IL-EMPOWER, a statewide system of support and accountability. Our school chose the American Institutes for Research (AIR) as our learning partner. With direction from AIR, the school leadership team completed the Illinois Quality Framework Assessment. Based on the results of this assessment, we determined, as a team, the specific areas our school needed to address for improvement. With the energy of a new building administrative team, we chose to dissect every aspect of our educational process from teachers and their methods to individual student's needs. We kept our philosophy - maximizing learning for the individual student so he/she would have the tools, both academically and technologically, to succeed through high school and beyond - at the forefront of this process.

The first area we recognized was a growing need to support the social-emotional well-being of our students and their families. Our staff understood that our demographics were a key contributor to low student performance. Our students did not have time to worry about school because many were worried about basic needs. For example, where were they going to sleep, or would they have a meal that evening? The administration began informing teachers of individual's problems and developing a bank of resources to help families. When students realized how far our staff was willing to go to help them, many more wanted to be at TJHS, and this caused an upward trend in attendance. An attendance program was instituted which included coordination with the Regional Office of Education's Regular Attendance Program (RAP) truancy officer, student attendance incentives, and home calls/visits.

Next, we analyzed our assessment data. The MAP assessment was given to students three times a year with class placement being its main use. We started to take a closer look at this data and utilize it to make improvements in classroom instruction. At this point teachers began to recognize that change would be necessary to create a positive outcome and was not something to dread.

After a review of the assessments, staff realized the need for reevaluating curriculum beginning with curriculum maps. Our data led to discussions that showed some areas within our curriculum were overlapping while others were missing completely. Realignment of curriculum in each subject area resulted in more accurate and efficient coursework throughout the building.

As discussions on student well-being, assessment, and curriculum continued, it became apparent that

concentration on several areas was vital to the success of our school: continued expansion of the technology program, student incentives and recognition, and diverse ability level programs to help every member of our student body reach his/her full potential.

Implementation of these programs was embraced by both students and staff alike and was producing positive results. With the onset of COVID-19, it was necessary for the administration, faculty, and student body to adapt these new initiatives to the online learning format. However, the successes we found that continued through the first semester of 2019-2020 helped our building cope with the effects of being thrown into remote learning.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

After our initial evaluation of available summative assessment data (including MAP testing and PARCC) during the 2018-2019 school year, we used our analysis to show possible gaps in our curriculum. Our next step was to revise curriculum maps to ensure that all gaps were filled and Illinois Learning Standards were addressed within these maps. Once the new curriculum maps were in place, making adjustments to formative assessments was an easier step for teachers. Our purpose was to provide students assessments that were relevant and focused on key skills.

We began the 2019-2020 school year more confident that our curriculum changes were resulting in a positive student growth. This growth was confirmed when we received our 2018-2019 Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR) results. Our overall building rating had improved from “Underperforming” to “Exemplary” in one year. TJHS was the only building within the district to receive the exemplary rating.

With the reassurance we were moving in the right direction we continued to further evaluate and improve our instructional practices. In the ELA department, the vocabulary program used in grades six through eight was deemed inadequate in building the decoding skills needed at the sixth grade level. Instead they began constructing an interactive notebook covering roots, prefixes, and suffixes. Science classes began using Gizmos to provide virtual science labs and activities. Eighth grade math classes developed an interactive notebook filled with “foldables” and other manipulatives giving students a needed contrast to the many online programs being utilized. All subjects began looking at academic and functional vocabulary to improve comprehension of the individual subjects. We emphasized the fact that each subject had its own “language” that students might not have been exposed to previously. By adding the working vocabulary used in assessments, those assessments became even more relevant and valuable. Grade levels met regularly to discuss curriculum covered throughout the school year, skill performance, and proficiency. This information was used to plan for the next school year.

Unfortunately, with the outbreak of the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic in the spring, we immediately prepared to transition to a remote setting. This entailed the deployment of Chromebooks to students in classrooms that were not previously involved in our one-to-one program, as well as the provision of wifi hotspots to families that needed access to the internet.

Staff quickly had to adapt to teaching in a virtual world. Subject areas such as physical education, for example, which normally relied on having students perform tasks, were forced to alter instruction. Some staff who had not previously used Google Classroom jumped right into learning tips and tricks to using this digital platform and teaching through Google Meets. We realized that even though this new method of learning was exciting, students still needed guidelines to maximize learning. Therefore, we transformed our school behavior matrix to an online behavior matrix.

Initially the district planned to begin the 2020-2021 school year in a hybrid setting. However, due to the rise in the percentage of COVID-19 cases within the county, the district leadership determined the best course of action was to remain remote. Plans remained fluid throughout the year. As we transitioned from remote learning to hybrid our district provided support for the teachers through workshops, seminars, and online learning. Teachers individually continued to use formal and informal assessments of student performance during remote and hybrid learning when standardized testing was not a valid or practical option. We wanted learning to continue whether students were learning in the home or in the classroom.

Academically we utilized supplementary educational programs such as MobyMax, Read Theory, and ALEKS to ensure the closure of curriculum gaps for each individual student. Not only do these software programs give our students the opportunities to develop, build, and master skills that may have been harder to evaluate in a remote learning environment, but they also provide our accelerated students with higher-level, challenging content. It was important that we were mindful of the number of online programs being used within each department and that we limited the amount of time students spent on academic tasks outside of Google Meets. Therefore, each teacher was limited to using one online program as part of the NBRS 2021

classroom instruction.

Reading/ELA

Within the ELA (English/language arts) department, the content is divided into two sections. Language arts covers grammar, vocabulary, and writing, while literature covers reading skills and the various genres. Speaking and listening standards overlap into the curriculum of both classes. While remote, we looked more closely at the standards, even though they had been completely divided between the two classes previously. Since our students were struggling with the responsibilities of covering so much content online, the first adaptation we made was to prioritize the standards. We chose to address these prioritized standards first.

For Language Arts, an explicit instructional approach allowed teachers to model each aspect of the writing process covering the range of writing skills set in the standards (narrative, informative, and argumentative) for all grade levels. Many students had not completed assignments in the spring, so we faced a struggle with individuals finishing entire written assignments. Therefore, we broke our writing lessons and assignments into smaller tasks to scaffold into a final essay. This method also helped to build their writing stamina. For example, narrative writing was broken into smaller parts. Dialogue and description were taught separately as more concise skills. Assignments involved two to three sentence tasks that could be used for formative assessments and were occasionally covered on exit tickets to refresh skills. Once we returned to the classroom, we were able to merge these skills to create our narrative writing pieces. For the informative and argumentative writing, summarizing, paraphrasing, and elaboration were taught as smaller tasks. Grammar was taught as mini-lessons. Daily assignments and exit tickets were used as formative assessments. Unit tests and the MobyMax online program were used for summative assessments. During remote learning, classes continued with the Sadlier Vocabulary Workshop at the seventh and eighth grade levels because the program provides teachers with both formative and summative assessments with options for differentiation. Sixth grade adjusted their common roots, prefixes, and suffixes study to an online format.

Literature classes at the junior high level focus on vocabulary awareness and context clues to improve reading comprehension. While classes study all genres, sixth grade devotes additional time to poetry. Seventh grade reads an additional novel, and eighth grade's main focus is nonfiction. During Google Meets, students often gave verbal summarizations in their own words. Screencastify was used to give audio recordings with the stories for those who needed them. This extension was also used to produce some lessons so that students had the option to review lessons multiple times when teacher-led discussions were not available during remote. Exit tickets often contained short writing tasks for a formative assessment of inferential understanding. This skill is hard for students in a teacher directed class and proved even more difficult during remote lessons. At the eighth grade level, Cornell notes were used at the beginning of the year to facilitate close reading. Eventually, the eighth grade classes began reading a nonfiction article online weekly. Each article aligns to a specific standard and requires students to use explicit and inferential evidence in answering the given questions. Each activity given hits a more advanced level of Bloom's Taxonomy.

The fifth grade incorporates reading and language arts into one class. They have recently adopted the Journeys online reading series from Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. Teachers emphasize reading literature and informational text while focusing on the following skills: main idea and details, cause and effect, compare and contrast, characters, author's purpose, theme, fact and opinion. Foundation skills including phonics and word recognition, decoding, and fluency are reinforced to prepare students for sixth grade. Teachers have been able to use the traits of writing throughout the year. For both remote and classroom settings, we have focused our writing on, "I do, we do, you do." The teacher writes first. Then we complete a group writing together before the students complete individual projects.

Mathematics

Taylorville Junior High School students are placed into different levels of math courses based upon Northwest Evaluation Association's (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment data, classroom performance, and teacher recommendations. Regular, self-contained, co-taught, and accelerated courses are offered in order to meet our students' needs. Students in accelerated courses are able to move

into accelerated (advanced placement) and dual credit courses at the high school level. The math department and administration meet frequently to discuss formative assessment data and instructional practices in order to improve student performance.

In the course of a traditional school day, teachers use direct instruction, scaffolding, cooperative learning, differentiated instruction, gamification, and universal design for learning. Teachers provide direct instruction with specific visuals and manipulatives through the use of Promethean boards or interactive panels. They also incorporate conditional formatting in spreadsheets in order to provide immediate feedback. Many of these approaches were still utilized during remote instruction through our learning management system, Google Classroom. However, teachers utilized a flipped classroom format giving an initial introduction to the lesson with videos from EdPuzzle or screen casted videos created by the teacher. During Google Meets and livestreaming, teachers used direct instruction to elaborate on content and model problem solving skills. As remote learning began in the spring of 2020, we soon found that students were having more problems with organizational skills. Weekly agendas in Google Classroom gave students links to assignments, videos, and due dates in one place to help with these skills so that assessments were not a reflection of their lack of organization.

Math classes use ALEKS, not only to provide individualized and differentiated lessons to students, but also to gather accurate assessment data highlighting standards students have learned, are learning, or have not attempted. Teachers continued to use ALEKS throughout remote and hybrid learning to ensure students were working towards an individual goal.

Due to the pandemic, normal summative assessments were not given. However, we were able to use the data provided through assessments in ALEKS as both formative and summative data. Other formative assessments during a school day include bell ringers, quizzes, exit tickets, and daily assignments (in class and on paper). While on remote, some assessments were adjusted to compensate for not seeing students in person for one on one discussions. For example, exit ticket questions were specifically designed to determine: what students knew before the lesson, what they learned, and what they still needed help to learn.

The mathematics department follows the Illinois Learning Standards which allows districts to decide what is most important for their students. The younger grades (5th and 6th) focus on number sense, specifically fractions and decimals. This knowledge is then transferred to geometry related problems, i.e. area, volume, and surface area. Of course, the upper grades (7th and 8th) continue incorporating those concepts into the next set of standards. The main focus for 7th grade is integers. The students know the rules, how to apply them, and can transfer that knowledge to basic one and two step equations. Once in 8th grade, the main focus is solving equations and function notation with graphing. Again, just as in the younger grades, students take their prior knowledge and apply those skills to the new concepts.

Science

The science curriculum is aligned with the Next Generation Science Standards. Students explore a variety of science concepts through interactive lessons, either provided in the classroom or in a virtual setting. The science department and administration meet frequently to discuss formative assessment data and instructional practices in order to improve student performance and have spent time vertically aligning the curriculum to ensure standards are addressed. Fifth grade classrooms focus on life science, while also introducing students to physical, earth, and space concepts. Sixth grade classrooms expand upon the topics of force and motion, and earth and space science. Seventh grade classrooms explore life science and biology concepts while eighth grade classrooms concentrate on engineering and design.

In the course of a school day, teachers use modeling, spiral reviews, positive reinforcement, journal writing, and read alouds. During remote learning, teachers met with students one-on-one to provide individualized instruction, used Jamboards for collaboration and brainstorming, created Screencastify videos to further explain classroom assignments and concepts, livestreamed experiments while encouraging students to participate using materials found in their homes, incorporated the use of Mosa Mack to provide opportunities to complete virtual activities and assessments, and used Quizizz as an informal assessment tool.

In the fall of 2018, TJHS implemented Project Lead the Way (PLTW), an innovative, hands-on science curriculum engaging students in real-world problem solving. Students must apply for the class which teaches students how to use technology to solve a problem. Each semester-long unit has a culminating project. The lessons within each unit teach students how to use tools or skills to design their final projects. The engineering unit gives students a chance to learn and use the design process. The medical detectives unit uses the scientific method to find the cause of an outbreak. During remote learning, teachers adapted these units to a virtual setting by livestreaming experiments and providing opportunities for students to complete virtual tasks.

Social Studies

Students at TJHS look to the past as they prepare for active civic participation in trending world events. Our social science teachers believe the civic virtues and democratic principles necessary to advance society are vital, and they provide a robust curriculum based on the Illinois Social Science Standards, Illinois Learning Standards, and the Illinois Mandated Units of Study. Both formative and summative assessments drive a rigorous curriculum which promotes the growth mindset along with the critical thinking skills of Bloom's Taxonomy. Formative assessments include entrance/exit tickets, daily assignments, Venn diagrams, KWL charts, and extended response writing, while summative assessments are achieved through the use of culminating tests or projects and Student Learner Objectives. Great importance is placed on the Founding Fathers' primary source documents, historical perspective, and how both have changed over time through the contributions of women, the disabled, and people of color.

Instructional strategies include the use of essential questions, direct instruction, Cube It interactive review, tactile/kinesthetic projects, photograph analysis, videography, role play and debate, collaborative groups with role identifiers, as well as small group sharing. With the challenges brought on by the pandemic, teachers adapted their methodology to the remote setting. Using the learning management system provided through Google Classroom, teachers used Screencastify, Youtube, and Edpuzzle as a framework for flipped learning. Google Meets were also used to present virtual field trips, support instruction, and provide interactive lessons using Jamboard in Google Workspace. Parents, students, and teachers have increased communication via Google Classroom, teacher websites, phone calls, and email which has promoted student ownership of their work, and an even more collaborative and successful approach to learning.

Our Professional Learning Community has distributed coursework by grade level throughout our building. Social studies curriculum for fifth grade students consists of units that include Native Americans, Explorers, Life in the Colonies, Revolutionary War, Government/Economics, and the Civil War. World history is the focus in sixth grade classrooms as students research and analyze the geography, religions, achievements, politics, economies and social structures of early civilizations and significant time periods. Seventh grade geography classes incorporate map analysis and spatial patterns, global and environmental change, and financial literacy with the exploration of physical and human geography using the Five Themes of Geography. A U.S. History course is completed by eighth grade students at TJHS, which is a broad survey of U.S. History from pre-colonial times through the American Civil War. Similar to a high school or collegiate "U.S. History to 1865" course, it focuses on the development of the American republican democracy from its origins to its first great test of resiliency - the Civil War. Civic responsibility is developed through study of the Constitution of the United States and State of Illinois respectively. Students are also engaged outside of the core curriculum by participating in the Patriot's Pen Writing Competition sponsored by the Veterans of Foreign Wars, as well as experiential learning through student travel to Washington, D.C. The educational activities, experiences, and programs provided by the social studies department of TJHS reinforce our educational tenet of facilitating change through student civic involvement as they gain knowledge and understanding of their role in an ever-changing democratic society.

1a. For secondary schools (middle and/or high school grades):

Taylorville Junior High School provides students with leadership opportunities through Student Council and Builders Club. Student Council members participate in community outreach projects and fundraisers, while also consulting with administration on a number of school initiatives. For example, Student Council

organizes and sponsors school dances, trivia nights, and other activities encouraging all students to participate. During remote learning, our Student Council met regularly to create weekly videos for students encouraging participation in online classes, giving tips for dealing with quarantine, and providing a way for students to see their peers virtually. Our Builders Club works in collaboration with our local Kiwanis Club to complete community outreach projects and fundraisers. In December of 2019, our Builders Club was recognized in the International Kiwanis magazine for their non-profit fundraising efforts.

TJHS supports college and career readiness through a variety of experiences and opportunities. Mathematics, Science, and ELA accelerated courses support college and career readiness by preparing students to take accelerated offerings and dual credit courses at the high school level. Eighth grade students take a field trip to the local Capital Area Career Center (CACC) in the fall semester in order to learn about the career exploration and training available during high school in vocational and technical careers. Students complete Career Cruising, an online tool used to explore a variety of career paths based on interests and strengths. High school vocational programs, such as journalism, agriculture, and television production, visit TJHS and present information about their programs. All of these opportunities help prepare students to make informed decisions as they enroll in their high school courses.

Understanding the importance of exposing students to traditional as well as nontraditional career paths, teachers at all grade levels arrange virtual and in-person meetings with adults in a variety of careers. Former students have returned to discuss their current career paths including military, engineering, aeronautics, and microbiology.

1b. For schools that offer preschool for three- and/or four-year old students:

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

TJHS offers students a variety of year-long, non-core subjects. Fifth grade students are required to complete a nine weeks class in each of the elective areas. Sixth through eighth grade students then have the option of choosing from an expanded list of options as they attend TJHS.

Fifth grade students attend music, art, library, and PE classes each week. The music, art, and PE curriculum closely align with the elementary and high school courses. Library class focuses on the use of the library and its resources along with research skills.

The music department is comprised of both band and chorus. Band begins as an introductory class for fifth grade students to learn the basics of their chosen instruments and reading music. All fifth grade students take a music class to learn genres, sounds of various instruments, and musical terminology. Sixth through eighth grade students can choose to participate in band and/or jazz band as well as chorus. During remote learning, band students recorded themselves individually playing pieces of music and then submitted it to the instructor. Meets were used to work with individuals and specific instrument groups. During whole band Meets, students listened to pieces of music and compared the styles. Our band director even had the whole band playing together on a Meet to learn "The Star Spangled Banner." Choir students recorded themselves singing pieces of music and also met individually with the instructor.

Art classes are offered for sixth through eighth grade students as a year-long elective course. Content covered includes not only specific projects such as pottery and weaving but also an overview of specific genres and artists. To continue instruction during remote learning, the art teacher put kits together that students picked up from the school. In Meets, the teacher modeled creating the projects while students completed the projects at home. Students submitted photos of their finished projects for assessment.

All students attend PE classes each day. Our PE curriculum, in alignment with the state standards, includes lessons on life safety drills, nutrition, and health along with the actual physical activities. Remote learning consisted of engaging students in physical activity through Darebee, an educational program for workouts. They also utilized videos to teach the fundamentals of a variety of sports and to provide health related

lessons.

Seventh and eighth grade students can choose to participate in a computer science course. This elective offers students experiences in learning to code, visiting local businesses associated with technology, and listening to guest speakers about the value of technology in their careers. For remote learning, Screencastify helped students understand the steps necessary to complete coding activities.

3. Academic Supports:

When TJHS received the “underperforming” rating, the special education subgroup was the area of greatest concern. Previously, the Illinois State Board of Education had intervened by voicing a concern over students with IEPs not receiving enough time in the regular education classroom. At that point, co-taught classes were created. The students in these classes were special education students with IEPs and regular education students who would benefit from a class taught by a regular education and a special education teacher collaboratively. After the underperforming rating, co-taught classes were reevaluated. A concentrated effort was made to minimize class size and to ensure that students were chosen based on need, not poor behavior. The purpose of this class was to teach the same topics at a slower pace with an even greater differentiated curriculum. This allowed teachers to meet the students at their current level and build on their knowledge. Within these classes, teachers use questioning and modeling techniques to help these students understand the thought processes leading to the answer or end product. For example, writing teachers can model writing a paragraph and show what thoughts led to the topic sentence. Math teachers can explain the reasoning they use to decide on the next step. The co-taught classes have often helped students by adjusting curriculum through accommodations and modifications. These supports provide students a path to find success with grade level content.

However, differentiation is included at all levels. Special education teachers work with all teachers to individualize tests to fit the parameters of a student’s IEP. It is the philosophy of our administration that differentiation does not stop with the special education students.

Students performing above grade level are also very fortunate at TJHS. Accelerated math classes are available at the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade levels. Accelerated language arts and literature are available at the seventh and eighth grade levels. Our school was also chosen to participate in Project Lead the Way. This program provides science teachers the technology and training necessary for STEM science classes. Students must apply to be chosen for the class.

During remote learning, differentiation became even more critical. Programs provided individualization to reach students at their current levels. Differentiation actually became easier. In Classroom, teachers were able to adjust assignments for individuals or groups without students ever knowing. Scholastic Magazine gave teachers the capability of adjusting articles to meet an individual student’s reading level. Screencastify allowed teachers to show an article or story to the students online with a recording of the teacher reading the text. Using the same program, math teachers were able to work through a problem and show each step.

Students with IEPs who receive direct services were also given the option to come to the building for one-on-one assistance four days a week if requested by a parent or teacher during remote. We also brought at risk students who were in danger of failing into the building for additional tutoring.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

At the beginning of the 2018-2019 school year, we began putting several incentive programs in place. Each teacher was encouraged to nominate a student of the month and list reasons for the nomination. All students nominated for the month received the award and the explanation. We realized at the onset of remote learning that this award needed to continue. Teachers began to include attending all Meets and participating in online discussions as reasons for receiving the award.

We have continuously evaluated and improved our practices based on community and staff feedback. For example, when remote learning began, each staff member made weekly contacts with students and families. We quickly realized that this approach was overwhelming for both staff and parents. We revised our plan so that parents received one contact from the administrative team per week. Through these communications, we were able to identify high risk students. Several factors were used to determine students who were finding no success during remote learning: disengagement, lack of a positive home environment, no internet resources, and other stressors in the family home. These students were unable to learn in their home situations. Therefore, we provided transportation to and from school, food, and one-on-one instruction in an attempt to engage these students in their learning.

During the pandemic, the D3 Mentoring Program was put in place by the district to encourage struggling students by pairing each with a mentor and offering incentives for attendance, participation, and homework completion. The goal was to give struggling students an individual to connect with when physical contact was at a minimum.

TJHS, as a building, implemented a Social Emotional Learning team. The team created three levels of prizes based on levels of improvement. The improvements can be in grades, attendance, homework completion, or behavior. This team is also responsible for meeting students' needs that can be identified by a parent, a teacher, or the student by filling out a referral. Needs cover needing homework help, coping with family problems, or social struggles. The team works to develop skills to help these students cope beyond their years at TJHS. The team consists of a psychologist, a social worker, a student resource officer, school counselors, and the building administration. The use of incentives has created a positive environment. The educational process became much easier as students realized the staff is truly concerned for their well-being.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Taylorville Junior High students and staff have benefited greatly from the generosity of individuals, families, businesses and organizations within the school district. These entities have provided monetary donations, grants, and student rewards to bolster the educational atmosphere in our school.

Various events at TJHS encourage engagement among our school, parents, and community members. Our teachers host an Open House at the beginning of the school year to meet students and their families providing a positive start to the school year. Parents and grandparents help students involved in speech contest prepare for competition by attending Family Theatre Night, which allows students to practice their selections in front of an audience before performing in front of a judge. Community Nights are held to showcase STEM projects to the community which prompted business owners to invest in the program.

Through student council leadership, events such as Hat Day raised funds that were donated to our local chapter of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Local veterans were selected to travel to Washington D.C. where they visited national memorials sponsored by the Land of Lincoln Honor Flight.

Many classrooms and programs have been positively impacted by those who have chosen to be actively involved with our students. The Taylorville Chapter of Kiwanis Club International sponsors the Builders Club at Taylorville Junior High. This community service centered program encourages students to become active service minded members of our community. Group activities include constructing an exhibit for the

local Christmas in the Park display that is enjoyed by local citizens as well as visitors to our community.

Banzai, a program used for financial literacy education, is sponsored by the Taylorville Community Credit Union. Booklets are purchased yearly to supplement the online course work and prepare students to handle finances.

The Monsanto Corporation located in Stonington, Illinois, along with local farmers nominated Taylorville Junior High to apply for the America's Farmers Grow Rural Education Grant. Once grant funding was secured, materials were purchased, and students designed and built ROVs which were used to collect water samples from ponds located on local farms. The water was brought back to the school where students analyzed the chemicals found in individual ponds. Students then came up with a plan to reduce harmful chemicals discovered, and each pond owner was then given a water quality analysis report. Additionally, students presented their materials and findings at the local school board meeting.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

In revisiting the curriculum maps and reviewing data, discussions were initiated concerning best practices and data analysis. Both topics have shared the focus of professional development. For example, the math department received training on using the ALEKS program for assessment. The principal worked with the company to bring professional development to the building to demonstrate these possibilities within ALEKS. Having an additional assessment tool within an existing program benefited the department especially when state assessments were suspended for the year. Discussions during department meetings have helped math teachers differentiate the curriculum by using the program.

A new ELA book was adopted by the grade school including the fifth grade. Extensive professional development from the company has helped those teachers discover the expansive spectrum of genres and lessons possible within the series.

With the use of technology playing a significant role in our mission statement, professional development was held for the use of technology tools including the Z Space three dimensional program where students were able to dissect frogs and dismantle ships through this augmented and virtual reality machine.

When our school went to remote learning in March 2020, the science department felt that using the Gizmo program was not as user friendly as they had hope for students who were not in the classroom. Our tech-savvy principal was helpful in the science department's decision to choose the Mosa Mack program as an online platform to supplement science experiments and other classroom activities. Professional development was completed online to learn how to develop, assign, and assess lessons. The Mosa Mack program also helped supplement student learning when hands-on experiments were not possible during remote.

P.E. teachers were encouraged to participate in a round table discussion with schools from several counties to set parameters of appropriate P.E. activities for hybrid learning.

The focus of the district has been on students' social-emotional well-being with multiple professional development hours from several facilitators covering the topic. As remote learning began, these workshops were beneficial because we began to see adverse effects from students' not attending school after only two weeks. Our building immediately began watching for signs of distress on Meets or for disengagement from the learning process altogether. Our training helped us construct a set of responses to intervene when individual problems arose. The overall effect was that our building put our students' emotional and physical safety as our top priority.

4. School Leadership:

The Leadership structure at Taylorville Junior High has many facets and uses a collaborative approach that emphasizes communication. The Administrative Team, School Leadership Team, department chairs and teachers all play a critical role in our success. All meetings are kept concise and focused by using an agenda template created by the building principal, and now also being used district wide, that includes specific roles

for individuals. The facilitator creates the agenda and leads the meeting. Minutes of the meeting are kept by the recorder. A timekeeper ensures that the meeting is kept brief, and the gatekeeper assures that the members attend to the tasks at hand.

Our Administrative Team, which consists of the principal, assistant principal, school counselor, school resource officer, and social emotional interventionist, addresses the needs in our building in the areas of day-to-day operations, social-emotional health, student behavior and safety, and school climate. Concentrating on what is best for students, the principal and assistant principal work in partnership to support students and staff to make our school successful.

Department chairpersons and the principal primarily make up the School Leadership Team (SLT). They are joined by two teachers who are building representatives to the District Leadership Team (DLT). Information discussed at DLT meetings is shared with the SLT. Additionally, the principal informs department heads about important building items such as state testing schedules, district reports, and building changes. Each SLT member updates the team regarding his/her department. Members also coordinate classroom testing schedules, as well as collaborate over inter-departmental projects. Dissemination of those plans and ideas then occurs within each department.

Department chairs work jointly with members in their respective areas to determine the best avenues in which to engage students and maximize their learning. This is accomplished by continuous reevaluation of curriculum maps, along with sharing effective procedures and incentives. Successful strategies gleaned in these meetings are then shared for the benefit of the entire teaching staff.

Communication and collaboration were especially essential during the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers reached out to building leaders to utilize their vast knowledge in technology as they adapted content and activities traditionally completed in the classroom into a virtual platform. Surveys, phone calls and home visits completed by administrative team members were used to address student, family, and building concerns. At the same time, teachers were kept abreast of necessary changes needed in Google Classroom assignments to reduce student and parent stressors.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

TJHS provides opportunities for all students to find a sense of belonging from academics and sports to clubs and activities. We provide robotics, computer science, art, band, choir, speech, chess club, and other activities for students to find their niche, especially for those that may find core curriculum a struggle.

Our Functional Academics Communication and Skills (FACeS) program which encompasses our most severe and profound learning disabled students are incorporated into our exploratory programs throughout the building. For example, FACeS students that are interested in art class are paired with peers to assist in project completion. Additionally, they are provided opportunities to perform in school-wide concerts and events giving them a social outlet.

We are fortunate to have a Social Emotional Learning Team that uses a collaborative approach to providing supports and services to our students in need. Small groups of students with shared commonalities are composed and given opportunities to explore self-concept which aids in identifying their strengths. Peer relationships, self-esteem, and self-efficacy are explored through activities such as painting, decoupage, descriptive word collages, role playing, and games.

In a more academic setting, the Social Emotional Interventionist has introduced Second Step into our fifth grade curriculum. This web-based social emotional learning curriculum is used to teach students growth mindset, empathy, character, and how to process strong emotions. The curriculum is designed to expand further through grades sixth, seventh, and eighth. Our plan is to provide professional development to all staff on utilizing these lessons and incorporating them building

wide during homeroom classes.

We are fully aware that the amount of time students have spent away from the classroom and their peers has caused a number of social emotional issues within our student population. In an attempt to be proactive, our Social Emotional Team worked to develop a website of resources for students, staff, and families. The website has an introduction to our Social Emotional Team, the supports and services each member can provide, referral forms, along with resources on friendship, bullying prevention, and a virtual calming room.

The community has also recognized the need for bullying prevention. This culminated with a community march to raise awareness in which students and staff participated. It is our goal for our school family to be a part of the solution to current social and cultural issues, whether it be through school programs or community-wide activism.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Our stakeholders agree that our focus on meeting the basic needs of our students, their families, and staff is the single practice that has had the most impact since the onset of COVID-19. When our school district abruptly transitioned into remote learning in the spring of 2020, food service distribution was a priority, as many of our students rely heavily on our free breakfast and lunch program. Due to the large size of our district, food distribution spanned across multiple communities. This was accomplished using bus service, food service, and a multitude of school personnel.

Additionally, families in our building were in need of personal necessities such as toiletries, clothing, and furniture. These items were purchased or gathered through community outreach by building staff and then distributed. The ongoing stress continued to multiply on our already economically disadvantaged families. As the holidays approached, staff worked tirelessly to provide meals at Thanksgiving and gifts at Christmas in an attempt to help alleviate some of the burden.

Providing and/or maintaining wifi in the home was a struggle for our families. Internet access and technology support was critical to student academic success. Staff made frequent home visits to deliver district issued hotspots, set up technology, and provided technical support using the Google platform. This afforded students the opportunity to stay engaged with their academics.

As basic needs were being met, our focus turned to the social emotional impact the pandemic had on our students. Many were disconnected from peers, unable to leave home, or affected by loved ones either exposed to or suffering from the virus. The administrative staff deployed and provided on-site counseling, transportation to medical appointments, and academic assistance. We utilized multiple means of communication to reach our families: phone calls, text messages, emails and home visits. Students who continued to be disengaged were transported by district staff to and from school in order to receive one-on-one academic assistance.

Our focus shifted once again to returning gradually to school and in-person learning. The team continued to focus on meeting the social emotional needs of our students and engaging those few students that were unsuccessful with remote learning, pairing them with a mentor.

As we slowly return to a sense of normalcy, we feel that the strategies employed during this worldwide pandemic have been successful. Students are engaged and excited to share their successes.