

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

Official School Name Walter R. Sundling Junior High School
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 1100 N Smith Street
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Palatine State IL Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 60067-2606

County Cook

Telephone (847) 963-3700 Fax (847) 963-3706

Web site/URL https://www.ccsd15.net/WRS E-mail dietzj@ccsd15.net

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. Laurie Heinz E-mail heinzl@ccsd15.net
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Palatine Community Consolidated School District 15 Tel. (847) 963-3200

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

Date _____

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board President/Chairperson Mrs. Lisa Szczupaj
(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):
- 16 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 4 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 0 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 20 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	0	0	0
6	0	0	0
7	149	146	295
8	199	163	362
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	348	309	657

*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
 - 15 % Asian
 - 5 % Black or African American
 - 23 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 53 % White
 - 4 % 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	23
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	22
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	45
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	696
(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):

Afrikaans (Taal), Arabic, Assyrian (Syriac, Aramaic), Bulgarian, Cantonese (Chinese), Czech, English, German, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Hungarian, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Lithuanian, Malayalam, Mandarin (Chinese), Panjabi (Punjabi), Pashto (Pushto), Pilipino (Tagalog), Polish, Romanian, Russian, Serbian, Spanish, Tamil, Telugu (Telegu), Turkish, Ukrainian, Urdu, Vietnamese

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 11 %
75 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 26 %

Total number students who qualify: 174

8. Students receiving special education services: 9 %

61 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.

10 Autism

19 Multiple Disabilities

0 Deafness

2 Orthopedic Impairment

0 Deaf-Blindness

13 Other Health Impaired

0 Developmental Delay

25 Specific Learning Disability

5 Emotional Disturbance

10 Speech or Language Impairment

0 Hearing Impairment

0 Traumatic Brain Injury

0 Intellectual Disability

1 Visual Impairment Including Blindness

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 10

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.	30
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	14
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	18
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	6

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

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	97%	96%	95%	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 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. 1996

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

Walter R. Sundling Junior High, in partnership with the community, dedicates itself to challenge and inspire all students toward academic excellence while fostering positive social development and mutual respect in an ever changing global society.

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.

Sundling Junior High School has been operating under the hybrid model for a majority of the 2020-2021 school year. Students with the last name starting with A-L attend school on Mondays and Wednesdays, while students with the last name starting with M-Z attend school on Tuesdays and Thursdays. All students attend school online/virtually on Fridays. Beginning February 22, 2021, our school brought in specific groups of students four days per week, including special education instructional students and EL students in Priority Group 1. As of April 1, 2021, our school district will be looking to offer all students in the junior high schools the opportunity to return to school in person, five days per week. We anticipate that many of our current families will take advantage of this opportunity for the remainder of the school year.

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

Not applicable.

PART III - SUMMARY

Walter R. Sundling Junior High School has a diverse population of students, which makes it a unique and essential place for learning. Our students represent varying racial and socioeconomic backgrounds; our school serves five major feeder elementary schools in District 15. Our student population comes from the towns of Palatine, Hoffman Estates, and Inverness.

Our consistent commitment is on the whole child, and our focus is to get students involved during their two years at the junior high school. Sundling provides a full day of rigorous and engaging academic courses, as well as a variety of extracurricular opportunities after school. The choice of extracurricular offerings is a collaborative process. At the beginning of each school year, we gather feedback and ideas from our student body and faculty on the types of clubs and after school activities we should consider offering. In any given year, we offer fall, winter, and spring sports, over 16 club offerings, intramural sports, and a variety of homework and intervention supports. We also have a Buddies Program that allows our students opportunities to work with and support our SIP (Structured for Independence Program) students in Art, Music, Physical Education classes and after school activities.

2020-2021 has been a highly unusual school year. Although many school clubs, activities and annual service projects have been canceled or changed, we have adapted and found opportunities to engage with and connect both our student and parent communities. We have worked with our staff and the Sundling PTA, throughout the school year, to support the needs of our community through coat, food, and supply drives. The outpouring of support has been amazing during this difficult time, and has shown the relevance and importance of service to others in the community.

We have continued working to engage all of our students through home visits, delivering school related items, and much more. One of our favorite events each month is visiting the homes of the students chosen as "Paladins of the Month" to deliver the good news, as well as Sundling goodies and photo ops which we feature on our Twitter account! We have developed school wide assemblies, team and classroom activities, and games that include both our hybrid and virtual students in an effort to create a sense of connectedness and an added opportunity to have a little fun during the school day. These have been very successful and bring a sense of joy and normalcy for both our students and staff during a difficult year.

As a former National Blue Ribbon School Award recipient, we find that this has empowered and engaged the entire school community into holding itself to a higher standard as both representatives of the Award, and also a school that continues to be worthy of the Award.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

Walter R. Sundling Junior High School (WRS) has worked with the district curriculum coordinator and the instructional technology department to implement a hybrid learning model for all core content areas that includes utilizing the “flipped classroom” philosophy. The flipped classroom moves direct instruction from the group learning space to the individual learning space. This model fits perfectly within the new challenges faced teaching during a pandemic.

Teachers participated in a variety of professional learning opportunities which included concurrent learning, student engagement, and differentiation. Overall, the mode of delivery of lessons across content changed and teachers found creative ways to engage students in learning. Increasingly, teachers created choice boards of activities, videos, songs and developed new and unique ways of assessing students. Teachers became adept at accessing new resources such as Pear Deck, FlipGrid, and the use of Parlay for discussions.

Science has always been and continues to be a high priority at Sundling. Our school was the first, and for many years, the only school outside of the City of Chicago that was accepted into the Museum of Science and Industry’s Leadership Program. The Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago is a world-class museum and has afforded our students a variety of unique experiences only partner schools receive. As a result of this partnership, our students and teachers have had access to modern technology, researchers and scientists, curriculum enhancements, and teacher professional development that emphasizes students’ understanding of the need for collaboration across industry, community, and business. This has resulted in not only problem-based experiences for students, but also a true understanding of how science can address and solve societal problems.

In order to enhance our student’s science experiences, our 7th & 8th grade science teams are piloting a new science program - Amplify Science. This program was selected because of its alignment to the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), its robust web platform, and its integrated content that supported our English Language Learners, students in Special Education, and students in general education. With these materials, teachers adapt and modify lessons, labs, and projects to teach across all learning environments (virtual and concurrent) and meet individual student’s needs. Access to both live and virtual simulations was critical to our success in fostering student engagement in virtual and in-person teaching environments.

Formative and summative data is used at the classroom level to drive tiered interventions, and as a team to problem solve from a wider lens. To allow for the need to address learners as a team, common plan time is provided to give teams time to work on reviewing student data, MTSS instructional supports, etc.

Facilitated by our 1:1 (one student to one device) Chromebook environment, our 7th & 8th grade math teachers, working with Illustrative Math and Aleks programs, transitioned from a textbook/workbook model, to an online platform. To ensure we meet students where they are, all students were administered a placement assessment, which allowed individual teachers and teams to use the data to differentiate instruction according to grade level standards. Teachers were supported in aligning tiered interventions to Common Core State Standards and creating opportunities for student ownership in instruction and learning. Through the use of “Go Guardian”, our classroom teachers were able to observe students during learning and adapt to the needs of individuals during remote learning. Go Guardian Teacher helps teachers determine what students are doing on their Chromebooks and whether they are staying on-task and/or if they need help. Finally, using a blended learning workshop model allowed students to work with each other, as well as in small groups with their teacher across both platforms.

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

Walter R. Sundling Junior High School (WRS) offers many programs that support college and career readiness. Our STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) program is structured by Project Lead the Way and offers students opportunities to explore Robotics, Design and Modeling, Computer Science as well as our students’ favorite class, Medical Detectives, which allows students to play the role of a medical

investigator. This program links students to the local high schools as well by giving them a preview of the Project Lead the Way program prior to moving into secondary education.

Students have opportunities in the arts and music and may choose to participate in Jazz Band, Band, and/or Orchestra. The arts and music programs are robust and allow students not only to participate in groups, but also to have individual opportunities to grow.

Students may elect to participate in our community-based program, Young Entrepreneurs Academy (YEA). YEA offers students the opportunity to develop a business plan and present it to area merchants and civic leaders in an attempt to receive funding to implement their unique business ideas. This program is a joint venture with the local Palatine Chamber of Commerce, creating natural connections between our business community and our student population.

Through our Scholars Program, students have the opportunity to explore different colleges and entrance requirements, attend field trips to local colleges, and learn about the Harper Promise Program. The Harper Promise Program enables students who are residents in our community to earn two years of free college tuition at William Rainey Harper College, our local, nationally ranked community college. Our Scholars program ensures that students know and understand well in advance what is expected of them to earn this opportunity and more importantly, they leave the program knowing that they have what it takes to be successful in a post secondary setting.

Finally, and unique to Walter R. Sundling Junior High, students have the opportunity to give back to the community through our ‘When Pigs Fly’ Event. For the last fifteen years, WRS has sponsored the charity event When Pigs Fly. During this time, we raised over \$100,000 for the Palatine Food Pantry and PATH (Palatine Assisting Through Hope). Students walked and collected donations to demonstrate what can happen when the young adults here at Sundling put their efforts toward helping others. Each year, students, staff, community, and PTA members walk our track and complete service projects to help others. The main service project we undertake is that the students make blankets and activity packets for children in hospitals. Typically, we try to set a goal each year to fill over 100 boxes for the Palatine Food Pantry and PATH, and raise over \$10,000 in monetary donations. In doing so, we hope to raise student awareness of needs within our own communities and offer them the chance to really make a difference.

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

Not applicable.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Walter R. Sundling Junior High School offers students a variety of co-curricular activities and enrichment opportunities. Students have the option to take foreign language courses in Spanish or French, and participate in daily physical education with a comprehensive physical and mental health program.

Our Social Studies program focuses on study of the past and how doing so can help us understand human behavior of the past and apply it to the future and current realities. Capitalizing on our local world-class museums, Sundling students take a trip to the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center. At the center, students have the experience to interact with a hologram of a Holocaust survivor and ask the hologram questions about their experience. It is always a very moving trip for both students and staff as they see and enter a replica train car used to carry prisoners and view actual concentration camp relics including piles of shoes. These experiences are highly thought provoking and are more often than not, one of the experiences students remember most about their time here. Though the museum is closed due to the current health crisis, students will still have this experience via the virtual field trip that will be provided.

Our school is 1:1 (one device for each student) with each student having their own Chromebook which is brought to and from school each day. Students are proficient in the use of Google Classroom, G Suite applications, and a variety of web-based tools which foster student engagement both in the classroom and at home. The 1:1 environment was in place prior to the current health crisis and the transfer to exclusively

online learning was a natural evolution and highly successful. During the closure of schools, school personnel worked diligently to ensure that students who did not have internet access were provided with internet hot spots to ensure equity of access.

3. Academic Supports:

Walter R. Sundling Junior High employs a myriad of strategies to ensure that all students' needs are met. A tiered system of support is in place to support all learners and can be modified to meet students' individual needs.

Sundling has been recognized as a Platinum Level School by Illinois Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. All students are taught the expected behaviors for success at WRS; positive reinforcement and encouragement are primary supports of the program. Our T Chart of behaviors allows students to know the exact consequences for inappropriate behavior and that the reason that some behaviors have consequences is because a safe environment that is respectful of others is always our top priority.

Students who need additional support can receive such support and or guidance by our referral system. Support students may receive at our second and third tier levels include 'check in-check out', time with our clinical staff, or additional support with academics as needed. If a student's need extends beyond our multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), a student may be referred for a case study to determine if special education supports are needed. If the student is found to be eligible for special education support, the team at Sundling strives to ensure that the student receives an education in the 'least restrictive environment'. WRS provides students with resource, instructional, and self-contained special education supports based on their individual needs and and special attention is paid to ensure that the student is aware of and feels comfortable availing himself/herself to all that Sundling has to offer in the form of extracurriculars and athletic opportunities.

Sundling boasts a strong population of English Language Learners. Spanish is the second most predominant language at Sundling and in our district overall. Our teachers participate on curriculum materials adoption committees to ensure that teaching materials selected for board adoption have identical materials available in Spanish to help support our students' goals of bilingualism. Teachers in bilingual classrooms receive robust professional development designed specifically for teaching English Language Learners their new language while maintaining their native language.

All Sundling teachers received two full days of training in Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching to ensure that they are equipped with tools to conduct courageous conversations about differences including race and culture, so that a true community can be built in the classrooms and all students feel validated and affirmed about who they are and where they come from. Parents of Sundling's bilingual students have access to community support via our Bilingual Parent Advisory Council (BPAC) which helps families navigate everything from understanding the American school system, keeping children safe online, to accessing tutoring and counseling.

All WRS students participate in state and federal assessments. However, more importantly, all students participate in our Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessments, crucial in providing the district with data to look at specific groups of students and ensuring that all students have the opportunity to make a year's worth of academic growth in a year's time.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

The Walter R. Sundling Junior High School staff has looked at a variety of ways to engage students during hybrid and virtual learning. In an effort to check in on our students and staff, we developed and implemented several surveys to determine how are students were feeling, what they currently needed, and asked for their feedback on things that were currently working or needed to change. We asked both our students and staff ways that could help everyone feel more connected in this current learning environment and then tried to implement those ideas throughout the school day, or at various times each quarter.

A few ways we have worked to build a sense of community and connectedness were through the use of music, Kahoot! (Learning) Games, March Madness brackets, and more. All of these ideas were brought to us by gathering the feedback, mainly from our student body and staff. Outside of these opportunities, we continue to look for ways to celebrate student accomplishments, including engagement, attendance, maintaining good grades, and more. We have also continued to feature our honor roll lists, Paladin of the Month awards, attendance recognition, etc.

Over the past year, we have also used social media outlets, including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, to promote our students and our school. Whether visiting homes to honor or recognize students, showcasing staff and students at-home learning set up, or going live with Dance Party Wednesday in physical education classes, we tried to engage with our school stakeholders to showcase the amazing learning opportunities and growth that have continued to occur during the school year.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Walter R. Sundling Junior High Schools has built and maintained strong partnerships with local agencies including the Palatine Food Pantry, Partners for Our Communities (POC), and Palatine Assisting Through Hope (PATH). We have secured food, clothing, funds, and much more for our families in need. Our Sundling support staff and our WRS PTA have created deep relationships through their work with these organizations. They have expanded their reach to other organizations including Northwest Community Hospital and Amita Health in an effort to connect our families to appropriate support, and work directly with our school and students.

In addition to our community partners, we have also worked with Northrop Grumman, Candor Health, the Museum of Science and Industry, and the Skokie Holocaust Museum to enhance and expand the learning experiences and resources for our staff and students. Along with our school partners, our Sundling PTA has worked to foster connections and resources for our families by providing parent workshops in the evenings with organizations such as the Palatine Police Department, Amita Health, and others to support education and social emotional needs at home. These partnerships have helped to build important relationships that support the overall growth and well-being of our students and families.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

Walter R. Sundling Junior High School creates an environment of value and support by providing its teachers with a voice. Over the past several months, our team has had to adjust, change, and pivot to address constant changes and to meet the needs of our students and families, and we have kept teachers and their voices at the center of our work. Since June 2020, we have collaborated with our building leadership team, custodial staff, parent groups, and others to review learning models and needs specific to our school.

We have worked together to ensure a safe learning environment for all, and also provide the most optimal educational opportunities during the pandemic. This has not been easy, it has been a difficult and challenging journey. By allowing people to share their thoughts, feelings, ideas, and possible solutions, we have been able to work together to educate our students. Throughout the school year, we have adapted and changed our staff meetings, team meetings, and other professional development opportunities to support

staff during current times, while also planning for possible changes and pivots down the road.

Due to the March 2020 COVID-19 school closures, our school district professional development (PD) model flipped from an in-person one to a virtual one. Many training sessions were videotaped or turned into screencasts so that they were readily accessible to teachers and administrative staff as needed, and viewable at any time. Instead of one or two shared professional development opportunities at our May 2020 Institute Day, we offered sixteen. Topics included CLR, Elementary and Junior High Literacy, JH History and Math, Mental Health, ELL, Special Education, and Fine Arts offerings. This was just the beginning of a comprehensive PD plan created for 2020-21 designed to support teachers and administrators. It also built capacity for all of us to move into and through hybrid learning with a common skill set. Our Instructional Technology department - and our Sundling IT coordinator - were particularly pivotal in making the leap from in-person learning to virtual/concurrent learning. Having these resources available as a reference throughout the school year became an invaluable PD tool for all staff.

The ability to gain feedback from school stakeholders through many avenues; including in person meetings, surveys, Zoom meetings, hallway conversations, emails, and phone calls/texts on the weekends has helped us to survive the current situation and provide quality education during difficult times. Our current work and experiences will only make us better, and help to drive our work for the future.

4. School Leadership:

The leadership and philosophy of Walter R. Sundling Junior High School revolves around the ability to build strong relationships that are based in open communication and trust. The importance of building relationships with school stakeholders is the foundation for the work that needs to be done now and in the future. This leadership is fostered by the building administration, and can be found in all aspects of our school community. This was especially true this year, as communication became the regular and consistent foundation for all of our work. Moving from in-person meetings to online meetings forced us to streamline our communication and information to all school stakeholders. The principal and assistant principal met more frequently to assess the climate and culture of our building, including student engagement and staff morale. Together we worked with building committees to provide targeted support, including resources and time.

During the summer of 2020, the principal and assistant principal worked with the building leadership team (BLT) to develop and implement a return to learn plan that was safe and manageable for everyone. Our BLT is focused on moving the school forward and made up of administrative leadership, including grade level team leaders, office staff, program assistants, and special education staff. We discussed every aspect of re-entry to school - both when we began virtually and later when students began to return to school in the hybrid model in October 2020. This planning included, but wasn't limited to, bus arrivals, student assessment as they entered the building, protocols for students who were ill, lunch ordering and serving, etc. From the beginning of the student day - until the students were off the bus at the end of the day - our building leadership team discussed - with the support of the district team - every aspect of a child's day. While a principal has always had the benefit of a building leadership team at Sundling, this year the group was vital to our school's success as it addressed building climate and culture, the real everyday needs of students for food, mental, and physical safety, in addition to continuing a robust education.

Administrative roles of the principal and assistant principal shifted slightly in the way they managed and interacted with the custodial staff. Regularly scheduled meetings were convened to review strict cleaning procedures, touching base, and ensuring custodial staff had a voice and could share expertise and knowledge to ensure our building remained efficient and safe. Together, we continued to review updated CDC/IDPH guidelines and recommendations from the school district, as well as shared feedback from staff in the building to ensure safety was our type priority, and that everyone had what they needed to focus on student learning.

Finally, WRS worked to provide a voice and leadership opportunities to our students through developing and completing surveys, presenting relevant topics, and discussing the strengths, struggles, and barriers for our current learning model. The importance of communication, support, and shared leadership has never

been more important as it has during the past year. We have been able to sustain, learn, and grow, even during this pandemic and challenging learning environment.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

Walter R. Sundling Junior High is one of the first schools in the district, and the State of Illinois, to adopt and implement Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching (CLR), the work of Dr. Sharroky Hollie. As a racially diverse school, Sundling's strength is its many cultures as well as the diversity of languages spoken. Consistent with our nationwide trend, our faculty is predominantly Caucasian and female, despite consistent efforts to increase the diversity in our workforce, which can lead students to feel unheard, their cultures unacknowledged.

In recognizing the disparity and in an effort to increase our teachers' abilities to validate and affirm their students' home cultures, Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching training continues to be provided. The protocols were designed to increase the engagement of all students and have been implemented with fidelity at Sundling. Teachers have become skilled in building communities in their classrooms based on the Rings of Culture, including: race, ethnicity, gender, orientation, religion, age, socioeconomic status, and nationality. The fact that CLR had been an integral part of classroom instruction for two years (prior to the current civil rights and health crises in our country) has enabled Sundling teachers to have the difficult conversations that have been imperative for students' identities, connection, and well-being.

At Sundling, accepting individual differences extends well beyond multi-cultural nights, it is a way of conducting oneself on a daily basis. We work with our students, using CLR methodology, to see how differences in one another don't make one person right and the other person wrong - quite the contrary. Our students learn that differences are related to that person's circles of culture and everyone has the right to be validated and affirmed.

Sundling Junior High is represented on our Board of Education Equity Committee by building administration, teachers, and school clinicians. The committee was in existence prior to the recent unrest and has continued to address how to 'level the playing field' for students who may experience barriers due to socioeconomic exigencies. The Equity Committee has also established a board policy committing to equity and the role of social justice in our community. In conjunction with the district, Sundling has worked to provide age-appropriate learning activities which help students express their concerns about inequality and civil unrest, in a safe environment. We also have provided families with talking points and resources to address concerns at various grade levels. Our clinicians are on hand to individually address students who have concerns and or anxiety related to ongoing unrest.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

At Walter R. Sundling Junior High School, our ability to maintain a high level of excellence over the years boils down to a few important components, which are essential for any school in any year. This year, the one practice we have relied heavily on is our relationship-building.

As we learned from stakeholder feedback during the pandemic and virtual learning, we understood that a sense of connectedness was missing. Being connected to your school your teachers, and your peers are all important factors in the junior high school, and also support positive growth and adolescent development.

We worked with our Culture and Climate and Continuous Improvement Teams, in collaboration with district office personnel, to develop and implement opportunities and resources to help our students connect with the staff, with aspects of our school, and with each other. The importance of building relationships with others is an important part of the junior high experience, and fosters appropriate development of social and academic skills needed for life.

Sundling has always worked hard to build relationships with students and families. We understand the importance of these relationships in regards to student growth and learning, and building a sense of community. During the pandemic, we found there was a greater level of need for transforming these relationships because in-person connections were lacking for many. We developed a PALS (Paladin Allies of Sundling) mentoring program that connected staff to students who were not completing work, attending classes, or engaging with school. Many of these students, also fall into our struggling sub categories on our standardized assessments over the years, so this is not a coincidence. Meeting with students and listening to them has allowed us to get to know our students better, and also remind them that we care about them and want them to succeed. It has been an eye-opening learning experience for all involved and will continue to help guide our future work.

Successful educational relationships with students during a pandemic out of necessity include transforming our relationships with our parents/guardians. Our annual school events (Walk Your Schedule, Parent Orientation, Parent-Teacher Conferences, Open House, etc.) all had to be reconsidered and reconfigured. Even our weekly communications needed to be reevaluated. The first action we took was to increase the frequency and detail of our parental communication. We made sure our doors were always open - virtually. Teachers and administrators alike made themselves accessible to parents/guardians as often as possible. We found both creative ways and additional resources to ensure we were meeting the communication needs throughout our school community.

What we learned from our experiences is that our commitment to building relationships remains central to who we are at Walter R. Sundling Junior High School. We didn't need to change our focus; we needed to change our delivery model. And that that has made all the difference.