

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

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

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

Official School Name Skyline Middle School
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 20663 US Highway 65
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Urbana State MO Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 65767-8602

County Hickory

Telephone (417) 993-4254 Fax (417) 993-5948

Web site/URL https://www.skylineschools.info/ E-mail jblair@skylineschools.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* Mr. Randy Dougherty E-mail rdougherty@skylineschools.net
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Hickory County School District R-I Tel. (417) 993-4226

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. Troy Pinon
(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):
- 1 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 1 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 3 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	26	34	60
6	27	29	56
7	29	30	59
8	35	35	70
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	117	128	245

*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
 - 0 % Asian
 - 0.4 % Black or African American
 - 0.8 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 98 % White
 - 0.8 % 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: 12%

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	6
(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)]	29
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	233
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.12
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	12

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: 44 %

Total number students who qualify: 109

8. Students receiving special education services: 10 %
25 Total number of students served

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional conditions. 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>5</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>7</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay | <u>7</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>2</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>1</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>3</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: 5
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	1
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	14
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	4
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	1
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	2

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	96%	96%	96%	96%	97%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

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

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

The mission of Skyline Middle School is to provide a nurturing environment and well-balanced sequential study program, leading to academic proficiency for the whole child.

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.

Skyline Middle School has been operating as usual during the 2020-2021 school year. The Hickory County School District, along with Skyline Middle School, has taken necessary precautions to be able to keep our in-person learning intact throughout the year. This has included masking at the appropriate times, ensuring every classroom is socially distanced, and consulting with the county health department in following Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines. The fact that our school has remained open is a testament to our staff, community, and parents who have been supportive of all the policies.

Although over 90% of our students have chosen to attend classes in-person, the school and the district have offered virtual options to parents for the entirety of the 2020-2021 school year. The staff at Skyline Middle School has maintained virtual classrooms for those choosing to stay at home or for those who might find themselves quarantined. This model has worked well for the school and has helped maintain a level of semi-normalcy throughout the year.

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

The success of Skyline Middle School can largely be attributed to the quality of staff, parental involvement, and community support. The school is located in a very rural setting in Southwest Missouri and is outside of any town's city limits. Skyline Middle School is located roughly three miles from the nearest small town and approximately sixty miles north of the nearest metropolitan area (Springfield). The school district of Hickory County R-1 consists of Skyline Elementary, Skyline Middle School, and Skyline High School. The district is off of Highway 65 and came into existence in 1958 when the four small towns of Preston, Urbana, Cross Timbers, and Tunas consolidated their four schools. The school district has a long history of success and has been awarded the Distinction in Performance Award from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) for seventeen straight years. Skyline Elementary is also a past recipient of the National Blue Ribbon Award.

The past and continued success of Skyline Middle School is due, in large part, to the school's staff. They take the statement "EVERY CHILD MATTERS" to heart and treat every student with dignity and respect. The staff takes a great interest in all our students and uses a variety of strategies to ensure success for every child. Although a school cannot control the household environment of every student, the staff takes an interest in each child's life, and will do anything possible to make school a positive environment where the student can grow and develop the skills necessary to lead a successful life. Skyline Middle School staff works hard to ensure that every student that walks through our door is treated equally. The staff fully believes that every child has the right to feel safe, secure, and cared for.

The community and parental support that Skyline Middle School and the Hickory County School District receives is second-to-none. Parents take an active role in the education of their students and partner with teachers to increase student success. Most of our parents are only a phone call away and support the decisions of the staff, administrators, and district to the fullest. Not only does Skyline Middle School receive parental support, but it receives the support of other community members. The school is never lacking in volunteers. Community members offer a variety of resources to help improve the education and opportunities that we can offer our students. Skyline Middle School has a history of former students who are proud of their alma mater and are more than willing to make sure that future students have the same type of experience.

The past twelve months have been a shining example of what makes this place special. Skyline Middle School is rural, as previously stated, so when schools statewide shutdown last March, it was not as simple as going online for our community. The district has a very high percentage of students without internet or cell phone capabilities, so the staff and parents had to work together to make arrangements to distribute paper copies of assignments and textbooks to students. The staff was flexible enough to work virtually with those that had the capability, but also worked to ensure those who did not that capability could still have a full educational experience. The school and community also went out of their way to make sure other needs were being met by offering daily food services and online tutoring.

One word really summarizes what has made Skyline Middle School successful – TEAMWORK. The ability of the school, the staff, the parents, and the community to work together for the betterment of the school's educational environment speaks loudly of the quality of people in this area. This school and this staff genuinely care for the students, and in return, the parents and community genuinely care for the school. Skyline Middle School is a unique place and one that we are very proud of.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

Mathematics

Mathematics, like all of the curricula at Skyline Middle School, is based on the Missouri Learning Standards, and works to reinforce the concepts therein. Mathematics is taught daily in fifty minute blocks at each grade level. The staff has worked to develop an approach that uses both hands-on and paper/pencil work, while still utilizing online and digital resources. The base math curriculum is the McGraw Hill series that begins at the third grade level and is then followed throughout the middle school. The staff decided that the McGraw Hill My Math and Glencoe Math series best follows the Missouri Learning Standards. The mathematics teachers use IXL for benchmarking and teaching processes throughout the year. Additional use of the program includes providing reinforcement and guided practice. The use of daily “math minutes” has been a critical part of the teaching process, as the staff uses this to ensure skills are being taught in the proper scope and sequence, and critical skills are being reinforced. The data received from the IXL online testing and benchmarking is used to help teachers identify gaps in learning. Students can then be assigned individual modules to improve their skills in a given area. Students, who have been identified as lacking certain skills, are referred for additional mathematics time with our Title I services. To fully understand mathematical concepts, it is critical for students to observe teachers working through sample problems. With that in mind, Skyline Middle School invested in writing tablets which allow teachers to work problems that can be relayed to our virtual students in an online classroom. Students were able to view the problem being worked and were able to interact in real time with the teacher.

Reading/English Language Arts

Skyline Middle School follows a balanced literacy approach that strives to integrate reading and writing across multiple instruction areas. A heavy emphasis is placed on basic reading skills, reading fluency, and reading comprehension as it is our strong belief that reading is foundational for all learning. Reading is taught daily in fifty minute blocks for all students grade five through eight. The foundation for the reading curriculum is the McGraw Hill series, which is utilized district wide beginning in first grade. Teachers supplement the curriculum with Read Works, Scholastic Scope, and Coach Digital. Student reading comprehension is assessed four times yearly utilizing SRI (Scholastic Reading Inventory) to help benchmark and measure growth in reading. The language arts and composition curriculum are integrated together. Every student has language arts daily in fifty minute blocks. Skyline Middle School uses Write Source by Houghton Mifflin as the primary curriculum source and supplements with Performance Coach, Easy Grammar, Edulastic, and Scholastic Scope. Teachers also utilize daily “grammar minutes” for scope and sequencing purposes. An emphasis has been placed on making language arts cross-curricular to reinforce reading and comprehension across multiple subject areas. SRI testing for comprehension has been used as a tool to identify growth and learning gaps with the students. This data can then be used to help the teacher fill the learning gaps or allow students to get additional help through Title I services. The end of 2019-2020 school year was challenging. When schools began to shut down, the school’s principal concern was making sure that students had access to reading materials from the library. The language arts staff assembled take home libraries, which allowed students to check out books virtually and have parents pick them up. The language arts curriculum moved online, and teachers continued testing reading comprehension through online resources that students could use.

Science

The foundation of our science curriculum is the McGraw Hill text series. Skyline Middle School utilizes this as it best fits with the Missouri Learning Standards. In addition to the text series, teachers utilize Triumph Learning and Kessler Science to supplement the materials. The staff also uses monthly publications from the Missouri Department of Conservation to help in reinforcing the principals of life and physical science. The science teachers have also made a conscious effort over the last three years to incorporate outside resources and in-class labs that will expose the students to STEM (Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). Teachers use a variety of assessments from McGraw Hill and IXL to help

benchmark student knowledge and identify gaps in education. Beginning next year, we will start working with Missouri State University. The University recently received a grant to provide STEM and coding resources to rural areas. Science staff will receive a week of intensive training and have access to several resources at the University. Science teachers have always placed an emphasis on hands-on learning and laboratory exercises. With the onset of COVID, they had to adjust the way the normal classroom operates. Group labs have been adjusted so they can be done by a single student while keeping social distance standards. Labs have been posted online so virtual students can recreate the lab at home. At the onset of the pandemic, science teachers built “take home labs” that included all materials that students would need to complete laboratory work at home.

Social Studies/History/Civics

The social studies curriculum in grades five through eight uses a textbook series from McGraw Hill and Pearson. The curriculum has been sequenced for teaching American history in fifth grade, early ages world history in sixth grade, late ages world history in seventh grade, and civics in eighth grade. This sequence has proven successful in student retention and understanding of the basics in all social studies areas. Teachers utilize online resources through IXL and CNN to reinforce content areas and current events. Teachers test periodically for comprehension of the Missouri Learning Standards for their given grade levels.

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

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

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Physical Education/Health

Physical education and health curriculum is offered daily for every grade level. Emphasis is placed on keeping students active and promoting healthy lifestyles. Students in grades seven and eight receive independent health classes. Physical education instructors expose students to a variety of areas, including strength training and cardiovascular training, in addition to instruction on the importance of staying physically active, and making good choices. The diversity of activities that instructors expose the students to also helps to give students choices in maintaining physical fitness. Furthermore, Skyline Middle School works with a healthy school grant through the University of Kansas that further provides students resources for healthy living. In 2020, Skyline Middle School was recognized as one of America’s Healthiest Schools.

Fine Arts

Skyline Middle School maintains active curricula in the areas of art, music, band, and drama. Students have the option to participate in choir beginning in fifth grade and can receive instruction in band beginning in seventh grade. Students may also take part in after-school drama programs beginning in sixth grade.

Technology/Media

Students receive education in technology and computer usage each year at Skyline Middle School. Instruction begins with basic keyboarding in fifth grade and graduates to program usage and coding by eighth grade. Skyline Middle School has Chromebook carts in each classroom and has a 1:1 student-computer ratio. In addition to Chromebooks, the school also has two labs with thirty computers each. The staff at Skyline Middle School utilizes software and online resources for a variety of online assessments and benchmarking across all grade levels, so students being well-versed in technology is critical for our school. With the onset of the pandemic, it has become vital. As schools closed at the end of the 2019-2020 school

year, students were trained on accessing the online classrooms. The use of online classroom has persisted through the 2020-2021 school year. The utilization of online classrooms has played a critical role in keeping quarantined students up-to-date with schoolwork. Students who may need to work from home are given Chromebooks for checkout and have an open line to contact teachers with any problems or questions. Skyline Middle School also has access to two library/media centers. The media centers have online resources for research, which students can use throughout the day.

3. Academic Supports:

Skyline Middle School strives to meet all academic and social/emotional needs of our students. Our teachers encourage students to be active learners and are involved in their full education. Teacher planning is deliberate, and each teacher strives to meet the needs of each student.

Students receive Title I services based on benchmark testing performance. Title I teachers work with students in the areas of math and reading to meet the needs of students. Aside from Title I, many middle school teachers offer before-school or after-school tutoring for students. Any student can stay for tutoring and it is offered every day of the week.

The needs of special education students are determined through comprehensive evaluations. Once a student has qualified to receive special education services, each student is provided with specialized instruction to meet their individual needs. Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) that contain goals specific to the student's needs are written. Parents are actively involved in IEP planning and implementation. Student progress is monitored quarterly. Our district is a member of the Exceptional Pupil Cooperative (EPCO). EPCO provides the district with resources to assist in meeting the needs of each child. They provide the following services to the district: Speech/Language Pathologist, Visually Impaired Teachers, Hearing Impaired Teachers, and In-District Autism Consultants, just to name a few. At EPCO, they have an Alternative School (CAS) for at-risk special education students as well as a Special Learning Center (SLC) for students with significant needs. We have special education classrooms in the middle school, and also offer a Functional Life Skills Classroom.

During remote learning, the district provided services for diverse learners in the home setting. Speech/Language materials were sent home for parents related to each student's needs. The Speech/Language implementer scheduled weekly time to work with students via Zoom or over the phone. The special education teachers sent materials home with students for distance learning. They contacted parents weekly either by phone calls or text, through Zoom meetings, and by using Google Classroom. Contact numbers were distributed to parents during this time, so they could call or text if they needed assistance. The district scheduled times that teachers were available at the school to meet with parents or students to provide assistance with distance learning materials.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

Developing a positive climate and culture has always been a focus at Skyline Middle School. Engaging students in their own academic success is a huge part of creating a positive culture. Beginning in fifth grade, students are academically challenged to grow as people and as students. The staff has a structured and varied curriculum that both engages students and pushes them to meet the broader educational goals of the district. A reward box of healthy snacks and drinks can always be found in the principals' offices as a form of rewarding students who have put forth their best effort. The principal consistently makes positive phone calls home, so students will know that their efforts are being recognized. Assemblies are held throughout the year to celebrate student performance, and the staff does a great job of setting goals for all our kids.

For students to be fully engaged, all of their needs must be met; therefore, the school has been working on ways to improve this area. The school has increased the counseling services offered and has worked with the University of Kansas on a healthy school grant that improves both physical and mental health. During the 2019-2020 school year, Skyline Middle School also began offering a "Super Snack" to all students at the end of the day. This snack is offered free to every student, and helps in meeting a basic human need so that students can perform their best and be fully engaged with their learning. Skyline Middle School also has a TOP (Teen Outreach Program) program which offers personal hygiene items and toiletries to students free of charge. This allows students to feel better about themselves and produce better results in the classroom.

Although our school maintained in-person instruction throughout the 2020-2021 school year, we recognized the need to address the mental health needs of students who might have been quarantined for long periods. The school began offering additional counseling services to students upon return, along with academic support so students would not feel overwhelmed by missing in-person classes. By working closely with our local health departments, we were able to develop a strategy to focus on mental and physical health of our students while still maintaining high academic standards.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Skyline Middle School is extremely fortunate as it has always had strong family and community support. The school has always recognized the importance of parental involvement and continues to work closely to develop and nurture an environment in which parents feel welcome and needed. Over the last several years, Skyline Middle School has made a point to communicate with parents regarding the Title I Program, national educational standards, Missouri educational standards, state and local assessment tools, the school's performance profile, and the school's assessment tools. It is our belief that being transparent with the community in regard to our teaching and learning, we empower parents to become more engaged in their student's education. Skyline Middle School has also tried to further community engagement through activities including open house, in-person parent/teacher conferences, virtual parent/teacher conferences, progress reporting, office phone calls, parent meetings, and a variety of school based activities. Skyline Middle School also keeps parents informed through Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Remind, and through the use of the School Messenger system. It is through these open lines of communication that students, parents, staff, and administration can be on the "same page" in regard to student achievement. Through continued community and parental communication, the students not only feel supported at school, but in the home environment.

The role of community engagement has come to the forefront throughout the COVID crisis. Skyline Middle School wanted to ensure that parents felt safe sending their students to in-person instruction. Beginning in mid-July, the school's plans were made available for parental and community input. This open line of communication only serves to further strengthen the bond between the school and its stakeholders. The community has been actively involved in making in-person instruction successful this year, and in return, is fully engaged and involved with student outcomes. Community businesses and parents were at the forefront for donating cleaning supplies to make sure the doors of the school could remain open.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

The general culture of Skyline Middle School is one of mutual respect where teachers and administrators respect each other's time, teaching styles, and goals for student success. Through teacher feedback, administration organizes professional development opportunities that will further the abilities of the staff to meet the educational goals of the school. The professional development opportunities are aimed at growing the teachers as educators and help to meet the overall school's goals, mission, and vision. Regular faculty meetings allow staff to discuss any issues that need to be addressed. These meetings also serve as a vehicle to celebrate individual and group successes. The focus of any professional development is always grounded with careful design, continual learning, and research-based practices.

Skyline Middle School is also fortunate enough to have several staff members with a great deal of teaching experience. These teachers share the knowledge with colleagues through professional dialogue and shared classroom observations. All new staff members receive a mentor. The mentor acquaints the new teacher with school policies and procedures. The mentor also guides the new teacher through grade level expectations, professional development requirements, and state certification requirements. Although we have minimal staff turnover, the existing staff has been critical in acclimating new staff members to our school's expectations and policies.

The 2020-21 school year provided a unique example of providing professional development based on a very specific set of circumstances. Due to the technological limitations of our rural community, professional development was held on how best to serve students who elected to do virtual learning. This involved specific instruction on the use of virtual classrooms and how to serve students without internet connections. This process included a great amount of professional dialogue and collaboration before the school year started.

4. School Leadership:

The leadership style at Skyline Middle School (as well as the Hickory County School District) has always been a site-based management strategy. With this style, a leader must be able and willing to empower staff to be active participants in the decision-making process. It is the school's belief that when a site-based management approach is taken, the school's culture is more positive, and staff will work harder to achieve the goals that were set through their feedback. When staff are empowered to be a part of the decision making process, they will naturally take more ownership for it and ultimately feel more responsible for making sure the goal is reached.

Skyline Middle School also takes great pride in allowing our teachers to teach. It is the belief that the building principal should not micro-manage staff but give them the tools and training to be successful in the goals they have set for their students. Site-based management encourages feedback and sets goals that all stakeholders can feel responsible for and take pride in. Just like any other school, we have a curriculum and state learning standards, but we firmly believe in giving our teachers the freedom to teach that curriculum in a way that takes full benefit of their personal strengths and the strengths of their students.

In addition to a site-based management approach, the administration tries to use the strategies of servant leadership with all staff and students. The staff has also adopted this philosophy and uses it to make a genuine positive difference in student lives. This leadership philosophy takes an attitude of the leader serving others. Whether it is the building principal or a classroom teacher, serving students is what we do. This may take the form of providing new educational opportunities or meeting the personal needs of students through programs, like Super Snacks, tutoring, or offering personal hygiene items through TOPS.

The principals from each building use these two leadership styles to come together and discuss district-wide policies and educational decisions. This conversation is then moved to a building level, which allows staff members to freely provide feedback to the building-level administrator. It is through this free exchanging of ideas and staff empowerment that Skyline Middle School has been able to have success and continues to build for the future.

The site-based management and servant leadership styles were never on greater display than in the last twelve months. Teachers and administrators took the personal responsibility to make sure every child received education whether this was in-person, remote, or virtual. In the days preceding the 2020-2021 school year, the administration met with the staff of Skyline Middle School to develop a plan that would best serve every student in the school. Ultimately, this led to the formation of the school's response to the COVID crisis, which has resulted in full in-person instruction for the entire school year. Again, in-person instruction was a shared goal between the administration, staff, and community. This allowed our school to offer a good educational experience for all students.

As school leaders, we can either accept excuses for students' inability to learn, or we can accept the responsibility of student learning. The administration and staff at Skyline Middle School accepts that responsibility and looks at every avenue to improve the students' educational experiences. The teachers and students alike, believe that they can learn, and education is the way to a brighter future.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

Although Skyline Middle School has little in the way of cultural diversity, we do emphasize and prioritize educating our students on a variety of cultural experiences. The school has always placed priority on every student matters, and thus, every person matters regardless of heritage or background. The curriculum throughout the middle school supports a variety of belief systems and works to educate students on the global significance of cultural differences.

Even though the cultural diversity at Skyline Middle School is limited, the socioeconomic diversity is not. With nearly 45% of our students qualifying for free/reduced lunches, the district serves a large range of students with economic disadvantages. The school has worked hard to help meet the needs of these disadvantaged students with a wide range of programs previously mentioned, such as the Super Snack and TOPS programs. The staff also recognizes the presence of diversity and the need to teach using a variety of teaching strategies to meet the needs of all students.

In helping to meet the needs of a diverse population, Skyline Middle School has worked closely with the Hickory County and Dallas County Health Departments in teaching students about healthy lifestyles. These groups have also offered tangible supports to the school to help meet the personal needs of students to improve circumstances at home. The school has also been fortunate to have the support of several individual community members and several community businesses in offering items to help meet the needs of the diverse student population.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

The single practice that has been instrumental in the success of Skyline Middle School since school closures began has been community-wide communication. The school recognized early on that school closures would result in confusion and, in some cases, panic on the part of parents. This strategy began four days before we closed our doors, by informing our teachers that closure could be a possibility and allowing them to prepare accordingly. Knowing the technological limitations of our area, the staff immediately began preparing two weeks of take-home assignments with clear directions and different methods of contacting school staff. As the pandemic grew, and it became apparent we would be closed for the remainder of the school year, the administration and staff immediately sent out communication regarding how all schoolwork for the year would be handled. Detailed instructions on distribution and collection of assignments were given, along with a staff wide plan to make this successful. Shortly after, parents were informed of multiple ways in which school meals could be picked up or distributed. In addition, the entire staff made sure each student received at least one phone call per week to check on their academic progress and address any concerns. The transparency and trust that was built between Skyline Middle School and the parents of the community was the foundation of beginning the 2020-2021 school year successfully.

Using this strategy of transparency and communication, the school began taking input from the community regarding concerns with the 2020-2021 school year. Through this open line of communication, it became very apparent that parents were overwhelmingly in favor of in-person instruction but did have some concerns. The district took these concerns seriously and addressed them. Prior to the school year starting, we put together an action plan addressing the concerns of the community while still following the advice of the local health department and CDC. This method of communication has continued throughout the school year with parents and community members commenting on how thankful they were of the information being provided. Throughout this process, students knew the staff genuinely cared for and missed them. Benchmark testing conducted in the fall shows that students were on track for grade level expectations.

The one refinement the school has made and changed along the way was to develop a central point for all communication. Prior to the pandemic, Skyline Middle School sent information out on a variety of platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, and the school webpage. Early on, it became apparent that the school needed to consolidate communication efforts so parents and students could find all necessary information on one platform. The school and the district migrated toward using the school webpage, which has led to an improved webpage design and downloadable app to further bolster community communication. I think that it would be fair to state that the staff and community relations have only improved during this difficult period and the sharing of common goals have only aided the overall academic success of our students.