

SOUTH HEART SCHOOL DISTRICT #9

STRATEGIC PLAN



June 2026

Approved: June 10, 2026

South Heart Public School

Strategic Plan

Last Revised: May 2026

- **Vision:**
"Soaring with the Eagles: Excellence, Integrity, Pride."
- **Mission:**
"We prepare students to soar as lifelong learners, leaders, and productive citizens through respect, accountability, and service."
- **Beliefs:**
 - S – Serve**
We care for our community with pride and respect.
 - O – Own It**
We are accountable for our actions and learning.
 - A – Achieve**
We strive for excellence and lifelong learning.
 - R – Rise**
We lead with integrity and responsibility.

Eagles SOAR

I. Educational Location and Community Profile

South Heart School serves a proud rural community located approximately 10 miles west of Dickinson along Interstate 94 in southwestern North Dakota. The district provides comprehensive PreK–12 educational services to residents of the City of South Heart and the surrounding rural areas of Stark County.

According to recent U.S. Census estimates, the City of South Heart has a population of approximately 414 residents. The region is characterized by a robust work ethic, supported by an economy rooted in agriculture, energy production, manufacturing, and related industrial sectors. Sustained activity within the regional oil industry has provided strong economic opportunities for local families, significantly influencing regional workforce and career pathways.

The community served by South Heart School is predominantly rural, with English serving as the primary language spoken within both the municipality and the school. The district remains deeply committed to meeting the academic, social, and emotional needs of all students while fostering collaborative, high-impact partnerships between the school, local families, and regional businesses.

II. Mission, Philosophy, and Extracurricular Life

As an integral part of the North Dakota public education system, South Heart School maintains a foundational commitment to academic excellence, student growth, and proactive community engagement. Through high-quality, evidence-based instruction and a systemic focus on continuous improvement, the district strives to develop well-rounded citizens.

Complementing its core academic programs, South Heart School supports a vibrant student life through diverse athletic and extracurricular pathways. The district offers numerous activities sanctioned by the North Dakota High School Activities Association (NDHSAA), alongside high-performing, school-sponsored organizations including:

- Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA)
- Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA)
- National FFA Organization (FFA)
- Future City Program
- North Dakota Honor Society
- Student Council
- Drama
- Music Vocal
- Music Instrumental
- Senior and Junior High Acalympics
- Close-Up
- Senior High Math Counts
- Speech
- Yearbook
- Science Olympiad

These programs are intentionally designed to cultivate student leadership, teamwork, technical creativity, and personal accountability. Throughout its history, South Heart School has remained a student-centered institution that values character development alongside academic achievement, preparing students to soar as productive leaders in an ever-changing world.

III. Enrollment Trends and Capacity Management

South Heart School has experienced steady, documented enrollment growth over the past five years. For the current academic year, enrollment stands at 416 students in grades K–12, disaggregated as follows:

- Grades K–6: 233 students
- Grades 7–12: 183 students

This overall trajectory represents an increase of approximately 16.6% over a five-year period, reflecting a sustained period of regional expansion. Enrollment stabilized completely between the previous school year and the current school year, holding flat at 416 students.

While the district continues to receive robust open-enrollment applications from neighboring communities, current longitudinal patterns suggest that student growth is beginning to level off. To ensure that facilities, staffing resources, and fiscal budgets remain aligned with student needs, the School Board enforces protective capacity guidelines.

To preserve favorable student-to-teacher ratios and allow for highly individualized instruction, district policy caps enrollment at:

- 32 students maximum per grade level.
- 16 students maximum per individual classroom section.

The administrative team monitors these enrollment metrics continuously to drive data-informed decisions regarding long-term staffing, budgeting, and facility utilization.

IV. Instructional Methodology and Technology Integration

The district operates under the core belief that all students can achieve at exceptionally high levels when provided with a structured, supportive learning environment and rigorous instruction. While South Heart School embraces a grounded, traditional educational philosophy, classroom practices are strictly informed by modern educational research.

A. Foundational Curricular Focus Areas

- The Science of Reading & Mathematics: Instructional frameworks prioritize evidence-based foundational skills in reading and mathematics to build the advanced critical thinking capabilities required for modern career and college readiness.

- **Sustained Silent Reading (SSR):** This district-wide initiative provides dedicated, structured time for students to engage with self-selected texts, fostering an enduring culture of literacy and independent learning.

B. Purposeful Technology Standards

Instruction is delivered primarily via an on-site, face-to-face setting. To ensure equitable access to expanded coursework, secondary students are provided access to online and distance-learning opportunities. Through Advanced Placement (AP) frameworks, dual-credit courses, and technical skills training via the Roughrider Area Career & Technical Center (RACTC) and Southwest Center for Technical Education (SWCTE), 11th and 12th-grade students can customize their academic pathways.

Every PreK–12 classroom is structurally equipped with an interactive Smart Board to enhance visual engagement and provide immediate formative feedback loops.

The South Heart Technology Philosophy

South Heart School is intentionally *not* a 1-to-1 personal device district. This pedagogical choice is maintained to intentionally prioritize verbal communication, active interpersonal exchange, and physical written literacy within the classroom setting.

To protect this high-engagement learning environment, the district enforces a school-wide cell phone ban during the instructional day. This policy has demonstrably increased direct student participation, peer collaboration, and meaningful focused engagement.

V. Comprehensive Assessment Framework and Student Engagement Data

South Heart School utilizes a balanced, multi-tiered evaluation matrix to monitor both student academic achievement and holistic engagement to drive continuous district improvement.

A. Systemic Assessment Schedule

- **State Academic Testing:** Students participate in the North Dakota A+ (NDA+) Interim Assessments (Grades K–10) and the NDA+ Summative Assessments (Grades 3–8 and 11), in compliance with the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction.
- **Elementary Diagnostics:** Students in grades K–6 complete quarterly IXL Diagnostic Assessments in English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics.
- **Middle School Diagnostics Expansion:** Beginning in the upcoming school year, 7th and 8th-grade students will be integrated into the quarterly IXL diagnostic testing framework to support the district's focused "Science of Mathematics" initiative.

B. Analysis of Academic Performance Data

Recent state and interim assessment indicators highlight distinct institutional strengths alongside specific areas targeted for strategic growth:

- **Elementary Performance (Grades K–6):** Students consistently perform at or above state averages in both Reading/ELA and Mathematics. Performance in mathematics is particularly strong, with multiple grade levels exceeding state baselines by notable margins. Elementary science scores also surpass state averages.
- **High School Performance (Grades 9–12):** 10th-grade metrics exceed state averages across ELA, mathematics, and science, while 9th-grade cohorts show strong competency in mathematics.
- **ACT Metrics (Grade 11):** The district average composite score reflects distinct student pathways. Students enrolled in Advanced Placement or Dual-Credit tracks achieved an average composite score of 22, while students focused primarily on technical education and immediate workforce readiness registered a disaggregated average score of 14.3.
- **Targeted Growth Areas (Grades 7–8):** Assessment data identifies clear instructional opportunities in the middle school tiers. Grade 8 performance in ELA, mathematics, and science fell below state averages, and Grade 7 ELA metrics mirrored this trend.

C. Evaluation of Student Engagement (NDSSES Results)

To complement academic data, the district analyzed preliminary data from the 2025-2026 North Dakota Student Engagement Survey (NDSSES), reflecting responses from South Heart students in grades 3–12. This survey evaluates student perceptions across three distinct engagement domains—behavioral, cognitive, and emotional—as well as school belonging.

The metrics indicate that South Heart students significantly outpace statewide averages in deep, authentic connection to their learning environment:

Engagement Domain & Definition PDF	South Heart Metric PDF	Statewide Benchmark PDF	District Strategic Takeaway PDF
Behavioral Engagement: Measures positive conduct, effort, attendance, and	71.65% Committed	55.17% <i>Committed</i>	South Heart students display exemplary conduct and active participation. The district's disengagement rate

Engagement Domain & Definition PDF	South Heart Metric PDF	Statewide Benchmark PDF	District Strategic Takeaway PDF
visible participation.	24.30% Compliant 4.05% Disengaged	34.71% <i>Compliant</i> 10.11% <i>Disengaged</i>	(4.05%) is less than half the state average (10.11%).
Cognitive Engagement: Measures intellectual investment, time-on-task, and valuing of learning.	48.29% Committed 43.30% Compliant 8.41% Disengaged	44.10% <i>Committed</i> 47.53% <i>Compliant</i> 8.38% <i>Disengaged</i>	While exceeding the state baseline for "Committed" learners, 43.30% of students remain "Compliant"—meaning they work primarily for extrinsic rewards or grades rather than personal value.
Emotional Engagement: Measures feelings of enjoyment regarding school, teachers, and peers.	62.31% Committed 25.23% Compliant	52.18% <i>Committed</i> 30.89% <i>Compliant</i>	Over 62% of students possess an authentic emotional affinity for their school environment, outperforming the state average by over 10 percentage points.

Engagement Domain & Definition PDF	South Heart Metric PDF	Statewide Benchmark PDF	District Strategic Takeaway PDF
	12.46% Disengaged	16.93% <i>Disengaged</i>	
School Belonging: Measures a student's perceived sense of social inclusion vs. exclusion.	51.56% High Belonging 33.44% Moderate Belonging 15.00% Low Belonging	47.15% <i>High Belonging</i> 36.35% <i>Moderate Belonging</i> 16.50% <i>Low Belonging</i>	More than half of the student body feels deeply included and connected to the South Heart school culture, exceeding the state norm.

Note on Scale Scores: On domain scale scores, South Heart's elementary tier (Grades 3–6) registered strong baselines, highlighted by a 3.51/4.00 in behavioral engagement and a 3.33/4.00 in school belonging. The secondary tier (Grades 7–12) demonstrated matching strength, scoring 3.76/5.00 in behavioral engagement and 3.74/5.00 in school belonging, outperforming the state average in every measured metric category.

D. Remediation and Student Support

To aggressively address the middle school academic performance gap highlighted in subsection B, the district has implemented a targeted Middle School Concept. This model focuses core instruction—Math, ELA, Science, and Social Studies—exclusively under teachers with documented instructional strengths in those specific disciplines.

Crucially, the NDSSES student engagement metrics justify this structural shift; by channeling the high behavioral commitment (71.65%) and strong emotional belonging (51.56%) of our students into specialized, high-engagement classrooms, the district can directly convert positive student behavior into higher cognitive and academic achievement.

Assessment and engagement protocols remain fully customized for individual learners. Students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) or Section 504 Plans systematically receive all legal accommodations, modifications, and testing supports necessary to ensure equitable academic access.

VI. School Climate, Data Analysis, and Future Professional Development

A. Context and Evaluation Framework

To establish an objective baseline for continuous district improvement and maximize the efficacy of our teaching and learning environments, South Heart School administered two comprehensive evaluation instruments during the 2025–2026 academic year. The first, the *Cognia Climate & Culture Teacher Survey*, yielded 23 professional responses across the elementary and high school campuses to evaluate classroom pedagogical practices. Concurrently, the district participated in the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction's *Vital Network End-of-Year Pulse Check*, achieving a 69% response rate from 35 district educators and support professionals to track perceptions of climate, culture, and operational well-being.

An analysis of these disaggregated data points reveals powerful core cultural strengths alongside clear target areas for strategic professional development.

B. Core Cultural Strengths and Professional Intersections

The data demonstrates that South Heart School boasts an exceptionally collaborative, supportive internal environment that serves as a strong foundation for future growth.

- **Collegial Trust & Respect:** An overwhelming 96% of surveyed faculty describe their colleagues as "caring," while 83% explicitly characterize peer interactions as "supportive" and "helpful". Qualitative data from the *Vital Network* reinforces this, with staff celebrating the district's "close-knit, family-like culture" and deep mutual professional respect.
- **Commitment to Retention:** This strong internal support network translates directly to stable workforce retention, with 82% of all responding staff members confirming their clear intention to return to the district for the upcoming academic year.
- **Mission-Aligned Engagement:** Educators report a high level of dedication to their pupils; 100% of surveyed teachers state that "students are learning" as a primary day-to-day expectation, and 83% note that students spent their daily classroom time actively engaged in thinking.

C. Identified Growth Opportunities and Structural Constraints

While core beliefs align with student success, survey data highlights a distinct variance between what teachers *believe* is best for students and the *daily structural capacity* they have to execute those strategies within the current school framework:

- **Time and Pace Pressures:** Teachers strongly agree that successful students learn best when actively engaged in the learning process (scoring 3.70/4.00) and when linking new information to existing knowledge (scoring 3.65/4.00). However, when describing their daily experience completing professional duties, 70% of teachers report feeling "rushed," 70% report "never enough time," and 61% describe their environment as "hectic". Furthermore, 48% of staff explicitly report feeling "tired" on a daily basis.
- **Pedagogical Hurdles:** Due to these pacing constraints, long-term multi-day projects (2.48/4.00) and collaborative student problem-solving models (2.96/4.00) registered as the lowest-scoring pedagogical actions occurring in classrooms. Additionally, only 30% of teachers report that they are currently able to explicitly state the learning goals of their lessons on a daily basis.
- **Systemic Vulnerabilities:** While overall workplace satisfaction remains stable at 52%, only 40% of responding staff agree that staff well-being and workplace culture are visible operating priorities within the district. Furthermore, significant experience gaps exist; paraprofessionals consistently score lower across well-being and staying power indices than certified teachers, and educators in their first 5 years or their 11–15 year mid-career bracket show marked dips in professional enthusiasm.

D. The University of North Dakota (UND) Strategic Partnership

Rather than implementing a traditional, top-down professional development model, South Heart School is using these precise baseline metrics to launch a formal, strategic partnership with the University of North Dakota (UND) beginning in the 2026–2027 school year. This collaborative initiative will deliver individualized, highly meaningful professional development for faculty designed to address the specific vulnerabilities identified by our staff:

- **Instructional Efficiency & Time Recovery:** Professional development tracks will focus on integrating high-yield instructional routines. This will empower teachers to clearly communicate daily lesson goals and facilitate collaborative problem-solving without exacerbating feelings of being rushed or time-scarce.
- **Inclusivity & Role Alignment:** Action plans will explicitly involve paraprofessionals and support specialists in the district improvement process to bridge the systemic workplace experience gap between certified and non-certified personnel.
- **Targeted Mentorship and Retention:** Specific support structures will be engineered to sustain early-career educators (0–5 years) and re-energize mid-career staff (11–15 years) to safeguard long-term institutional knowledge.

By focusing directly on targeted teacher engagement, modern instructional design, and the reality of our staff's daily experience, this partnership will structurally elevate outcomes for all South Heart staff, students, and families over the next three to five years. South Heart School will systematically transform these culture and pedagogical challenges into opportunities for measurable excellence.

Below is the action plan to engage in continuous improvement as outlined in our partnership with UND:

Pillar	Pillar's Key Indicators	Associated Evidence	District Action Items & Group(s) Responsible)
Soaring through strong relationships	• Every classroom is a safe (physically and social-emotionally), supportive, encouraging, and positive learning environment • Every child feels a sense of belonging to the South Heart community; successes (academic, arts, athletics, etc.) are celebrated both individually and communally • Every parent/guardian and community member feels welcome in the school building and is actively engaged in communication	• Student Engagement Survey • Climate and Culture Parent Survey • Infinite Campus Log Entries • Intervention Program Referrals • System of Support Meeting Notes • Office Referrals • Nest System Data • Monthly Nest Activity Plan • Student Council Agenda & Notes • Parent volunteer logs • Extra/co-curricular activities participation logs	• Utilize the Nest System to promote positive interactions among all K-6 students and staff. • Student "Shout Outs" for positive contributions to the school and monthly drawing. Names will be posted in the hallway for the year for grades 6-12.

Soaring through positive character education	• Every teacher and staff member demonstrates positive character • Every child is supported to meet high behavioral expectations; every child develops pride of place as part of the South Heart community • Every child demonstrates respect, work ethic, integrity, perseverance, critical thinking, and problem solving	• Student Engagement Survey • Climate and Culture Parent Survey • Infinite Campus Log Entries • Intervention Program Referrals • System of Support Meeting Notes • Behavioral Logs	• Create, communicate, and uphold consistent behavioral expectations; engage in reflective, data-informed dialogues surrounding implementation throughout the school
Soaring through academic rigor and relevance	• Every classroom features well-designed lessons and rigorous instruction that is responsive to students' individual learning needs • Every grade level and content area demonstrates steady, continuous academic gains, with a foundational aim of improving ELA and mathematics proficiency across all grade levels (as assessed through	• Teachers' unit and lesson plans • Eligibility Reports • Student Engagement Surveys • Observations of classroom instruction • Schoolwide Assessment Data • Career and Tech Education Enrollments	• Implement regular curriculum review process/cycle • Collect input/student voice about the curriculum via surveys and/or focus groups • Review and enhance peer mentoring/tutoring programs • Explore career readiness curricular options • Explore the possibility of adding another section of algebra to enable more students to take advantage of

	test scores and other metrics) • The curriculum emphasizes foundational, basic skills (e.g., math facts, phonemic awareness, cursive handwriting, etc.) while supporting development of critical thinking and problem solving • The curriculum is clearly structured, well-rounded, and sufficiently flexible to prepare students for an ever-changing world and for a variety of post-graduation pathways (e.g., college, career, military service, and/or entrepreneurship)		career/tech opportunities in their schedules (due to greater flexibility) • Evaluate space and resources available for special education
Soaring through strong support for teachers' professional learning	• Every teacher experiences personalized, district goal-aligned, content-specific, and/or individually relevant professional learning; school administration steers sufficient resources to achieve this goal	• District calendar • Professional development agendas and logs • PDE credit transcripts/logs • Evaluation survey • Evaluation focus groups • Profession	• Evaluate district calendar and professional development schedules; allocate sufficient time for teacher collaboration and sustained, professional learning experiences • Explore scheduling of time

	• Every teacher is provided with sufficient time for collaboration and reflective practices (e.g., analysis of instructional data, adjusting curriculum and instruction to meet student needs, etc.)		for cross-curricular collaboration where appropriate (e.g., complementary content areas, grade-level bands, etc.) • Identify opportunities for teachers, particularly those who are the only representative of their content area or field, to connect to professional networks (e.g., through conferences, through professional associations) • In partnership with UND, provide inquiry-based, personalized professional development focused on teachers' self-identified problems-of-practice aligned with this strategic plan. • In partnership with REAs and UND, provide professional development on research-based instructional strategies,
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			specifically related to ELA and math. • Partner with UND to submit grant proposals to the Leach Foundation and other funding agencies, to support long-term sustainability of the strategic plan. • Teachers provide on-going log of PD.
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