You are the newly hired superintendent of Mountain School District (MSD). The school board has indicated that Saddle Ridge Middle School (SRMS) is a problem in the division and they have high expectations that you will act quickly to make positive and lasting changes at this school.

SRMS has a new principal. She was hired last year and is very interested in school improvement but lacks direction and experience in strategic planning and improvement process implementation. SRMS is a grade 6-8 middle school. There are 1000 students in the school. The population is Caucasian (60%), African-American (20%), Hispanic (15%) (this population fluxes between 10% and 18% based on a small population of annual migrant workers) and Other (5%) (Asian, American Indian, etc.) The school has a free and reduced lunch population of 57%. The special education population is 23% and is largely comprised of Math and Reading Learning Disability (LD) students. All remaining exceptional population identification is less than 2%, with the exception of identified gifted students. 3% of the population is identified gifted. Response To Intervention (RTI) has been in place for only a few years; 68% of students are tier 2, 35% are tier 1, and 7% are tier 3.

School attendance averages 90%. The school is currently in warned status and has not met AYP in 2 years. On state assessments, science scores are at 71% (passing but below the state mean and uncomfortably close to being considered failing). English scores are at 65%; Math 69% (algebra is not offered in the middle school), and Social Studies is at 66%. Sub group data indicates that African American males, special education students, and Hispanic male students score below white students by at least 18% in all categories. These low score areas significantly contribute to missing target improvements.

School discipline is not a major issue. Annually, SRMS has been a school with low numbers of fights and there has been only two knives confiscated in the past year. The biggest issues are typical middle school issues of shoving, pushing, running in the halls, spreading rumors, talking trash and students being late to class. Drugs are in the community but the school has not had a drug incident in several years.

SRMS is on a traditional seven period day, with 48 minute periods and 4 minute transitions. All special education students are provided services in a resource room setting. Behavior disordered students, for the most part, are self-contained in a small classroom at the rear entrance of the school. Sixth graders are exposed to life skills/home economics; art; and music in an exploratory cycle that does not match with the six week grading cycle. Seventh grade students can select two electives from the previously identified electives each lasting ½ of the year. Eighth graders may select a year-long elective from the same group along with Spanish, French, and Shop. Gifted students receive pull out instruction one time each week for 30 minutes. There are currently no before school programs, after school programs, or sports/intramural programs, and there has not been a dance in over three years.
Teacher morale at the building is low. There has been frequent administrative turn over due in part to political turmoil. However, the current board is stable and dedicated to school improvement. 60% of staff has between 10 and 25 years of service, while the remaining 40% have less than 5 years of service. Staff development has been extremely limited in the past few years; however, the current board has stated a dedication to professional development and staff support. Most new staff have never been to a professional conference. Many staff members at SRMS were placed there, being transferred from other schools in the system; this was usually not at the choice of the employee. Many staff members feel that the system has forgotten them. The sting of ineffective administrators has left staff feeling un-empowered, void of resources, and without direction.

Before the start of the year, the principal will be able to hire six staff members; two are replacing math teachers, one will replace a language arts position, one will replace an assistant principal. The remaining two are to be utilized to strengthen the overall program. The student teacher ratio is fairly low 21:1 (overall) so there is some flexibility in the two remaining positions.

Mountain is a rural community nestled among mountains and flowing rivers. It is located within driving distance to a large urban center, with mainly blue collar and minimum wage industrial job opportunities. The community is bimodal in the distribution of wealth. There are “haves” and “have nots” with very little in between. Many parents commute to work, leaving early in the morning and not arriving home until evening has begun. Parents are supportive of the school but not involved. The PTA/PTO was dissolved 10 years ago after an alleged embezzling incident. The community at large is supportive but again, not involved. There are no local partnerships although there are a few local businesses that could be school partners. There is a printing business, a few restaurants, a modular learning lab company, a large stone company/cement/asphalt company, and nearby, a large paper manufacturer has tree farms.

The SRMS building is over 50 years old and was the old high school. It is a two story building and is in the shape of an “L” on both floors. All the students fit in the building and there are two classrooms not being utilized. The school has a well-equipped library, two computer labs alone with two student computers and a teacher’s computer in each classroom. The halls need painting and the lockers need repairing. The auditorium is grand in the tradition of an old auditorium, it needs new seats and new stage curtains but the sound system is good. The auditorium seats 500. The grounds are spacious and include a rundown stadium with a six lane track, asphalt paved. The beautiful gardens that once surrounded the school are no longer tended by the local Garden Club and have become rather grown over.

The School Board met with you and committed support and as much resources (within reason) as they could provide to support you in bringing this school to the level of performance that is expected by this community and demanded by the success of other schools in the district and region.
School Leadership Candidates Assignment: (respond as the superintendent)

1. Utilizing research develop a strategic plan for improving SRMS. Provide your definition of strategic planning; outline at least three focus areas for improvement and areas that you believe are strengths that should be maintained. Your plan should include teaching and learning, professional development, community development, business partnership development, district financial and facilities improvement.

2. Using research from areas such as management, leadership, learning theory, psychology, sociology, political science, and other areas as appropriate leadership, personnel development, politics, professional development etc. develop and describe the implementation process for your plan to implement the strategic plan developed in item number 1.

3. Utilizing research to support your actions, detail how you will evaluate the development and implementation of items 1 and 2.

Administrative Candidates Assignment:

NOTE THE FOLLOWING:

Administrative Candidates are to respond to the above case as the newly hired PRINCIPAL of SRMS. As principal, you have the support of the superintendent and a commitment by the school board to support your improvement efforts.

1. Utilizing research develop a strategic plan for improving SRMS. Provide your definition of strategic planning; outline at least three focus areas for improvement and areas that you believe are strengths that should be maintained. Your plan should include teaching and learning, professional development, community development, business partnership development, district financial and facilities improvement.

2. Using research from areas such as management, leadership, learning theory, psychology, sociology, political science, and other areas as appropriate leadership, personnel development, politics, professional development etc. develop and describe the implementation process for your plan to implement the strategic plan developed in item number 1.

3. Utilizing research to support your actions, detail how you will evaluate the development and implementation of items 1 and 2.