

# Sterling High School's Young Doctor's League

## Pathways Spotlight Briefs

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Geoffrey Scott Chattin, with Collaborating Educator Jason Austin

### Sterling High School

Grade Levels: 9-12

Students: 1,056

Sterling High School is located in Sterling, Illinois, which is in the northwest corner of Whiteside County, about 115 miles west of Chicago and 30 miles from the Iowa/Illinois border. It is the largest high school in the Sauk Valley region. Sterling High School (SHS) has a racially and ethnically diverse student body (62.2% White, 3.2% African American, 30.8% Hispanic, 0.5% Asian, 0.2% American Indian, and 3.1% Multi-racial). Approximately 50% of Sterling's students are eligible for free or reduced price lunches. SHS enjoys a solid state and national reputation, ranking 67th among Illinois high schools and 1701st nationally by U.S. News & World Report, earning SHS a silver medal distinction in 2014. Also, in 2012, SHS was included in The Washington Post's listing of America's Most Challenging High Schools. For additional information regarding Sterling High School (e.g., student and educator demographics, student achievement, revenues, and expenditures), please visit <http://www.illinoisreportcard.com/>.

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### Student Organizations that Support College and Career Readiness

This brief describes the inception and expansion of the Young Doctor's League student organization and its benefits to participating students.

### The Young Doctor's League

Sterling High School entered into a partnership Community General Hospital Medical Center during the 2012-2013 academic year. CGH Medical Center is a progressively acute care facility located in Sterling, Illinois, that employs over 1,400 people and also includes seven clinics servicing a region encompassing 105,000 people. CGH Medical Center has a medical staff consisting of 140 physicians specializing in 35 areas of medicine. CGH Medical Center has a longstanding commitment to its community, offering \$37.7 million in free and discounted care to community residents in 2013. CGH Medical Center's relationship with the Young Doctor's League is part of their investment in broad-scale public education.

A former student approached SHS Principal Jason Austin with a proposal to create the Young Doctor's League. During the Young Doctor's League inaugural year, students met in the Sterling High School library, and the organization consisted exclusively of SHS students. Beginning with the 2013-2014 school year, in cooperation with CGH Medical Center, monthly meetings are held in the hospital auditorium, and membership in the Young Doctor's League is now open to students in the neighboring Rock Falls High School and Newman Catholic High School as well. Approximately 30-40 SHS students are members of this organization.

Medical doctors who are involved with this student organization are selected by the CGH Medical Center's Recruitment Office. During the monthly meetings, which start at 7:00 a.m., the physicians spend approximately 45 minutes describing their professional experiences working at CGH and within their own area of medicine, and then fielding student questions. In Spring 2014, Sterling High School invited former graduates who are either in the midst of pre-medical preparation, currently enrolled in medical school, or currently practicing as physicians to speak with the Young Doctor's League, addressing their questions about college, work, and the field of medicine.

Although this student organization initially began as the Young Doctor's League and still bears that name, the purpose of the organization has expanded to embrace all students who have career interests in healthcare occupations. Under this larger umbrella, Sterling High School is able to meet the needs of a greater percentage of the student population, including students who are interested in becoming nurses or obtaining Certified Nursing Assistant credentials.



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AT ILLINOIS

**Impact on students.** The greatest strength of the Young Doctor's League, according to Mr. Austin, is the strong relationships that have been developed among students and faculty in Sterling High, CGH Medical Center, Rock Falls High, and Newman Catholic High. These partnerships have helped better prepare Sterling's students for the rigors of the medical field. Through the partnership with CGH Medical Center, according to Mr. Austin, students have a greater understanding of the various areas of medicine and the commitment required to reach their career goals of entering the field of medicine. The large number of local healthcare facilities in the region provides Sterling's students a wealth of opportunities for job shadowing, internships, and employment. Sterling serves as the medical hub for the area, but there are other regional healthcare service providers, including the Veteran's Administration Community-Based Outpatient Clinic and hospitals and clinics in the nearby Dixon and Morrison areas.

In its new expanded capacity, the Young Doctor's League benefits students who have diverse career interests within healthcare. CGH Medical Center is able to form relationships with local high school students and encourage them to consider a wide variety of careers within the healthcare field. Many SHS graduates choose to pursue nursing licensure and other health occupations at Sauk Valley Community College, so the CGH Medical Center partnership through the Young Doctor's League was an important connection to make with the local high schools.

*"My advice would be to listen to students and help them grow their ideas. Then, great things can happen!"*

~ Mr. Jason Austin, Principal

**Key points.** Sterling's students who are interested in careers in the health occupations field are encouraged to participate in the Young Doctor's League. Additionally, the school counselors and faculty encourage students with interests in health occupations to enroll in Advanced Placement courses, including AP Biology and AP Anatomy and Physiology, so that they are engaged in highly rigorous science curricula that enhance their college and career readiness. Currently, Sterling maintains an open enrollment policy for AP courses, thus allowing access and encouraging broad participation by the student body. Students enrolled in AP science courses have deeper knowledge of science that ideally permits more robust engagement with physicians during the Young Doctor's League meetings. For example, having a more comprehensive understanding of bioethics or the mastery of key terminology of anatomy promotes a more fluid and robust interaction with doctors and visiting former SHS students who are studying medicine or preparing for specific occupations within the field of health science.

Sterling website: <http://www.sterlingpublicschools.org/shs/>  
CGH Medical Center webpage: <http://www.cghmc.com/>  
Greater Sterling Development Corporation:  
<http://sterlingdevelopment.org/>

**Advice from the field.** As Mr. Austin notes, the success of the Young Doctor's League can be largely attributed to CGH Medical Center's willingness to engage in a partnership that supports the interests and goals of our local high school students, not just at Sterling High, but also Rock Falls and Newman Catholic. One barrier that had to be overcome was accommodating the students' and physicians' busy schedules. Because of this concern, the three high schools and CGH Medical Center agreed to hold the Young Doctor's League monthly meetings in mornings before school. This decision allowed students from all three local high schools to attend, thus eliminating conflicts with their after-school commitments.

Additionally, Mr. Austin makes programmatic adjustments over time to ensure the continued success of the Young Doctor's League. For instance, Sterling High allows all students to help design, develop, and govern student clubs. This organization is supported by the school's Academic Booster Club, which funds all SHS student organizations and activities. The Young Doctor's League was founded as a direct result of a policy that requires student input in regard to organizations and clubs.

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