

**U.S. Department of Education**  
**2016 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program**

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Ms. Kim Holland Hauser

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

Official School Name Vestavia Hills Elementary West School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 1965 Merryvale Road

(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Vestavia Hills State AL Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 35216-2740

County Jefferson

Telephone (205) 402-5151 Fax (205) 402-5156

Web site/URL http://www.vestavia.k12.al.us/Domain/15 E-mail hauserkh@vestavia.k12.al.us

Twitter Handle https://twitter.com/VHEWk3 Facebook Page \_\_\_\_\_ Google+ \_\_\_\_\_

YouTube/URL \_\_\_\_\_ Blog \_\_\_\_\_ Other Social Media Link \_\_\_\_\_

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. Sheila Phillips E-mail phillipssm@vestavia.k12.al.us  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Vestavia Hills City Schools Tel. (205) 402-5151

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 Dr. Nat Robin  
(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, write N/A in the space.*

## Part I – Eligibility Certification

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The signatures 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. The school configuration includes one or more of grades K-12. (Schools on the same campus with one principal, even a K-12 school, must apply as an entire school.)
2. The public school has met their state's accountability requirements (i.e., avoided sanctions) in participation, performance in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics, and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate) using the most recent accountability results available for the year prior to nomination.
3. To meet final eligibility, a public school must meet the state's accountability requirements (i.e., avoided sanctions) in participation, performance in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics, and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate) for the year in which they are nominated (2015-2016) and be certified by the state representative. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
4. If the school includes grades 7 or higher, the school must have foreign language as a part of its curriculum.
5. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2010 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
6. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, or 2015.
7. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's application and/or rescind a school's award if irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state.
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

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Data should be provided for the most recent school year (2015-2016) unless otherwise stated.

### DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 5 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 2 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 1 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 8 TOTAL

### SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located:
- Urban or large central city
  - Suburban with characteristics typical of an urban area
  - Suburban
  - Small city or town in a rural area
  - Rural
3. Number of students as of October 1, 2015 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
<b>PreK</b>	0	0	0
<b>K</b>	106	96	202
<b>1</b>	96	93	189
<b>2</b>	106	108	214
<b>3</b>	99	96	195
<b>4</b>	0	0	0
<b>5</b>	0	0	0
<b>6</b>	0	0	0
<b>7</b>	0	0	0
<b>8</b>	0	0	0
<b>9</b>	0	0	0
<b>10</b>	0	0	0
<b>11</b>	0	0	0
<b>12 or higher</b>	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	407	393	800

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 12 % Asian
  - 6 % Black or African American
  - 4 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 78 % White
  - 0 % 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 2014 – 2015 school year: 6%

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, 2014 until the end of the 2014-2015 school year	30
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2014 until the end of the 2014-2015 school year	19
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	49
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2014	799
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.061
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	6

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 4 %  
30 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):

Chinese, Spanish, Swahili, Teluga, Italian, Czech, Turkish, Korean, Urdu, Kiswahali, Punjabi, Gujarti, Hindi, German, Undu, Lithuanian, Russian, Japanese, French, Slovakian, Kannada, Arabic

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 10 %  
Total number students who qualify: 78
8. Students receiving special education services: 10 %  
78 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. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- 8 Autism
- 0 Deafness
- 0 Deaf-Blindness
- 0 Emotional Disturbance
- 0 Hearing Impairment
- 1 Mental Retardation
- 0 Multiple Disabilities
- 0 Orthopedic Impairment
- 8 Other Health Impaired
- 9 Specific Learning Disability
- 43 Speech or Language Impairment
- 0 Traumatic Brain Injury
- 0 Visual Impairment Including Blindness
- 9 Developmentally Delayed

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 3
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers	42
Resource teachers/specialists e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	15
Paraprofessionals	16
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	3

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 19:1

12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

<b>Required Information</b>	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012	2010-2011
Daily student attendance	96%	96%	96%	97%	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 2015.

<b>Post-Secondary Status</b>	
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.

Ensure each student learns without limits by pursuing knowledge and igniting curiosity about the world through a system distinguished by a safe and nurturing environment, the courage to be creative, unparalleled community support, appreciation of diversity, and multiple paths to a bold future.

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

## PART III – SUMMARY

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In the hustle and bustle of beginning a new school day, our principal proudly concludes our morning announcements: “Always remember, the West Way is the best way: courtesy, respect, and responsibility.” Throughout each day at our sweet school, we strive to unpack these characteristics by learning without limits and creating a community of learners that is unparalleled in academic rigor and social-emotional support. Our teachers and staff proudly promote a growth mindset both personally, through continued opportunities for learning, and corporately, by providing meaningful differentiation that is individualized for every one of our students. As teachers facilitate learning, children are engaged through novelty, technological integration, and autonomy.

Uniquely, West motivates students through a hands-on, multi-sensory, collaborative approach to learning which provides every student the opportunity to take risks, engage in healthy dialogue, and delve deeper into the required learning standards. We fully embrace the rigor required of students to meet and exceed the College and Career Readiness Standards of Alabama, or Common Core Standards. Teachers integrate whole brain learning experiences into their daily practices by utilizing technological integration, Genius Hour, Makerspaces, Coding Classes, Google Classroom, and project-based learning experiences. Extracurricular activities include Makerspace Club, Chess Club, Math League, and Girls on the Run.

## PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

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### 1. Core Curriculum:

“The new mission...is to get all students to meet high standards of education and to provide them with a lifelong education that does not have built-in obsolescence of so much old-style curriculum but that equips them to be lifelong learners” (Fullan, M., Hill, P., Crevola, C., 2006). As we consider differentiation for all, we must consider how teachers and students are motivated to do their work and be provided every opportunity for autonomy, mastery and choice (Pink, 2009). Ultimately, the rigor of our standards of learning, referred to in our state as College and Career Readiness Standards, are the end goal. We must adequately provide our teachers with the resources they need to help students meet and exceed these standards.

Our classrooms are literacy rich, providing students multiple avenues to engage in learning. Stephanie Harvey, a leader in reading education, says, “Smart is not something you are, smart is something you get. You get smart by reading, writing, drawing, talking, listening, and investigating.” We know that English-Language Arts cannot be minimalized to one particular class period during the day. In fact, in every classroom at West teachers are integrating reading, writing, and dialogue across the curriculum. In an effort to accomplish the mastery of these rigorous standards, our teachers employ a variety of strategies and resources. Mini-lessons, small group instruction, and individualized reading and writing conferences allow teachers to tailor their instruction to meet the students’ needs.

Similarly, math is learned through investigation. Our students work with manipulatives, visualizing and understanding the numbers that are represented in each problem presented. Rote memory and problem solving do not provide students with the tools they need to solve real-world problems. As Marilyn Burns says, “It’s insufficient and shortsighted to rely on quick, right answers as indications of students’ mathematical power.” Therefore, we strive and encourage deep thinking about numbers by allowing students the freedom to solve problems in a variety of different ways. Our teachers provide students with mental math discussions through Number Talks and Counting Collections. These strategies prove to build confidence, understanding, and perseverance for all students. The common core math practice standards are displayed in every classroom as a tool for teachers to reference when they engage in deep thinking and strategizing about numbers. Math games, hands-on learning, and real-life problem solving are the most effective methods for providing students with mathematical understanding.

“Science, engineering, and technology permeate nearly every facet of modern life, and they also hold the key to meeting many of humanity’s most pressing current and future challenges” (National Research Council). We are encouraged by the adoption and alignment of our state standards and the Next Gen Standards. The engineering practice standards have provided our teachers with an excitement about diving into new possibilities for learning and meeting science standards. Through Makerspace, Genius Hour, and relative science experiments our teachers are exposing students to real problems that need real solutions, and our students are flourishing. With the aide of technology, we partnered with our high school’s anatomy class for third graders to watch and investigate a sheep’s brain dissection. This activity not only provides an extension of learning, but also creates community within our district. With an inquiry-based approach to science, students are coding, building with TinkerCad, accessing research, and utilizing HASP science kits.

From the beginning of students’ experiences at West, teachers are emphasizing historical leaders, memorable holidays, and global awareness to provide on-going discussions about history. For students to be productive, vibrant citizens, they “ need to be knowledgeable about the economic, geographic, historical, and political perspectives of the world and its people” (2010 Alabama Course of Study). The social studies standards are embedded in literature, writing, and conversation in order for students to have a perspective of how the past impacts the future. Project based learning and technology integration allows for acquisition of the social studies standards. Oddizzi, an e-learning resource, is utilized by our teachers to build community and knowledge about individuals and countries around the globe.

In all curriculum areas, teachers in our school access many available resources. We also encourage teachers

to observe each other, research leaders in the field of education, and reflect on best practice to improve student achievement.

## 2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Vestavia Hills Elementary West offers additional curriculum areas that include art, physical education, technology, media/library, and music.

The mission of the Physical Education Department at West is to educate minds, develop healthy bodies and promote positive attitudes towards physical activity, fitness, and sports skills. Physical Education is an integral part of the total education process. All 800 children at West participate in physical education for thirty minutes each day. The students engage in activities that promote teamwork, social, motor, and leadership skills. Throughout the school year students engage in soccer, football, basketball, bowling, golf, baseball, lacrosse, volleyball, jump-roping, hoola-hooping, dance and rhythm movement. Students also focus on health and nutrition. Additionally, teachers build community awareness by encouraging participation in the Kids Mercedes Marathon and Juvenile Diabetes Walk.

The West media center is the hub of learning, providing on-going collaboration, student engagement, and cross-curricular experiences. It serves all 800 students, kindergarten through third grade. The library is open daily for students and teachers. Each class receives a minimum of thirty minutes of explicit library instruction and enhancement. These lessons focus on American Association for School Librarians standards, as well as College and Career Readiness standards. Students receive a wide variety of instruction which includes: locating, acquiring, and interpreting knowledge of pertinent information, exploring genres of literature, utilizing a variety of research tools, studying literary elements, accessing reference materials, and modeling appropriate reading strategies. These foundational skills serve as the building blocks for instilling a love of reading. Additionally, the media center houses a Promethean ActivTable, a book nook for electronic reading and coding, and laptops for research. West's media center is a wonderful learning resource area for students and teachers.

West's art program aims to engage the independent creativity in each child. Art instruction strives to teach the whole child through a combination of art production, art history, art appreciation, and character education. All students at West participate in art for thirty to forty minutes per week. Each student creates eight pieces of art during the school year, using a variety of drawing, painting and sculpting techniques. Additionally, with the art teacher's facilitation, students study the correct usage of materials and vocabulary. Most recently, in addition to our annual school-wide art show, an online art show was created for parents to view their children's work at home. Incorporating fine arts into our school curriculum promotes a well-rounded education.

Technology integration provides our kindergarten through third grade students and faculty with an Interactive Classroom experience. Students promote technology skills by using the computer lab opportunity weekly for a minimum of thirty minutes. In addition, teachers utilize mobile lab carts, classroom computers, ActivTables, and other mobile devices to integrate technology into lessons. The specific technology focus is to teach applicable computer concepts and skills and seamlessly embed and integrate technology into the core curriculum lessons.

The music curriculum at West is based on the National Core Music Standards for Elementary General Music. Students explore different musical styles and have many opportunities for movement and improvisation. They learn how music relates to daily lives, discuss lyrics, introducing and studying vocabulary, history, patriotism, traditions, and holidays. Steady beat and the use of beautiful singing voices develop the skills of our young musicians. Students produce an annual school music program for each grade-level that is truly something special. Students are exposed to authentic choral groups and band instruments when the music teacher arranges for the intermediate school honor choir and high school jazz band to visit and perform, enhancing their music curriculum.

West students are challenged with higher order thinking and deep learning by partnering College and Career Readiness Standards with additional curriculum areas. This combination of learning experiences cultivates a well-rounded learner, ready to meet the demands of society and future growth.

### 3. Instructional Methods and Interventions:

West uses a variety of instructional methods and approaches. Whole group Tier I instruction is frequently delivered through mini-lessons with reflection and feedback throughout the learning process. It is best administered in small increments with students engaged in a variety of learning experiences, including collaborative activities such as turn and talk, open discussion/reflection, and hands-on lessons. Student knowledge is best cultivated through dialogue. Mini-lessons provide opportunities for inquiry using varying degrees of complexity through Depth of Knowledge (DOK) to achieve deep learning in whole group situations.

Our teachers know their students diverse needs and...by incorporating both independent and collaborative student work. Students deepen their knowledge in each of the subject areas through individual and partner work while teachers differentiate explicit instruction through small groups and individual conferences. In kindergarten and first grade, teachers use the Daily Five structure for reading and math. Students work on necessary skills through math and literacy stations, as teachers lead reading conferences, small group strategy lessons, and Tier 2 targeted instruction. In second and third grade, teachers use a workshop model. Students cultivate experiences for reflection and discussion through independent and collaborative work, an important tenant of our differentiated instruction. In addition, teachers use enrichment activities such as Genius Hour, Makerspace, Brain Bags, and independent research projects to meet the needs of higher-achieving students.

Tier 3 intervention, determined through data-based assessments and discussion, is another avenue in which we can meet the specific deficits of individual students. West's Problem Solving Team meets weekly with general education teachers to determine the needs of students. The team supplies teachers with feedback and ideas for specifically-designed instruction in Tier 1 and Tier 2. The team also determines if a student is meeting criteria for Tier 3 instruction. In reading and math, we use direct-instruction programs to address student needs that include: SPIRE, WonderWorks, Leveled-Literacy Instruction, Do the Math and EnVision Intervention kits.

Through these methods we are able to achieve both continuous progress and high levels of student learning. These structures provide students grade-level content they need to know while simultaneously filling in gaps with instruction geared at student areas for both specific growth and extension.

### 4. Assessment for Instruction and Learning and Sharing Assessment Results:

Assessments help teachers and students see the power of improvement and further learning, rather than just a means to measure learning at a fixed point in time (Berger, 2014). West teachers use a variety of formative and summative assessments to measure student growth and guide instruction. Easy CBM evaluates literacy and math skills. For reading, we use Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Reading assessment and the Qualitative Reading Inventory to identify readers' needs. In writing, quick-write assessments inform teachers of their students' writing proficiency. In math, teachers use fluency and automaticity checks to measure students' understanding of math facts. The Primary Number and Operation Assessment is administered to evaluate the learning of grade-level standards. These one-on-one assessments encourage independent student reading and comprehension dialogue, written expression acquisition, and math achievement. These formative assessments inform and guide teachers to differentiate their instructional practices. At the school-level, these assessments determine our professional learning opportunities as well. Additionally, our teachers use authentic teacher-made assessments, created through their Professional Learning Communities, to align with grade-level standards and address the needs of the students.

Third graders are required to take the state-wide summative assessment, Aspire. The assessment results are used to identify trends in student learning and address those trends with school-wide conversation and professional learning, and subgroups are identified through the analysis of the test data. Of these subgroups,

special needs population and students living in poverty show a gap between their performance and the performance of the grade-level at large. We address the needs identified through our Problem Solving Team, Child Study Team or services for individuals with special needs by developing specific goals and providing interventions, accommodations, and explicit instruction to meet the individual need.

In a collaborative, systematic approach to learning, assessment results are shared regularly. We discuss students as groups and individuals to make decisions about professional development, Tier 2 and Tier 3 instruction, instructional practices, and enrichment opportunities. When a gap in learning is identified for groups of students, we develop professional learning to meet the need of our teachers. We share data and student growth with parents through parent-teacher conferences and quarterly progress reports. The meaning and purpose of the assessments are provided for parents during monthly PTO meetings, Lunch and Learn sessions, and individual parent-teacher conferences. Student data is shared with students through conferencing, providing every opportunity for them to take ownership of their learning. Student engaged assessments are the most effective way of helping students to set and attain goals. Therefore, as Ron Berger states, “Student voice is at the heart of student-engaged assessment.”

## **PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS**

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### 1. School Climate/Culture:

School climate reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures. At West, we strive to maintain a climate in which teachers and students thrive. Our positive culture and climate is a defining mark of our school. Through collaborative efforts involving families and caring teachers and staff, we reflect the ideal that every adult is in charge of every child. The faculty and staff promote learning and social-emotional growth of our students. “The West Way is the best way: courtesy, respect and responsibility “ is embedded in classroom practices. Teachers model learning by doing. School climate is captured through our Professional Learning Communities where teachers work alongside one another to enhance learning. The counselor at West cultivates a caring community through West Way nominations, where children are individually recognized for their actions and attitudes that exemplify the West Way. As administrators, we have an open-door policy and value and encourage feedback to improve our practices. Teachers have the resources they need and our parents are involved. We celebrate successes both individually and collectively.

Classroom teachers cultivate community that is school-wide, partnering with other grade-level classrooms for book buddies each week. This provides mentoring opportunities for students, allowing them to showcase their reading to a real audience. Some classrooms have partnerships for math and science as well. Teacher relationships are paramount for providing a culture that cares and honors one another, fostering an atmosphere where students and teachers take ownership of each other’s success.

We pull together to help one another. Recently, an apartment fire trapped a West family of five. The family lost all of their earthly possessions, and West immediately rallied to support them. An email from the mother said:

“January 14 is the day my family lost everything. January 15 is the day we gained so much more. The West counselor and assistant principal were two of our first visitors after the fire. They carried with them the love and support from the parents and staff of VHEW. When you have three children in the hospital, it's hard to assess what you've lost. When you have a community like Vestavia Hills behind you, you don't get the chance. I emailed both teachers that night and West was on it!!! So much of what we'd lost was replaced before we had a chance to notice the loss....My heart has never been so full of joy and gratitude...West is truly the best!!!”

Her response is a testament to the climate and culture we hope to cultivate and sustain.

### 2. Engaging Families and Community:

Many refer to Vestavia Hills City Schools as the city’s crown jewel, characterized by unparalleled community support and boasting high standards and expectations for students. This avenue for teaching and learning is exceptional: partnering with stakeholders to achieve our goals. At West, the PTO, Partners in Education program, and School Foundation promote opportunities for on-going parent and community involvement that aligns with our school’s mission. School and district-wide committees are created with parent and community representatives to have a variety of voices in the conversation.

Community is fostered through many of our community activities. Our annual fall carnival draws over 800 families to our school for dinner, games and fellowship. Monthly PTO meetings allow for staff members to share school information with parents. Also, at these meetings, the school administrators offer a question and answer time to promote community and transparency. These meetings are recorded and posted. Our website, Facebook page and Twitter accounts are kept current to communicate learning and extra-curricular activities.

We invite parents to Lunch and Learn sessions to provide understanding of curriculum, and to strengthen the home-school relationship. For example, in March, we will discuss math standards and math

instructional practices. Parents will see students engaged in math games, Number Talks, Counting Collections and other math instructional strategies.

We engage families and community through many venues. We host a canned food drive in November, an adopt-an-angel program in December, and a monthly pop-tab collection for the local Ronald McDonald house. All students participate in the Kids' Mercedes Marathon and the Juvenile Diabetes Walk. Our Girls on the Run team supports a charity each semester. In conjunction with our high school, we participate in Relay for Life to build community across the district, provide support and raise awareness for cancer prevention. A spirit of giving back is modeled and expected for our students and embraced by our families.

Our Partners in Education program gives in-kind services or donations to help support instructional enhancements. All school fundraisers, managed by our PTO, raise money to purchase additional resources such as new technologies, curriculum resources, professional development, library books and more.

West is a family, comprised of faculty, staff, parents, students and community. These individuals are intertwined to create a community at West that is exceptional.

### 3. Professional Development:

At Vestavia Hills Elementary West, our teachers are committed to continuous learning, embracing the idea of learning without limits. We seek to learn from one another and from other leaders in education. Professional Learning Communities provide an invaluable opportunity for our teachers to learn by doing and to reflect on their practice regularly. We all engage in learning together, understanding the tenants of this African proverb: "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

Our planning for professional learning begins with the end in mind. Using data, research, and reflection, our leadership team works collaboratively to develop our school goals. These goals guide our professional learning plans. Although learning is an intrinsic goal of our teachers, we recognize that we must provide opportunities that align with our needs and challenge our thinking, making every effort to continue to move us forward. Our teachers value evidence that informs their work. Encouraging rich conversations through a PLC model, characterized by reflection and data-based decision making, informs each teacher's practice. This results in moving students on a trajectory of learning toward mastery of grade-level standards.

Because we expect differentiation in our classrooms, we also seek to differentiate professional learning for our teachers. In addition to PLC, teachers are provided with on-going learning through technology, peer observations, and participation in district-wide, state-level, and national conferences. We use Google Classroom for sharing articles, ideas, and videos that align with the work our teachers embrace, providing opportunities for learning, reflection and discussion. Teachers want to observe their peers and reflect together on successful practices. Doing so builds a collective responsibility for excellence.

West teachers also value learning through learning from experts in the field. We prioritize funding in order to provide opportunities for teachers to perfect their work. Our teachers are able to participate in district-wide professional learning throughout the summer and during the school year. We have professional learning days that allow for us to bring in experts to share with us and build application specifically for our school needs. Additionally, our district offers DIY (Do-It-Yourself) learning opportunities that allow for teachers to create their own learning aligned with grade-level standards, school goals, and/or our district's strategic plan. This is a unique experience that encourages autonomy.

We embrace learning without limits, and value every individual in our school as a learner.

### 4. School Leadership:

As leaders at Vestavia Hills Elementary West, we embrace the words of Simon Sinek, "Leadership is not about being in charge. Leadership is about taking care of those in your charge." We learn by doing. We know good leaders cast a vision for what is expected, but great leaders model the work that is expected by serving, teaching, coaching, reflecting, and conferring. As administrators, our role supports the work of the

teacher, providing him/her with supports he/she needs to accomplish school goals and individual aspirations. We care about our staff and treat them as professionals by acting on their needs and engaging them in professional dialogue about school issues.

We create a caring community of learning that encourages risk-taking and opportunities for student growth with the goal of student learning. We challenge teachers to be innovative, and provide the supports they need to accomplish the goal. As leaders we reflect and revise our practice regularly, considering the question: how will we facilitate learning for all? Are we giving teachers freedom to adjust practices to match their individual strengths and needs? Are we allowing teachers to set goals and reach them, building confidence in them as they establish good teaching practice? Are we encouraging teachers regarding the meaningful work they do every day on behalf of our students? Using these questions we guide our conversations, set our goals, and align our practice to empower teachers to make wise decisions about teaching, learning and student success.

Through our leadership team and collaborative partnerships across our school and district, we engage teachers in conversations about our school goals, professional learning practices, and management of the classroom. We establish both personal and professional relationships to encourage trust as they voice their concerns with us. Because of our school climate and care for our staff, conversations are open, honest, and relevant. Sometimes conversations can be difficult, but it is through intentional, meaningful conversation that we can encourage growth and change.

As administrators, we rely on the professionals in our building to do their work with pride. We seek to balance healthy parameters that meet expectations while giving teachers and staff autonomy that allows them freedom to do their job well. We emphasize a team approach to decision-making, while taking responsibility for the work that happens in our learning community. We encourage a philosophy that promotes the team rather than the individual: "We go farther together."

## Part VI – INDICATORS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS

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Collective responsibility is the mark of an excellent school. At West, we believe that every adult is responsible for every student in the building. We establish teacher and staff autonomy, to create a climate and culture where students can achieve their very best through the supports they are provided. We know that every child requires different kinds of support to help him/her succeed. In order to determine and meet those needs, we use a systematic approach through Professional Learning Communities, a problem-solving team, counseling services, mentoring, and professional learning for all.

Data drives our instruction. We collaborate through Professional Learning Communities, data meetings, and a problem-solving team to review data and change instructional strategies. Teachers provide expertise and guidance to each other as we use the data to inform our practice. Based on data analysis, teachers target learning needs of individual students. Learning targets are established collectively to align with the core curriculum. Special area teachers attend professional learning communities with the grade-level teachers to align their practice with these standards, providing cross-curricular experiences that are authentic and engaging. As a result of this collaborative work, our test scores provide evidence of growth. Across all grade-levels EasyCBM is used to screen literacy and math according to the standards. Ninety percent of our students are meeting or exceeding the benchmark expectations. ACT Aspire showed an increase from 2014 to 2015 in both reading and math. Third grade teachers use this data in the summer to adjust their instructional practices resulting in positive outcomes for students.

Collectively, we determine behavioral and academic needs for our school at-large. We know that student behavior has a direct impact on student learning. We began this school year with an emphasis on behavioral strategies to support the needs of every child on the continuum of learning. As a leadership team, comprised of teacher leaders, we created school norms that match our beliefs. Teachers shared their training with the staff. Professional learning was embedded to meet school goals. We seek to provide children with a learning experience that allows for them to take risks in a supportive classroom.

Learning Forward proposes: “collective responsibility brings together the entire education community, teachers, supports staff, school system staff, and administrators...to increase effective teaching in every classroom.” At West, every student benefits from the strength and expertise of every educator.