

U.S. Department of Education
2020 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

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

Official School Name Brooks Elementary School
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 35 Genesee Point
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Newnan State GA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 30263-6337

County Coweta

Telephone (770) 683-0013 Fax (678) 423-2824

Web site/URL http://brooks.cowetaschools.net/ E-mail jillian.andrew@cowetaschools.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. Evan Horton E-mail evan.horton@cowetaschools.net
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Coweta County Tel. (770) 254-2800

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 Ms. Amy Dees
(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

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. 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 2020 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 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.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2014 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, or 2019.
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 most recent school year (2019-2020) unless otherwise stated.

DISTRICT (Question 1 is not applicable to non-public schools)

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

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

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, 2019 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent at the school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	23	21	44
K	45	45	90
1	68	49	117
2	49	54	103
3	58	70	128
4	60	49	109
5	67	56	123
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	370	344	714

*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):
- 0.6 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 0.7 % Asian
 - 9.2 % Black or African American
 - 11.1 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 73.1 % White
 - 5.3 % 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 2018 - 2019 school year: 9%

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, 2018 until the end of the 2018-2019 school year	29
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2018 until the end of the 2018-2019 school year	38
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	67
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2018	721
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.09
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	9

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

Gujarati, Spanish

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 4 %
32 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 27 %

Total number students who qualify: 193

8. Students receiving special education services: 10 %

69 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.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <u>4</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>16</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>7</u> Developmental Delay | <u>3</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>1</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>44</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>0</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: 2

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:

	Number of Staff
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	33
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	13
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	12
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	1

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 23:1

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

Required Information	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014-2015
Daily student attendance	96%	94%	88%	92%	93%
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 2019.

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.

At Brooks Elementary we are committed to student success. We believe that successful students are empowered for both school and life.

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

Brooks Elementary School opened its doors to students for the first time in 2009. Because the school is set apart from the rest of the county in a more rural area, Brooks Elementary's students, parents, families, and local stakeholders immediately were bonded as a new community when the school opened. The neighborhoods we serve are among the most affluent in the county as well as some of the most impoverished. However, to walk through our doors, you would only ever notice a single family of children and teachers who call their home away from home Brooks Elementary School. Our community is still growing, and new construction of homes and businesses can be found throughout. Our school is a reflection of this growth with new families joining us continually throughout the year. We are excited to see this growth and welcome the new opportunities it offers our students to meet new people and make new friends.

We have high academic and behavioral expectations for every single student. Our teachers have mastered differentiation and scaffolding and use every resource available to ensure that students find success and are ready for their next steps. It is not, however, enough for our students to simply understand the content. It is our teachers', families', and community's priority that students are curious, life-long learners who value education and the pursuit of knowledge. This is balanced with a strong emphasis on student engagement to support those rigorous expectations. Outside of the general education classroom, students may receive remediation through our special education program or early intervention program. Our special education program provides specialized instruction as well as tailored goals for student success. The early intervention program allows students to receive intervention at both the instructional level and grade level as well as providing instructional level assessments to monitor the progress students are making with the interventions given. Our REACH program serves students who qualify as gifted and provides acceleration and enrichment of grade-level standards for students. We also serve English language learners by providing daily instruction on language acquisition as well as academic language skills. In order to support our students socially as well as emotionally, we have adopted the 7 Mindsets curriculum which teachers integrate as part of their everyday instruction.

What sets us apart at Brooks Elementary School is consistent, effective, high-quality, and dynamic instruction that is regularly monitored by teachers and administration. Simply put, we engage in research-based, good, old-fashioned teaching practices. Our teachers engage students through a combination of direct instruction, student collaboration, effective technology use, and conferencing. Classrooms are student-centered, where students employ metacognitive strategies and set goals for themselves in order to further their self-directed learning. Teachers use spiraled reviews and assessments that are rigorous to plan for instruction. Consistent and effective feedback is given in order to promote understanding and challenge students. Scaffolding is employed to ensure appropriate support, and instruction and assignments are differentiated to meet the needs of all students. Teachers also prioritize strong engagement by understanding the challenges of educating twenty first century students. We have high expectations for all and a plan to help our students meet them.

It is not that we do not use programs, because we do. We use technology programs such as USA Test Prep and IXL. We use the Write Bright program to help our students get their ideas out in a logical and comprehensible way. We use Accelerated Reader to encourage students to read, track their Lexile levels, and to expand their reading skills. It is not that innovation is not encouraged, it is. Our teachers turn their classrooms into detectives' offices so that students can "crack the case" in math. Teachers send students on scavenger hunts around the building to find and identify United States symbols. Teachers and students have participated in dedicated time to foster innovation.

However what makes our school stand out is that capacity has been built among our faculty and staff to withstand fleeting educational fads, programs, and techniques. While every day, every lesson, and every year is new, it is through powerful teaching, collaboration, and motivation that helps to ensure we are creating successful learners. None of these programs, games, or strategies replaces what our teachers do for our students. Instead, they are supplemental and used only as support tools, not to replace teachers. It is the intentional and effective use of these programs that make them successful in our school, because our success rests on the shoulders of the hard work our teachers and students put in.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

1a. Overall approach, which may include overarching philosophy or approaches common across subject areas

When it boils down to the essence of our school's approach, the strategies our teachers utilize are employed with the purpose of engaging students in relevant and rigorous learning experiences that are differentiated to meet individual needs. Teachers begin by identifying what they expect students to do based on the standards, and teachers then identify what impact students' abilities and background knowledge have on access to those expectations. The ultimate goal is for students to demonstrate understanding of content and readiness for next steps. This is accomplished through differentiating processes, product, and/or environment. Presentation of academic material occurs in a variety of ways at each grade and achievement level. Students are also given many choices to demonstrate understanding of the material. For some students this may look like a reduced number of items, but for others it might be a non-traditional assessment. Some students are able to be more self-directed, while others need additional support. Leveled reading passages, accelerated problem solving in math, or real life application of science processes based on students' abilities and interests are just some of the ways differentiation occurs.

In addition to these methods of differentiation, teachers offer multiple means of engagement. Motivating students is an ever-evolving and increasingly complicated task. To arm ourselves for this challenge, our teachers have recently done book studies on literature like *Teach Like a Pirate* by Dave Burgess, *The Wild Card* by Hope and Wade King, and *Just Ask Us: Kids Speak Out on Student Engagement* by Heather Wolpert-Gawron. We understand that this is an area of instruction where we cannot afford to become complacent and are striving to continue to grow professionally in this area.

1b. Reading/English language arts

As the cornerstone for all other subjects, a substantial emphasis is placed on literacy. Beginning in pre-kindergarten, students are introduced to and taught to identify letters and sounds. Whole body sound identification, tactile letter identification, and other sensory techniques are strategies used to develop a strong foundation of letters and sounds. Whether a student begins their educational career in a pre-kindergarten or kindergarten classroom, all students are immersed in the usage of letters and sounds to create words, read sight words, and write sentences using a multitude of phonics strategies. Teachers use CAFE strategies (i.e., comprehension, accuracy, fluency, and expanded vocabulary) to lead students to develop phonemic awareness, comprehension, fluent reading, and expansion of vocabulary. But it does not stop there. Modeling and scaffolding silent reading techniques through close reading and the improvement of reading fluency teaches students how good reading should occur. Almost all of the literacy instruction in kindergarten, first, and second grades is given and practiced in differentiated small groups in order to allow students to explore and develop their new skills on their instructional level.

Building a strong reading foundation is essential in creating a successful environment for readers and writers. Even before students become proficient in independent reading skills, they are exposed to concepts such as inferencing, predicting, summarizing, making connections, visualizing, and asking questions while reading. Once students master independent reading skills, they are encouraged to stretch their reading capacity through rich discussions with teachers and other students.

Writing instruction parallels the mastery of reading strategies. As students learn to sound out simple words, they are taught to write them. When students are learning to predict, ask questions, and make inferences, they are encouraged to make anecdotal notes to help organize the use of strategies. In turn, this helps with making connections and evidenced-based writing. Grammar and structure are also woven into writing instruction.

Technology is used in our English Language Arts classrooms as a means for engagement, where technology presents an avenue for students to display their understanding of content as well as an assessment tool.

Technology as a tool for engagement is a no-brainer. Students would rather type an essay than write one, and they would rather make a recommendation about a good book they read by recording themselves on Flip Grid than write a book report. Teachers and students use the Accelerated Reader program as a positive way to encourage students to read books for pleasure. Technology is also a way our students are able to show what they have learned. Whether it's a Google Slides presentation or a Quizizz contest, using technology as the vehicle for the product of their learning is a strategy used often. We also use a universal screener, the STAR assessment, to track student Lexiles and set goals for growth.

1c. Mathematics

Before teaching the math standards set forth by the state, several of our teachers were involved in creating the scope and sequence for the district. In doing this, our teachers are more knowledgeable about the vertical alignment of our math standards. This allows for differentiation to happen more organically. Teachers having a strong understanding of the continuum of standards is essential to effective math instruction.

Students are engaged with manipulatives, real-world activities, number talks, and technology to help with the development of fundamental and more complex mathematical ideas. Students are presented with a toolbox of skills they can experiment with to establish their own understanding of concepts. Some students may need less in their toolbox in order to master the concept, and students that are more abstract thinkers may be given more freedom to develop their own skills. Teachers monitor this organic learning closely to ensure accuracy.

The first step in effective mathematics instruction is establishing solid number sense. Teachers throughout our building engage our students in number talks. Students must understand that numbers have value, that there are different ways to represent numbers, and that regardless of achievement level, having a deep understanding of basic math is essential. In the younger grades, students learn how to break numbers apart based on place value. Doing this allows our teachers to lead all students in higher order mathematical thinking. In the upper grades, students learn the basics of decimals and fractions. Before they dive into these more abstract concepts, the foundation of whole numbers must be solid.

Math is real-world. Our students are given many opportunities to incorporate their math knowledge into real-life situations. Whether it be counting their Bronco Bucks to earn a reward, doing "surgery" on polygons, or creating a snack using fractions, our teachers make math fun, applicable, and understandable for all students.

Technology is also ingrained in our math curriculum. Google Slides are used to show the progression of multi-step problems, videos are created to explain a student's processes, and students use online materials to review basic skills. Many of our teachers assign spiral reviews through Google Forms. In using all of these skills, students are becoming technologically literate.

Through the use of common spiral reviews, our universal screener (STAR), and other formative assessments, teachers are constantly evaluating mastery of standards. These are used to form small instructional groups within the classroom and flex groups within the grade level teams. Our built-in skills block is a set time each day when remediation and acceleration can occur within or outside of the classroom. Regardless of the concept being taught, engaging students in the processes of math is essential in ensuring mastery.

1d. Science

Throughout our building, the science curriculum is taught through a variety of hands-on and inquiry based activities. The design process centers on teaching students to question and explore new content. Asking, imagining, planning, creating, testing, improving, and sharing is the continuous cycle of collective efficacy that our teachers use to lead students through the mastery of content standards.

Involving our students in the processes of science is how our teachers engage them in new content. Our
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Kindergarteners plant seeds, complete observations, and write their findings in their science journals. Our fifth graders make landscapes using soil and other materials to discover the effects of erosion and how to prevent it. These examples are a small sampling of the scientific processes that our teachers use with our students to help them master the standards. And even through these processes, our teachers differentiate instruction and requirements based on students' needs. Some of our kindergarten students will draw pictures, while others will write sentences. Some of our fifth graders will be given materials with which to problem solve preventing erosion, while others will be given pictures to model their landscapes.

Teachers guide our students through inquiry based practices, because this allows teachers to support all students at their levels of mastery while ensuring that all students are learning. In addition to this, many of our teachers use technology for students to research topics, go on virtual field trips, and record and share their findings after doing an experiment.

Beyond just traditional classroom experiences, each grade level also has at least one science based field trip each year. We have West Georgia RESA visit to do STEM day in several grade levels. All fifth grade students participate in 4-H that reinforces many of the fifth grade curriculum standards. Our teachers have created an environment of learning both in the classroom and by using outside resources to establish a firm science foundation in our students.

1e. Social studies/history/civic learning and engagement

Social studies at Brooks is an area in which students are exposed to historical events, influential people, and civic duties. Teachers follow the scope and sequence set forth by the county, and several of our teachers have also been involved in the process of developing our county's scope and sequence.

From pre-kindergarten to fifth grade, students are exposed to the social studies standards in a wide variety of highly engaging strategies that make real world connections. Community members visit pre-kindergarten and kindergarten classrooms. Nurses, doctors, teachers, police officers, and even a life-flight helicopter pilot have all graciously donated their time to come talk to our students to give them a bit of an understanding of their job. Students in fourth grade put their research on historical figures on display by dressing up as their figures and simulating a kind of living replica of a wax museum. Each student chooses an influential historical figure that they find interesting. Students put their fears behind them and settle into character, because their parents and all their teachers and peers visit their wax museum to see their elaborate costumes and to hear the informative speeches they give. Fifth grade has a great deal of historical events in their standards, so in order to keep students engaged, these teachers have mystery suitcases that they pack full of items at the beginning of each unit that connect to the standards. Our students love making predictions about the contents of the suitcase and then figuring out how the items correlate with the content they are learning.

Through the use of hands-on activities, technology, and a passion for knowledge, our teachers engage our students in a multitude of strategies to ensure the mastery of the social studies curriculum.

1f. For secondary schools:

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

As an introduction to school, it is the goal of our pre-kindergarten program to foster a love for education through an understanding of how school works. The teachers follow the Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards to help their students develop fine and gross motor skills, social development, approaches to play, communication, and an interest in learning. Each student is assessed on these skills throughout the school year both formally and informally. This data is used to give the teachers a greater understanding of specific needs in the classroom and provide support accordingly.

Because of our school's focus on early literacy skills, these are introduced to students during their time in pre-kindergarten. While we do not expect students to fully master these skills, we do notice that exposure before kindergarten helps the development of later literacy skills such as writing, reading comprehension,

spelling, decoding, and oral fluency before kindergarten. Science and social studies are often integrated into literacy, and mathematics is most likely to take place in a small group setting.

Our pre-kindergarten program also focuses a great deal on social/emotional behavior. Most of the students who are entering our program have not attended another school. The first few weeks are spent learning the rules and routines of school as well as how to respond to certain social situations that may be new to them. The teachers encourage their students to use communication with their peers and other adults to express their emotions. Students explore taking turns, sharing, building relationships, and a balance between seeking adult assistance and attempting independence.

It is our goal that by the end of the year all students have been introduced to kindergarten expectations and are ready to participate appropriately.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Our Visual Arts program builds self confidence while teaching the basic elements of art and helping to further develop fine motor skills. Our students engage in various approaches to creating art including directed activities as well as collaborative and individual creations that are inspired by our surroundings, our imaginations, and established artists' works. We explore creating works of art using many different materials and techniques including pencil and paint techniques and texture rubbing with oil pastels. Students learn about artists such as Georgia O'Keeffe, James Rossi, Jim Bachor, Tim Burton, and Claude Monet.

The performing arts curriculum is based on the Georgia Standards of Excellence for Music. Students in kindergarten through fifth grades learn to improvise, compose, and share music. They sing, perform on instruments, read, listen, evaluate, move to music, and connect music to other arts, history, and culture. The foundation is built with asking students to sing and connect movement to music culminating in a concert for their families and friends. Third grade students connect music to history through a Veteran's Day program. Fourth graders learn to read music and play the recorder, and these skills are built upon in fifth grade when students play and write songs with ukuleles. In all areas of art instruction, academic content teachers collaborate with fine arts teachers to expand upon classroom curriculum.

The school's health and physical education program teaches students in kindergarten through fifth grades how to become physically literate while reinforcing a healthy lifestyle. Students refine gross motor skills through play and gain a greater understanding of movement and exercise. Students learn skills such as turn taking and following rules as well as respecting others through their behavior. It is also not uncommon for academic standards to be intertwined into physical education activities. Common activities include things like spelling word relay races, creating objects from prescribed shapes, building towers and pyramids, or calculating needed points. The goals of this program include helping students find enjoyment in being physically active in order to reap life-long benefits, teaching students how to navigate "wins" and "losses" and using those lessons as growing experiences, and to support learning in a new and creative way. Students also receive supplemental physical education opportunities through before and after school activities such as the track team, running club, Connect Sports Club that focuses on introducing students to a variety of physical activities, and Karate Club.

All students visit the media center regularly, but monthly lessons are planned for students in order to expose them to media in a different way. Lessons include everything from learning about literary genres to designing and printing 3D creations. Students take virtual field trips under the sea and to far away lands using Google Cardboard and Google Expeditions. Using online tools students are taught how to research topics included in grade level standards such as habitats, geography, and historical figures. Students are also given the opportunity to explore their creativity using assorted hands on manipulatives to recreate buildings, landscapes, or build something completely new. Allowing our students to explore media in this way gives them the opportunity to look at their world in ways they would not otherwise get to see.

Our Guidance and Counseling program at Brooks is based on the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) national model. The model includes a developmentally appropriate curriculum focused on the mindsets and behaviors all students need for postsecondary readiness and success. All students in
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kindergarten through fifth grades participate in monthly guidance lessons which are created using the ASCA mindsets and behaviors. Lessons are also designed to have a positive impact on student achievement, attendance, and discipline. In addition, these students participate in guidance lessons to meet the requirements of the BRIDGE law to address career awareness and SB 401 to address personal safety through the Child Safety Matters (CSM) program. The CSM program covers the topics of bullying, cyberbullying, child abuse, sexual abuse, and digital dangers. Students also participate in a values and character education program. Our program consists of a character education word of the month that is introduced and discussed during morning announcements. Students who display the characteristics of the traits described receive recognition by having their picture added to the “Amazing Character” bulletin board.

3. Academic Supports:

3a. Students performing below grade level

Through the Early Intervention Program (EIP), students are provided interventions on their instructional level to ensure mastery of content standards. Teachers fluidly increase or decrease complexity of texts and math concepts based on students’ individual needs. Even though instruction is provided at an individualized level, grade level standards are being taught and research-based interventions are being given. This occurs during our forty minute instructional skills time each day in each grade level. Data is collected from grade level common assessments to monitor growth and assessments are given based on individual interventions to determine the impact of those interventions. The EIP teachers are in contact regularly with each homeroom teacher to ensure that students’ academic needs are being met and that there is continuity between the EIP classroom and the academic classes.

In addition to this program, teachers differentiate instruction to remediate for students who are not meeting grade level expectations, and while this absolutely happens for reading and math as well, students also receive support in areas such as writing, fine motor skills, social skills, and behavior. We address all of these areas with support and remediation because their combined effect impacts the whole child.

We also understand that the four walls of the classroom are not always enough to close achievement gaps for students. Each morning, members of our Beta Club participate in a program called “Beta Buddies,” where these fifth grade students work on academics with students from kindergarten through fourth grade. Beta Buddies build relationships with the younger students in order to help support them through academic skills practice. They work on things such as reading fluency, sight word retention, reading comprehension, multiplication facts, and addition and subtraction. Parent volunteers can also be seen lining hallways working with students on similar skills. In both cases, the goal is to increase understanding, achievement, and confidence through building relationships and providing supported practice.

3b. Students performing above grade level

Challenging students who are performing above grade level looks different at each grade and within each content area. This happens for our students in several ways, one of which is through our gifted program. In order to qualify for this program, students are assessed based on achievement, mental ability, creativity, and motivation. Students who qualify for the gifted program spend one day a week in an alternate setting with a gifted certified teacher whose mission is to provide relevant learning opportunities that require logical and critical thinking skills. The interdisciplinary approach to the instruction of this classroom promotes a culture of learning, responsibility, cooperation, structure, and choice. Students in this program read advanced literature, participate in STEAM activities, absorb new words for vocabulary enrichment, and utilize problem solving strategies.

Students in the gifted program, however, are not the only ones performing above grade level. Advanced content within all classrooms is provided to students through flexible grouping during skills block, a time allocated specifically for meeting students’ needs, differentiated content during regular class time, goal setting for student-directed learning, and diving deeper into the grade level content. While our kindergarten and sometimes even first grade classrooms can take a move on when ready approach, this is not always developmentally appropriate for all ages and content. As students get older and material becomes more

complex, students are not “moved on” to the next grade level’s standards. For students who have mastered general understanding of grade level content, an increased complexity of the content is provided. For reading, that may be a similar text with a higher Lexile level, for math, that may be the use of more complex numbers or situations, for social studies, students may be asked to understand implications of historical events from the standards. This allows these students to take academic risks knowing that they understand the concept while allowing them to discover the concept with a deeper understanding.

3c. Special education

Our success in special education begins with strong collaborative teaching. From pre-kindergarten through fifth grade, special education students are served with support in general education classrooms. These services are given by special education teachers and paraprofessionals who take an active role in the instruction that is given and the accommodations and modifications for their students. The cohesion in instruction is such that you would not know which is the general education teacher of the two.

While the special education teachers provide support for their students in the general education setting, we realize that based on the Georgia Milestones Assessment System, the gap between our special education subgroup and that of all students is still too wide. Because of that, some students are pulled for small group instruction during what we call skills block. This is a daily forty-five minute block of time daily set aside to reinforce individualized goals as well as the content students are learning in content areas. In addition to this skills time, our special education teachers allow their students to attend tutoring and practice sessions before school to work on specific grade level skills.

What has the greatest impact on our special education students is that they trust their teachers. We build continuity with our students by allowing them to stay with the same special education teacher in the younger grades and then allowing both upper grades special education teachers to begin building the relationships before they become their case manager. The trust built over the course of the time with us helps students in a vulnerable situation feel more comfortable and become ready for academic success.

3d. ELLs, if a special program or intervention is offered

In 2016 the English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL) program moved to Brooks Elementary from another elementary school. This was an exciting time for our school with new opportunities to reach students and a growing diverse population. It was our goal from the beginning to make the transition for these students as smooth as possible and to embrace their families as part of our own.

The first couple of years were a learning curve for our general education teachers as to how to tailor instruction to meet the needs of our new group of students. We received professional development on writing from our ESOL teacher, teaching academic vocabulary, and using graphic organizers and explicit language in order to improve literacy skills. We immediately saw the results, but not only were our English language learners showing a greater proficiency in their classes, their standardized test scores showed great gains as well. We are closing the gaps that the Georgia Milestones Assessment System highlighted and dismissing an increased number of students from the ELL program based on their scores on the ACCESS test of language proficiency. In fact, the strategies were working so well, teachers began to incorporate them for all students.

We have continued to focus on ensuring success for this group of students by making sure their families are involved in what is going on in school and reinforcing strategies that work. Recently, our ELL students published their own book describing holidays from around the world. After their book was complete, ELL students' parents, school administrators, as well as district office personnel were invited to hear them read their portion of the book. It is important that we show all of our students the benefits of learning about a variety of cultures and expose them to the new ideas that accompany these perspectives.

3e. Other populations (e.g., migrant), if a special program or intervention is offered

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

The focus is always on students first. Our mission and vision revolve around student-centered goals and creating student based environments. This part is easy, because the faculty at Brooks genuinely loves our students and our work which makes for an authentic, positive environment. In fact, we believe that engagement begins with a positive environment. While our school systematically implements Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), this is not just another system that we follow, and our PBIS do not only pertain to behavior but extend to academics as well.

Students are taught how to engage in positive behavior through the use of the 7 Mindsets which encourages accountability, connectedness, and having a positive attitude as well as school-wide expectations for behavior. Students are rewarded for this positive and expected behavior from the lunchroom, to the classroom, to the buses, and everywhere in between. These rewards, of course, come from teachers and staff, but they can also come from each other. It is not uncommon to hear chants or cheers of praise recited by students to encourage one another. Connecting emotionally with each other helps to reinforce the climate and culture repeated to students each morning through announcements of “We are one!” In addition to this, each student has an adult advocate in our building. These advocates act as a safe person to talk to and from whom students can receive constant encouragement. Advocates provide support and motivation in the areas of academics, behavior, attendance, and social-emotional health.

Academic engagement is also proactively instilled. Teachers put a focus on real world relevance in learning and work hard to make learning fun. In order to support students who still need academic assistance, we execute a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS). We understand that students are more likely to give up when they feel overwhelmed by the complexity of academic expectations, so we break up long, complex sequences of learning by having students set goals for themselves, teaching them to become self-directed learners, and providing a student-centered learning environment.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

We are blessed to have families and community members who feel comfortable coming to and being involved with our school. Local builders and real estate agents support our teachers with lunches and help students with school supplies. Our local fire department assists with ensuring our drills are efficient, participates in our career day and community helper activities, and even comes out to have fun with our students for our water day. Local businesses and community partners donate items such as water bottles for our fun run and purchase advertisements displayed in our car rider line to raise money for technology for our school. Each year, a local extrusion plant, Bonnell, comes out to our school to discuss their organization and donates pocket-sized dictionaries for all third grade students. Business partners volunteer to participate in our school council, providing input for school-based decisions and helping to disseminate accurate information about initiatives to the community.

Beyond the typical family participation, we encourage our families to become invested in what is going on within classrooms. Each day parent volunteers and mentors can be seen in our hallways quizzing students on sight words, leading book clubs, or simply making copies for teachers. We invite families to events like “Tea and Tissues,” an event for parents new to our school (mostly kindergarten parents) on the first day. These kinds of events are used to give parents information about how to become involved in our school as well as help them to feel supported while becoming comfortable at our school. We also hold spirit nights at local restaurants and youth activity establishments to connect with students and their families outside of school.

Communication is a vital part of engaging our families and community. While we frequently use traditional forms of communication such as phone calls or emails and weekly classroom newsletters, we also use twenty first century forms of communication. Our school has a closed Facebook group for parents to connect with the school and each other. This is an excellent forum for parents to give each other advice about helping students with their homework, teachers to display pictures of field trips or events at the school, and administration to keep families updated on everything from school achievements to bus delays.

Our school also has a Twitter account where we focus on celebrating accomplishments and displaying proud moments throughout the year.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

One of the strengths of our school is our professional culture. Administration works hard to ensure that the staff feels valued and trusted, and, in turn, staff holds themselves to a high standard for the benefit of the students. The first key to a professional culture is strong and healthy collaboration. At Brooks, our teachers work together to plan, to intervene, to accelerate, and for everything in between. They trust each other and supplement each other with an "all in" team approach.

Monthly professional development is used to continually sharpen instructional skills. This time for growth and learning is continually evolving and, like our instruction for our students, spirals in content. We regularly revisit topics such as growth mindset, differentiation, student engagement, and strategies for students with disabilities. In addition to refining our craft through research-based strategies, we use the wealth of experience and skill we have at our school to collaborate with each other and share strategies and activities that are working. Vertical and horizontal collaboration allows us to use the expertise we have within our building to help each other grow. None of this learning and development would be effective if the school leaders were not also growing and learning as an example to the staff. School administrators at Brooks Elementary attend professional conferences and are continually reading cutting edge literature in order to stay on top of our ever-evolving profession.

Contentment is not an option for anyone at Brooks. While we are extremely proud of the accomplishments our school has achieved, continual growth is our goal. One way we promote this is through quarterly impact checks that analyze benchmark, common assessment, grade, attendance, and behavior data. Our teachers know their data and use it to drive effective instruction. Each nine weeks, grade levels and support staff disaggregate data with administrators and decisions are made about reaching students, closing achievement gaps, and strategies that may be effective. An action plan is created to be used over the course of the quarter. But it is not enough to simply make those decisions. It is through our impact checks that we analyze the impact these action steps have had on student learning in order to plan for effective instruction.

4. School Leadership:

It cannot go unsaid that the success of Brooks Elementary School was not developed overnight. For the past eleven years the leadership of the school has built capacity, provided instructional leadership, and empowered teachers to, in turn, empower students. Brooks is currently led by its third Principal who continues to build upon the foundation of the incredible leadership that preceded her. This foundation is one of servant leadership, instructional leadership, and shared leadership that makes relationships with students, staff, and the community a priority.

Leadership is most often defined and connected with a shared sense of purpose and direction. Involving stakeholders in the process of identifying these is one of the first steps in creating this sense of community and ownership in the organization. Each summer the leadership team, which is made up of teacher leaders and administrators, meets to analyze data, identify root causes for obstacles, and create an action plan for addressing them. During several sessions, the school improvement plan is created as a living document that is regularly monitored and updated as needed.

Teacher input is a vital component of the school's leadership. Seen as on the "front lines," teachers are encouraged to give feedback and insight to policies, procedures, and resource management. Guidance is also regularly solicited from the school's council which is made up of business partners, parents, and teachers. Connecting the whole community to appropriate school-based decision making not only encourages engagement but also instills a connection to the school that promotes investment in students.

Beyond our school as an organization, it is a family. Even with more than 730 students and over 70 staff, the principal knows everyone's name. Successes are celebrated, and struggles are supported. While being focused on student achievement has a large place in the culture of the school, it is also understood that the human component of our interactions is what will truly make a difference in the lives of our Brooks family.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Our strategy for academic success revolves around engagement. We make it a priority to engage families, engage students, and to be engaged ourselves. It starts with an engaged staff. Custodians, school nutrition personnel, teachers, support staff, administrative assistants, and administrators are all “all in.” When you think about working out and “engaging” your muscles, you are growing that muscle for the benefit of whole-body health. In the same way every member of Brooks Elementary’s staff is engaged for the benefit of our students. Whether a custodian is mentoring a student, our school nurse is helping a family through caring for their child, or a teacher is moving mountains to reach a student struggling for the first time through a concept, every person is vital to student success.

Engaging families is another priority that contributes to our success. We regularly have parent volunteers come in to read with students, pop popcorn for parties, paint backdrops for school plays, mentor students who need someone to count on, organize delivering Christmas presents to families in need, or helping students check out books from the media center. Parents who cannot come into the school during the day are working at home to cut out shapes for class projects or sending in items for project-based learning lessons. Our parents are here at the school to eat lunch with their students and in regular communication with teachers about students' progress and needs. We find parent engagement is an integral part of student success and open our doors to families any way we can.

Most importantly, we see students as volunteers in their learning and create an environment where they want to learn and are curious about their world. We begin by teaching students HOW to be engaged. Students learn about listening to others and showing respect at an early age. We continually express the relevance of education to our students. If they don’t understand why they need to know something, they can not understand or appreciate its value. We encourage students to see mistakes as part of the learning process instead of something to dread or be upset about. And we promote following your passion and use natural curiosity to enhance wonder about other content. Above all, we remember that for students to be engaged, we need to make learning fun. Time loving school is never wasted, and while rigor and high expectations are always in the front of our mind, they are worthless without student engagement.