

U.S. Department of Education
2023 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 Dr. Julie Norden
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name Mt. Carmel Elementary School
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 335 Homer Nance Road
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Huntsville State AL Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 35811-9033

County Madison

Telephone (256) 851-4660 Fax (256) 851-4661

Web site/URL <https://www.mcssk12.org/Domain/24> E-mail jnorden@mcssk12.org

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. Kenneth Kubik E-mail kkubik@mcssk12.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Madison County School System Tel. (256) 852-2557

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 Mr. Nathan Curry
(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, leave blank.*

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 2023 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 must include one or more of grades K-12. Schools located on the same campus (physical location and mailing address) must apply as an entire school (i.e. K-8; 6-12; K-12 school). Two (or more) schools located on separate campuses, must apply individually even if they have the same principal. A single school located on multiple campuses with one principal must apply as an entire school.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2018 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for at least the three years prior to September 2022.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 or 2022.
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. The nominated school has, or is subject to, a nondiscrimination policy (provide either a link to the policy or submit a text of the policy), is committed to equal opportunity for all students and all staff consistent with applicable law and does not have any outstanding findings of unlawful discrimination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's nomination and/or rescind a school's award if unlawful discrimination is later discovered.

12. 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.

The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's nomination and/or rescind a school's award if one of these eligibility requirements is later discovered to have not been met or otherwise been violated.

PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Data should be provided for the current school year (2022-2023) unless otherwise stated.

DISTRICT (Question 1 is not applicable to non-public schools. For charter schools: If a charter school is part of the public school system, information should be provided for the public school district. If a charter school is considered its own district or part of a charter district, the information provided should reflect that.)

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

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools. **Only include demographic data for the nominated school, not for the district.**)

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 in the school as of October 1, 2022 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent at the school. Include all students enrolled, in-person, participating in a hybrid model, or online only. If online schooling or other COVID-19 school issues make this difficult to obtain, provide the most accurate and up-to-date information available:

Grade	# of Students
PreK	77
K	138
1	123
2	162
3	146
4	0
5	0
6	0
7	0
8	0
9	0
10	0
11	0
12 or higher	0
Total Students	646

*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):
- 5 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 0 % Asian
 - 17 % Black or African American
 - 11 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 60 % White
 - 7 % 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 2021 - 2022 school year: 18%

If the mobility rate is above 15%, please explain:

Huntsville, Alabama is the home of Red Stone Arsenal (US Army Post) and NASA, which bring transient families to the area.

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, 2021 until the end of the 2021-2022 school year	54
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2021 until the end of the 2021-2022 school year	55
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	109
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2021	610
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.18
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	18

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

Spanish, Thai

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 3 %
17 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 44 %

Total number students who qualify: 285

8. Students receiving special education services with an IEP: 13 %
Total number of students served 85

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional conditions. All students receiving special education services with an IEP should be reflected in the table below. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

<u>19</u> Autism	<u>2</u> Multiple Disabilities
<u>0</u> Deafness	<u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment
<u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness	<u>10</u> Other Health Impaired
<u>25</u> Developmental Delay	<u>12</u> Specific Learning Disability
<u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance	<u>15</u> Speech or Language Impairment
<u>0</u> Hearing Impairment	<u>1</u> Traumatic Brain Injury
<u>5</u> Intellectual Disability	<u>1</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness

9. Students receiving special education services with a 504: 2 %
Total number of students served: 11

10. Number of years the principal has been in the position at this school: 1

11. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to the nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below. If your current staffing structure has shifted due to COVID-19 impacts and you are uncertain or unable to determine FTEs, provide an estimate.

	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.	14
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	3

12. 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

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

Required Information	2021-2022	2020-2021	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018
Daily student attendance	95%	95%	97%	97%	97%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

14. **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 2022.

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%

15. 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.

16. In a couple of sentences, provide the school's mission or vision statement.

The mission of Mt. Carmel Elementary School is to provide a high-quality education that prepares students for success in a globally competitive world. The Mt. Carmel team is committed to working collaboratively to ensure high levels of learning for all students.

17. Provide a URL link to the school's nondiscrimination policy.

(Located at the bottom of all pages) <https://www.mcsc12.org/Page/166>

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

PART III – SCHOOL OVERVIEW

Mt. Carmel Elementary School is a Pre-K through 3rd grade school with 646 students enrolled, serving the children of the Mt. Carmel community in Huntsville, Alabama. Part of the Madison County School System, Mt. Carmel sits just outside the city limits of Huntsville in north Alabama. Huntsville is a culturally diverse city known for its space, technology, and defense industries. Although Mt. Carmel serves a rural community, the area is densely populated. The school enjoys an active parent organization and low teacher turnover. While the demographic makeup of the school has not changed over the last three years, enrollment has increased steadily. Typically, enrollment jumps after breaks and holidays. The school has a certified staff of 48 teachers, counselors, and administrators, and 34 non-certified support staff members including office staff, aides, custodians, lunchroom staff, bus drivers, school resource officer, and a nurse.

The goal of Mt. Carmel Elementary School is to nurture, guide, and challenge all children to become responsible, confident, lifelong learners. We develop our student body to be active members of our community by promoting leadership, integrity, a positive outlook, creativity, curiosity, and a strong work ethic. One way we develop leadership traits in our students is through After-School Clubs, including choir, running club, math club, and theater. Club facilitators plan meaningful activities to connect learning to real-life. For example, the math club facilitated our first annual Cereal Box Challenge this year. We encourage leadership and learning to extend beyond the walls of our school into our community where our students can make a real difference in the lives of others, too. For instance, our choir performed at a senior citizen center in the spring.

Additionally, our faculty collaborates with our STEM instructor to provide standards-based, inquiry-based projects and activities that engage students. This collaborative approach to learning and real-world exploration through technology and community partnerships prepares our students for college, careers, and beyond.

Immediately, upon stepping into the lobby, one feels the positive energy of Mt. Carmel Elementary School in Huntsville, Alabama. Themes of kindness, teamwork, and celebration appear. Photographs of the Defenders of the Wildcat Way (students with exemplary behavior) hang on the walls, as well as student artwork. The school secretaries have kind, smiling faces and always offer a helping hand. The sun shines brightly through the glass windows, reflective of the School Family motto “kind thoughts, kind words, kind hearts”. The campus is a living, breathing organization with members who cross roles to ensure everyone’s success. The plant manager assists the custodians, teachers assist the cafeteria manager, and the assistant principal helps the special education aide, and so on. Hallway banners outline the Wildcat Way, which is R.O.A.R! Respectful, Orderly, Attentive, and Responsible. Hallways are orderly because students know to walk “blue, one two”, and you may even spot Whiskers the Wildcat mascot leading the pack. Student leaders are visible—dropping off lunch orders, passing out food bags, helping at PE, walking Pre-K to the library, and returning from morning announcements. The walls celebrate student achievement and goals, including math facts, reading challenges, Accelerated Reader points, STEM experiments, and creative writing exercises. Step into the gymnasium to experience the same sense of school pride, energy and achievement! Our PE coach hosts friendly competitions amongst classes that include goal-setting for activities and behavior that change with the seasons. Go team! One will even feel the positive energy during afternoon dismissal, which is the calmest, most efficient car dismissal in the state of Alabama. Teachers use 6 colors and 12 cones to dismiss over 250 students in less than 20 minutes safely.

The Mt. Carmel school community has been honored in several ways, including as a Blue Ribbon Lighthouse School of Excellence, winner of Alabama School Secretary of the Year, and 2021-22 Be a Champion and Read winner.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

1a. Reading/English language arts curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:

The Alabama Literacy Act was passed in 2019 to ensure students would be reading on grade level by the end of third grade. The literacy act led to the implementation of new state reading standards as well as the requirement to have a vetted and approved core reading instructional program. The core reading program was required to address all aspects of literacy including phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, oral language and writing. Our newly adopted curriculum is Amplify Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA). CKLA is an explicit, systematic curriculum which is grounded in the Science of Reading research and combines deep content knowledge with research-based foundational skills. Kindergarten through second grade has two separate components. Third grade integrates the skills and knowledge portions into one daily lesson. Each component helps students develop the skills needed to be a proficient reader.

The skills portion of the curriculum focuses on foundational skills that are needed for reading success including phonological awareness, phonics, sight word recognition, and writing. At the kindergarten level, 43 sound-spellings are taught which enables students to read 5,672 words by the end of the school year. First grade instruction covers 73 sound-spellings which empowers students to read 20,760 words by the end of the school year. Second grade reviews all previously taught sound-spellings and adds an additional 45 spellings which increases the number of words they can read to 37,038. Third grade shifts the focus to morphology thereby increasing students' word knowledge as well as their decoding and encoding expertise. Grammar and comprehension skills are woven into the daily routines which allows for a seamless integration of the skills needed for reading and writing. Fluency is built throughout the units by providing students with decodable texts that are both rigorous and captivating. Students are introduced to chapter books at the kindergarten level and this is continued in subsequent grade levels. Students are motivated to continue to read about their favorite characters.

The knowledge portion focuses on background knowledge, vocabulary, language structures, oral language, etc. The knowledge portion of CKLA covers a collection of diverse topics. These topics range from nursery rhymes and fables, plants, presidents, and American symbols in Kindergarten to classic tales, the human body, and colonial American and ancient Rome in third grade.

Both the knowledge and skills units in grades K-2 and the integrated units in grade 3 target writing and comprehension. Writing is developed through the use of informal as well as formal writing. Formal writing includes narratives, persuasive writings as well as informative pieces.

Comprehension is an essential component of the curriculum at all grade levels. Grades K-2 develop listening comprehension skills which are further developed in the third grade when students are required to apply their comprehension strategies to rigorous texts. Students learn how to support their reasoning using textual evidence.

Assessment is an integral part of the CKLA curriculum. Daily assessments are aligned to the primary focus standard. These consist of formative assessments and checks for understanding which can be used to guide instructional decisions. End of unit assessments are used to determine student mastery of the standards. Beginning of the year assessments help teachers diagnose skills gaps which need to be addressed. Middle of the year assessments give the teachers an update of how students are progressing.

1b. Mathematics curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:

At Mt. Carmel Elementary School, all learners in each grade level are working toward standards mastery in accordance with the standards found in the 2019 Alabama Course of Study. This course of study was developed by educators and business and community leaders to provide a foundation for building quality

mathematics programs across the state. Implementation of high quality, rigorous instruction will enable all learners to be mathematically well-prepared graduates.

In our district, Madison County has worked hard to identify Essential Standards in each grade level to ensure consistency among all students across the district. Kindergarten students work during the year to build knowledge in the domains of Foundations of Counting, Operations and Algebraic Thinking, Operations with Numbers, Measurement and Geometry. In first grade, the students work within the domains of Operations and Algebraic Thinking, Operations with Numbers : Base Ten, Data Analysis, Measurement and Geometry. In second grade, students work in the areas of Operations and Algebraic Thinking, Operations with Numbers: Base Ten, Data Analysis, Measurement and Geometry. In third grade, the students are focusing on the following domains: Operations and Algebraic Thinking, Operations with Numbers: Base Ten, Operations with Numbers:Fractions, Data Analysis, Measurement, and Geometry.

To meet the needs of all learners, teachers at Mt. Carmel routinely engage in research based, best practices during math instruction. The majority of our teachers are trained OGAP (Ongoing Assessment Program) teachers. The Ongoing Assessment Project (OGAP) is a systematic and intentional formative assessment system in mathematics based upon the mathematics education research on how students learn specific concepts, common errors students make, or pre-conceptions or misconceptions that interfere with students learning new concepts and solving related problems. OGAP presently has formative assessment systems for additive reasoning, multiplicative reasoning, fractions, and proportionality. These mathematical topics represent about 80% of the mathematics in the CCSSM in their respective grade spans. Time is spent on teaching students a variety of problem types within specific and appropriate magnitudes. Teachers also routinely engage in Counting Collections with their students to help solidify Base-Ten and counting understanding. Teachers use daily Number Talks to teach, reteach, or give sneak peeks at a little piece of the instructional focus for the day. The enVision Curriculum is used as the daily guaranteed and viable curriculum to pull lessons and resources for everyday use in the classroom. Students routinely use iReady math, an online custom math curriculum that provides students of all ages with differentiated instruction and supports them on their individual paths to success.

Data at Mt. Carmel is gathered in many ways. Teachers work together in teams to create small, formative assessments that can help drive their instruction and fill any gaps in their instruction when covering standards. Students take iReady Diagnostic Assessments three times a year (beginning, middle and end) to track growth towards their Annual Growth Goal and Typical Growth Goal (set by iReady Diagnostic at the beginning of the year). Our 2nd and 3rd grade teachers have access to Standards Mastery, a short, digital assessment that allows educators to assess specific standards as they are covered in the classroom. Built to match the rigor of state tests, Standards Mastery assessments let teachers know which skills their students have and have not mastered so they can adjust instruction. The enVision curriculum has embedded unit assessments that the teachers can use. Our students in 2nd and 3rd grade also take the Alabama Comprehensive Assessment Program (ACAP) in the spring of each year. ACAP is an online assessment designed to provide students, parents, teachers, administrators, and Alabama residents with information regarding student progress toward mastery of the Alabama Course of Study Standards.

1c. Science curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:

Teachers use state standards as their guide to establish objectives "(I can" statements) and design assessments. Our current ELA curriculum contains informational text that aligns with some of our science and social studies standards. Therefore, teachers often plan cross-curricular projects that hit multiple standards and allows for collaborative groups. To address the remaining standards, teachers use quality resources for lesson planning, such as Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative (AMSTI) Science and Science Weekly. During Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), teachers develop common assessments and plan relevant activities that help students master standards. Our STEM Teacher supports classroom teachers by incorporating hands-on standards-based Science kits and the curriculum Generation Genius.

1d. Social studies/history/civic learning curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:

Teachers use state standards as their guide to establish objectives ("I can" statements) and design assessments. Our current ELA curriculum contains informational text that aligns with some of our science and social studies standards. Therefore, teachers often plan cross-curricular projects that hit multiple standards and allows for collaborative groups. To address the remaining standards, teachers use quality resources for lesson planning, such as Social Studies Weekly and Scholastic News. During PLCs, teachers develop common assessments and plan relevant activities that help students master standards. In second grade, students participate in Liberty Learning's Super Citizen Program, which includes hands-on activities surrounding civics, character, financial literacy, career exploration and personal responsibility.

1e. For schools that serve grades 7-12:

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

Four-year olds in Madison County Schools have access to Alabama's First Class Pre-K, which is a grant-funded program. Alabama's First Class Pre-K has been awarded the highest quality ranking by the National Institute for Early Education Research for 16 consecutive years. Certified teachers assess and develop specialized lessons designed to address the following domains: social emotional, physical & cognitive development, mathematics, language & literacy, science & technology, and social studies & the arts. A typical day includes the following: whole group lesson, small group activities, free center time, gross motor activity, science exploration, singing, fingerplays, rest time, and meals. Teachers use a positive behavioral approach called Conscious Discipline, which is based in brain research. With this approach, students learn social and emotional skills, through the core components of safety, connection and problem solving. Teachers are supervised by regional coaches, monitors, and directors who play a regular role in the classroom's success. Classrooms include no more than 18 students, one certified teacher and one paraprofessional teacher with specific early childhood credentials. Teachers use the Alabama Standards for Early Learning and Development, which view learning as a continuum, so they are formatted to include learning progressions for birth through age 5. All classroom are equipped with age-appropriate, stimulating learning toys and activities, included on a master inventory list. Additionally, teachers refer to a crosswalk that shows the alignment of Alabama's Early Learning and Development Standards to Alabama's Courses of Study. Teachers collect anecdotal data daily to determine students' developmental growth and next steps.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

2a. Arts (visual and/or performing)

All students receive visual art instruction during the first semester and music during the second semester. The art teacher collaborates with grade-level teams to support classroom standards, including social studies. The teacher provides direct instruction in drawing, painting, printmaking, and collage that include state art standards involving lines, patterns, and planning. Students explore personal experiences within a variety of media arts techniques and productions, and develop social skills including safety and fairness while working with materials and peers. Some of the examples of student art experiences includes collage, watercolor, drawing, oil pastels, masks, and vases. Furthermore, the teacher embeds art history in daily lessons by spotlighting an artist of the week. Most importantly, classroom teachers integrate visual art into weekly activities to further engage students and enrich the curriculum. The music teacher creates a variety of musical experiences in which students may explore music history, musical concepts, and performance. Performances include drums, sticks, and bells. Students may also participate in the after-school Choir Club, which practices weekly and performs several times per year for the community. This year the Choir Club performed at a nearby nursing home for senior citizens.

2b. Physical education/health/nutrition

Physical education is essential for students to maintain a healthy mind and body. Physical activity is useful for students to improve their motor and cognitive skills through daily exercises and athletic competitions. It

is hard to dismiss the importance of physical activity when seeing the benefits day to day in students. The movement and freedom of expression that physical education allows enables our students to return to the classroom ready to learn each day. At Mt. Carmel, students are taught life skills while attending physical education classes throughout the week. They learn the importance of teamwork, positive attitude, and accountability while completing various state standards. The Physical Education teacher aligns lessons with grade level standards, and collaborates with teachers to address life skills. One of the more popular lessons in all grade levels incorporates math and physical activity. Kindergarten and first grade students work on their counting while moving throughout the gym. Second and third graders focus on adding and subtracting numbers while completing various activities. Students are able to reinforce their math skills while also having fun. The Physical Education teacher is intentional about building student leadership traits during class. For example, students rotate leading daily exercise routines, which requires self-control, assertiveness, and confidence.

2c. Foreign language(s), if offered (if not offered, leave blank)

2d. Technology/library/media

The media center is the hub of our school. The flexible schedule allows students to visit the library throughout the day, as well as weekly with their class. Beginning in Pre-K, students check out a book weekly, and learn to browse the shelves to choose a 'just right book'. During class time, the media specialist embeds state literacy and technology standards within each lesson. She conducts exciting read-alouds where she spotlights literacy standards, such as summarizing, author's purpose, and point of view. Many schoolwide activities focus on reading and literacy skills that help students reach standards in the classroom. One unit of study is cybersecurity. Students learn about being safe online and keeping information private. They are able to apply this knowledge while completing schoolwork online, communicating with family members, and various life events. The entire school participates in a March Madness book challenge. Students are encouraged to read various books and vote on their favorite title. This encourages reading while also exposing students to new literature.

The librarian also works to build the life-long love of reading through incentive programs, seasonal displays, and school-family competitions. Twice yearly, the library holds community book fairs to encourage the love of reading. Often time, the library is the prime location for special events, such as author visits, service animal visits, community helpers, and more. Another official duty of the library involves technology. All students have access to a Chromebook in their classrooms and all teachers have devices for at-home work. Therefore, the librarian maintains all equipment, including document cameras, touch screens, and other peripherals. She helps teachers learn how to use technology to enhance their instruction, and she serves as the district liaison for support.

2e. Any other interesting or innovative curriculum programs you would like to share

3. Academic Supports

3a. Students performing below grade level:

At the start of each year, the bottom 5% of students in reading are screened for dyslexia-like tendencies. Beginning in Kindergarten, students who are not making progress with daily objectives receive Tier II and Tier III instruction in the general education classroom in a small group setting. Teachers use evidence-based curriculum resources, such as iReady Math or Amplify to provide students additional practice and exposure to master the standards. Teachers track their progress through regular progress monitoring to determine next steps. Students not meeting benchmarks or making adequate progress in reading and math receive daily intervention either with the regular education teacher or with the school interventionists, who is certified through Neuhaus. Teachers track intervention on district-approved Response to Intervention data sheets.

Then, review student data during monthly Problem Solving Team (PST) meetings with their grade-level teams. PST also includes an administrator, interventionist, and reading specialist, who work together to develop an individual reading or math plan for improvement. The plan includes parent involvement and at-home activities and goals. At the start of second semester, grade-level teams begin intervention deployments, which involves teachers exchanging students for intervention. This strategic plan capitalizes on the teachers' strengths and exposes students to a variety of instructional strategies in order to master reading standards. The PST will eventually determine if a student should be referred for special education testing based on their lack of progress, parent input, grades, and social-emotional development.

3b. Students performing above grade level:

The Academic and Creative Enrichment (ACE) program provides pullout enrichment services to elementary students identified as gifted in Madison County Schools. ACE enrichment programming is thematic and multidisciplinary in nature, and its content, process, product, and learning environment are administered differently than those within general education studies. Students are encouraged to develop independent and self-directed study skills, higher-level thinking skills, and products that use new techniques or expand existing ideas. Students identified attend at least one time weekly beginning in the second grade.

Additionally, five days weekly, extensionist provide students performing above grade level further learning opportunities. They work closely with classroom teachers to 'extend' the classroom standards beyond typical expectations to include endeavors that are more creative. During classroom center rotations (Tier II), teachers provide students with more rigorous activities at the 'teacher table'. Furthermore, Mt. Carmel also addresses students' academic needs through extra-curricular activities, such as math and robotics clubs.

3c. Students with disabilities:

To ensure equitable practices, Madison County School uses a detailed protocol to determine special education eligibility. Once the IEP team has determined that a child will receive specialized instruction, we develop a unique plan to guarantee that they will demonstrate growth on all levels. By taking a whole-child approach, we work to develop several skill sets, including functional, social-emotional, cognitive, and academic. Special education case managers work collaboratively with behavior specialists (certified BCBAs) and district coordinators to develop behavior plans, arrange schedules, and create environments in which students thrive.

Mt. Carmel currently has three two self-contained resource rooms with students with high needs, three collaborative rooms, and one developmental pre-school room. School staff involves parents in all decision-making, and case managers communicate with parents on a daily basis. Most importantly, the district office of special education and Mt. Carmel case managers review student data regularly to make adjustments and guarantee continuous improvement.

Students with disabilities are a valued part of the Mt. Carmel school culture. They are included in each area of our school day, including participation in morning announcements, lunch, and all school activities, such as Color Run, Spring Dance, and Book Fair. They learn daily through interaction with typical classroom peers, and they read with third grade friends on special days throughout the year. Our special education teachers participate in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) with their general education counterparts and complete the same professional trainings allowing them to provide high-quality, research-based interventions in the classroom.

3d. English Language Learners:

When a new student enrolls in the district, we evaluate their Home Language Survey to determine if the student needs to be screened for EL services. Once screened, if a student scores below a 5.0 on the WIDA Screener or a 4.5 on the Kindergarten Screener, they are considered eligible for EL services and classified as LEP (Limited English Proficient). After that, the EL teacher and classroom teacher(s) will collaborate to determine what accommodations/supports the student will need to succeed in the general education classroom. An IELP (Individualized English Language Plan) will be developed specifically for each student

to help them improve their proficiency in English as well as their performance in the classroom. Active EL students will be given pull-out supplemental services with the EL teacher in one-on-one or small group settings. Students will be grouped according to WIDA Access scores and will be given tailored instruction according to assessments and performance observed by the classroom teacher and EL teacher. Most students will be seen a minimum of 30 minutes weekly; however, students with lower proficiency levels and greater needs may be seen more often. The EL teacher creates lessons focused on developing the four domains: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. Each spring, active EL students will take the WIDA Access for ELL's 2.0, where we will be able to see how much their English proficiency has grown throughout the school year. Once a student scores a 4.8 or higher, they have exited the EL program and are considered proficient in English. They will then be monitored for four years to ensure that they are able to perform well in the general education setting.

3e. Other populations, if a special program or intervention is offered:

Mt. Carmel participates in the Madison County Schools Indian Education Program through a Title VI Indian Education grant. The mission is to plan, develop, and implement an effective program that assists American Indian students in their educational endeavors. The program offers a variety of activities to meet the educational and unique cultural needs of American Indian students. Support and resources include scholarships, newsletters, a parent advisory committee, and cultural support. There is no cost to the student. The program's objectives includes: To assist Indian students in meeting challenging academic standards; to support the district mission and assist in closing the achievement gap; to supplement and enrich the regular academic program with culturally specific learning resources for Indian students to allow parents, community, and students a meaningful role in program planning. Mt. Carmel students registered with the program receive regular visits from the facilitator who leads engaging cultural activities.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

Mt. Carmel Elementary is a high-energy school that starts each day off by creating a positive atmosphere with motivational affirmations. Members of our staff greet students everyday as they enter the building. From that start, student representatives take turns leading the entire school through live morning announcements via Google Meet. They share the goals for the day or week, celebrate birthdays, and recite the pledge and school motto with enthusiasm and pride. Our students know that they are loved, which is essential for young scholars in their growth and development within themselves and within the way that they see others. The morning announcements set the tone for the day, which says “I’m glad you came to school. You’re an important member of the Mt. Carmel school family.”

Our school provides services that go beyond academics, which further engages students. Since we are in the “Rocket City”, the military is a key factor in our community. Many of our families either are currently serving or have been a part of the military. Empathy and knowledge for our students who are a part of this lifestyle gives a sense of calmness and peace to those families; which, in turn, brings our school closer than many other campuses. Often our teachers and staff spend their free time cheering on our students at their extracurricular activities as a way for caring for their students outside of the classroom, which tends to create lifelong relationships with families. The Mt. Carmel School Family is grounded in authentic relationships that develop over time. This occurs during special activities, student-led announcements, friendly competitions, and speaking kindness to others. School clubs offer a unique opportunity to develop student capacity and increase engagement. For instance, our student ambassadors assume leadership roles with younger students during the year, math club students facilitate school-wide projects, and choir students kick-off school events.

Although we are a primary school, we still strive to meet the expectations of college and career readiness by giving our students opportunities to learn in a variety of ways each day, which thoroughly engages our students. Activities include physical education, counseling, library media, music, art, STEM, and computer science. In core academics, students track their progress monitoring data, books read, and math lessons completed, as a way of motivating them to the finish line. Internal motivation will sustain future learning and growth, which is the ultimate goal for future societies.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Community members and partnerships thrive at our school because we know our families. Many of our parents either work for companies or own their own businesses, which allows us to use that resource when we are in need of extra support. Our Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) is a great asset to our community and our school in creating experiences for our students, such as festivals and dances. The PTO also donates raised funds to our school to fill financial gaps, especially in the areas like playground and large equipment. PTO also works closely with administration to recruit parents to provide duty-free lunch to teachers during special occasions, which contribute to a positive campus morale. Local churches replenish our community closet and a food bank on campus weekly, which we use on a daily basis. We provide low-income families with food bags at the end of each week to ensure that they have food for the weekend. Local businesses participate in our Community Action Group (CAG), which meets three times per year to discuss issues, concerns, and create change surrounding our school community. For example, this year’s CAG supported the creation of after-school clubs. Additionally, other businesses provide financial support through donations for special teacher events, since the accumulation of non-public funds is challenging. The winter holidays are an exciting time in the life of our school because our community and local churches ensure that the needs of our students are met through giving gifts and food for families. Some of our families who have businesses help each year in making sure that our students and teachers have the supplies that they need to begin the year off successfully and prepared. Our yearly career day allows parents to come in to meet with students about a variety of jobs and careers that could cultivate the current interest that our students have in answering questions and sharing knowledge. Several times throughout the year, we make a special connection with our high school athletes, which serves many purposes. For example, our high school

basketball team stopped by our school prior to attending the state championship, and we lined the sidewalks with cheering, decorated students and staff! This gesture shows how school family love and kindness extends beyond our doors, and it exposes young students to healthy extracurricular activities. Mt. Carmel also hosts college students from local universities through internships, which helps our faculty tremendously. From this partnership, local professors see the great connection between our elementary school and their world of higher education. Many of the students trained through their programs later become employees of our school. Having the opportunity to make these connections not only helps the faculty and staff professionally, but it also allows students to see first-hand that learning is continuous.

At Mt. Carmel, school is so much more than 7:30 to 2:30. We work hard inside and outside of the classrooms to make the necessary connections so that our students can learn, practice, and grow into upstanding citizens who are prepared to be whatever they have chosen to become.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

The administration at Mt. Carmel creates a yearly professional development plan to ensure that teachers receive adequate support, coaching, and skills that result in high student achievement. The plan includes district professional development provided regularly throughout the year for new curricula or platforms and outside opportunities through agencies such as the University of Alabama at Huntsville. Also, Mt. Carmel has a formal agreement and relationship with the Alabama State Department of Education's Reading and Math divisions, which includes access to consistent on-site coaching, resources, and professional development. These regional specialists work closely with our reading and math coaches to enhance their coaching skills, instructional delivery, and student outcomes. All parties meet regularly with the administration to review and amend goals for continuous improvement.

Mt. Carmel reading and math coaches work closely with most grade-level teachers with specific instructional strategies or standards. They use progress monitoring data and teacher feedback forms to develop their schedules and plans for student-centered coaching. Coaches employ both traditional and mini coaching cycles to meet teachers' needs; however, all interactions include a focus on student data, goals, standards, observations, and reflections. We celebrate both teacher and student growth during weekly Professional Learning Community (PLCs) meetings.

By far, Professional Learning Community meetings and team meetings provide the greatest level of embedded professional development. These weekly meetings are facilitated by the grade-level chairs, the principal or assistant principal, the reading specialist, math coach or reading interventionist. Teams develop unit plans and common assessments, analyze student data, discuss plans for intervention and instructional strategies. This is also a time to turn around outside professional development. Collectively, the structures in place at Mt. Carmel ensure that teachers develop critical thinking skills, effective instructional and strategies, and collaborative approaches to problem-solving that perpetuate the cycle of continuous improvement.

4. School Leadership:

The principal at Mt. Carmel sets the overall tone of the school, which comes from the heart. Together, with the leadership team, the principal guides the campus towards a philosophy of collaborative leadership and learning through a growth mindset rooted in kindness. We recite our daily mantra, kind thoughts, kind words, and a kind heart, to remind all Mt. Carmel stakeholders of the value of kindness.

The administration makes a conscious effort to share decision-making, increase opportunities for staff buy-in, and develop teacher-leaders on campus. For example, teachers choose pathways to lead each year. Some may choose to develop in the area of instructional technology, while others may choose student leadership capacity. The principal meets with all certified staff individually twice yearly to provide professional support and facilitate reflection for continuous improvement. During these 15 minute chats, trusting relationships develop that become the core of student success and the bridge to potential difficult conversations in the future.

Each grade level has a team leader chair who rotates yearly. Administration regularly visits team meetings and consistently facilitates PLCs. The Building Leadership Team (BLT) is comprised of these grade-level chairs, the principal, assistant principal, counselor, physical education coach, librarian, special education lead, and interventionist. The BLT meets regularly to make logistical decisions and structural improvements. For example, the team weighs in on budgetary decisions, capital improvements, scheduling, calendars, community engagement, and fundraising. The BLT represents the hands and the feet of our organization as they move us through the ancillary logistics of student achievement.

Another essential school leadership team is the Guiding Coalition, which is comprised of the principal, instructional coaches, special education representative, and grade-level representatives. This team meets regularly for professional development opportunities with other district schools, such as book studies and meetings regarding Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). They develop the annual campus improvement plan (ACIP). The ACIP is essentially the strategic plan that guides everything we will accomplish for a particular year, including academic, behavior, and community goals. The team writes the goals in a “SMART” manner, so that the objectives are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound. A SMART goal leads to greater student achievement, especially with periodic check-ins. For example, the administration meets mid-year with district officials to review ACIP progress, and to outline necessary adjustments so that we meet our goals. The guiding coalition also meets to develop long-range plans for new academic initiatives or make school-wide decisions. The Guiding Coalition represents the heart and brain of the school, as they work to lead us in the true direction of our vision of improving student learning through collaborative study.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

The Mt. Carmel School Family begins the day with a sign of respect and kindness during the live morning announcements. All classrooms, including all special education students, are provided an opportunity to lead morning announcements. When we spotlight students and staff, we celebrate a variety of skills, traits, and attributes, including artistic talents, character traits, behavior, academics, and kindness. We intentionally recognize and respect a variety of holidays and traditions represented in our School Family, too, which is evident on our fun monthly calendar of events. Mt. Carmel arrived at this place of respect through open dialogue, professional training, and leadership expectations and modeling. The district provides additional resources and support through the Director of Equity. Mt. Carmel staff and families may contact them with questions, concerns or suggestions or request their advocacy. Administration sometimes relies upon support from the Director of Equity during unique situations involving state laws, budget proposals, and residency affidavits.

Our school librarian developed an engaging collection representative of our population, so that students now see themselves on the covers of books. Teachers are mindful to conduct read-alouds from a variety of authors from diverse backgrounds to enrich our students’ background knowledge. Our most recent English Language curriculum adoption includes stories from a variety of cultures, contexts, and situations with pictures that represent many people.

All students in all classrooms have jobs that rotate weekly, which instills a sense of duty, accountability, and respect for the classroom family. Teachers are mindful during whole group lessons to call on a variety of students and use strategies such as ‘equity sticks’ or online spinners. For robust group discussions, teachers activate students’ prior knowledge and try to make sense of historical contexts. Since students often work in small groups, teachers regularly rearrange groups to provide students with experience collaborating with a variety of individuals. Also, teachers intentionally teach students how to work in small groups. Administration ensures classrooms are equitable through their use of an application that helps compose class rosters based on a variety of factors, such as behavior, race, gender, and academic achievement.

Mt. Carmel administration adheres to specific hiring practices outlined by the Madison County Schools Director of Equity to ensure fairness when developing the school staff. Administration must submit interview reports and records to the Office of Personnel prior to recommending a new hire. To increase perspective, the principal invites at least two leadership team members to final interviews.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR EXCELLENCE

The primary key to Mt. Carmel's success is the laser focus on continuous improvement through the Professional Learning Community (PLC) process. Continuous improvement is a cyclical journey that requires all participants to create and implement plans, then review and reflect upon results. Mt. Carmel made the conscious decision to commit to continuous improvement roughly in 2015 when Madison County Schools adopted the vision of PLCs. Since then, grade level PLCs gradually developed into high-functioning teams. PLCs gather weekly with a purposeful agenda to analyze student assessment data, discuss instructional strategies, and plan units. While each grade level develops their own norms, shared norms across all PLCs include listening, respect, and a positive attitude. Teams assign rotating roles, such as timekeeper and note taker, and the administration and instructional coaches facilitate professional dialogue and maintain the vision. Recently, to increase equity, our special education teachers joined grade-level PLCs during data meetings and problem-solving team meetings.

One way that the PLC process supports continuous improvement is during the unpacking of state standards. Several years ago, Madison County Schools worked collectively to unpack state reading and math standards, and the work continues when standards are updated. Grade-level PLCs dissected the standard to determine what a student should be able to do or know. The teachers determined how they will clearly know when the student is proficient. Then, the teachers decided how they will respond when a student does not (or does) meet the standard. During PLC teachers identified the action verbs in the standards for more clarity. They selected the most valuable vocabulary and academic language and determined the depth of knowledge. Then, our team created a standards-based common assessment. As PLCs meet weekly, they discuss instructional strategies leading up to the common assessment. Ultimately, they share common assessment results and determine next steps for remediation, so that all students have an opportunity to practice and master the standard. Interestingly, through yearly staff changes, team dynamics and needs change. However, the teams withstand volatility because they are rooted in the common vision of continuous improvement. That is the power of a PLC, and thus, the key to Mt. Carmel's success.