

U.S. Department of Education
2016 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 Mrs. Amy Bartlett

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

Official School Name Sharon Elementary School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 3595 Old Atlanta Road

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

City Suwanee State GA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 30024-1173

County Forsyth County

Telephone (770) 888-7511 Fax _____

Web site/URL http://www.forsyth.k12.ga.us/sharon E-mail abartlett@forsyth.k12.ga.us

Twitter Handle _____ Facebook Page _____
https://twitter.com/SharonElemS https://www.facebook.com/sharonelem/ Google+ _____

YouTube/URL _____ Blog _____ Other Social Media Link _____

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date _____

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent*Dr. Jeff Bearden E-mail jbearden@forsyth.k12.ga.us

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Forsyth County Schools Tel. (770) 887-2461

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. Darla Light

(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. The school configuration includes one or more of grades K-12. (Schools on the same campus with one principal, even a K-12 school, must apply as an entire school.)
2. The public school has met their state's accountability requirements (i.e., avoided sanctions) in participation, performance in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics, and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate) using the most recent accountability results available for the year prior to nomination.
3. To meet final eligibility, a public school must meet the state's accountability requirements (i.e., avoided sanctions) in participation, performance in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics, and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate) for the year in which they are nominated (2015-2016) and be certified by the state representative. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
4. If the school includes grades 7 or higher, the school must have foreign language as a part of its curriculum.
5. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2010 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
6. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, or 2015.
7. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's application and/or rescind a school's award if irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state.
8. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
9. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
10. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution's equal protection clause.
11. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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

DISTRICT

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

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

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

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	14	3	17
K	76	60	136
1	76	63	139
2	88	96	184
3	77	90	167
4	108	88	196
5	110	72	182
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	549	472	1021

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 19 % Asian
 - 2 % Black or African American
 - 5 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 70 % White
 - 4 % Two or more races
 - 100 % Total**

(Only these seven standard categories should be used to report the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.)

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2014 – 2015 school year: 5%

This rate should be calculated using the grid below. The answer to (6) is the mobility rate.

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2014 until the end of the 2014-2015 school year	31
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2014 until the end of the 2014-2015 school year	22
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	53
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2014	1053
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.050
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	5

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 2 %
23 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):
Spanish, Thai, Korean, Hindi, Vietnamese, Chinese, Hmong, Gujarati

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 5 %
Total number students who qualify: 47

8. Students receiving special education services: 14 %
138 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>12</u> Autism | <u>1</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>11</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>15</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>79</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>1</u> Mental Retardation | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |
| <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities | <u>19</u> Developmentally Delayed |

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

	Number of Staff
Administrators	3
Classroom teachers	44
Resource teachers/specialists e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	15
Paraprofessionals	14
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	4

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	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012	2010-2011
Daily student attendance	97%	97%	97%	97%	97%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

13. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**

Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2015.

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.

Mission: Educating Beyond Expectations Vision: Preparing Today's Children for Tomorrow

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

Located in the southeastern corner of Forsyth County, Sharon Elementary can be found nestled in a wooded enclave. Deeply embedded in the community since 1904, the Sharon School, a one room wooden structure, was first built. In 1922, a new brick building housed students, but it wasn't until 81 years later in 2003 that the current Sharon Elementary opened its doors. Built to alleviate crowding at neighboring schools, Sharon is the first two-story elementary school in Forsyth County.

Students), an innovative program designed by the National Center for Fathering focused on improving education. Its goal is to use the influence of fathers and father figures to provide male role models for students.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

Sharon Elementary is highly committed to providing a well-rounded, rigorous, and authentic learning environment for its students, Pre-K-5. “Educating Beyond Expectations” is our school’s mission and is clearly evident in the halls, classrooms, and common learning areas. Sharon is comprised of a collaborative team of educators, dedicated to preparing our 21st century learners for college, careers, and beyond. Our teachers utilize a variety of instructional methods, research-based strategies, and innovative tools and resources to provide challenging, engaging, and authentic learning experiences at every grade level.

Instruction of the core curricular areas at Sharon Elementary is built upon the foundation of the Georgia Standards of Excellence (GSE) in grades K-5. Along with instructional support, resources, and opportunities for collaboration, teachers have become content masters in each of the four core academic areas: Reading/ELA, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. Though classroom instruction is driven by GSE, the individual child is at the heart of all we do. Keeping our students at the focus of our instructional practices, we are shaping future leaders, lifelong learners, critical and creative problem solvers, and effective communicators. This year we added two Special Needs Pre-K classrooms, which provide a curriculum based on the Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS). This curriculum encompasses physical development, motor skills, social/emotional skills, play and learning, communication, language, literacy, math, science, social studies, and creativity.

A great emphasis is placed upon preparing students for a world where reading and writing-to-learn is at the nucleus of any higher-learning experience, whether it is high-school, college, or a chosen career path. With that in mind, Sharon’s teachers delve into the Reading/ELA standards, teaching foundational skills and providing rich experiences through a balanced-literacy approach. Teachers in kindergarten through grade five utilize small group guided reading and close reading/modeling with shared text to teach critical reading as a skill that transcends every academic and occupational experience in life. Though instructional material varies from classroom to classroom, our teachers’ focus is to immerse students in a variety of non-fiction and fictional texts, expose students to increasing text complexity while teaching foundational skills, and demonstrate the powerful connection between reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Walk through the doors of any classroom in our school and note the obvious importance placed upon reading and writing. On any given day, one can observe whole group modeling of text, small group guided reading instruction, skill-based instruction, vocabulary/word work, individual conferences about depth of knowledge and text analysis, as well as collaborative discussions amongst critical readers. To support differentiated reading instruction, Sharon Elementary boasts two leveled book rooms, trade book libraries at every grade level, and a media center that is continuously growing with materials and state-of-the-art resources.

Literacy permeates every area of instruction and is ever present in our school-wide approach to teaching writing. Our writing instruction is scaffolded and utilizes a common language approach to teaching writing using Lucy Calkins Units of Study. Teachers teach writing through a workshop approach, using modeling and explicit instruction of writer’s craft and strategies, while fostering the ability to be independent, proficient writers in the real world. Writing and reading are taught in every core curricular area, focusing on: response to literature and demonstration of content mastery, informational and technical writing, memoir/narrative writing, and argumentative/opinion writing.

To further illustrate how literacy and writing instruction are intertwined, one can note the seamless connection between ELA and social studies instruction. Our students are exposed to historical documents, informational books that focus on historical and geographic standards, as well as related historical fiction selections. Teachers use writing in various genres to reinforce instruction of history, geography, civics, and economics. In addition, our Enrichment course, offered to all students, supports social studies standards at every grade level.

Mathematical instruction at Sharon aims to individualize and customize mathematics for students of all ages, learning styles, and mathematical abilities. Based on the state standards, mathematical and logical thinking

become accessible to all students using guided practice and modeling, guided math groups, instruction using a variety of models and approaches, feedback and discussion using Number Talks, along with analysis and real-world applications.

Our science instruction is an area that has grown rapidly. Through inquiry and project-based learning, as well as hands-on experiences, our teachers embrace science as a passion and a priority at Sharon. Since its inception several years ago, our school's science lab supports science standards at every grade level. Our science lab is heavily stocked, not only with supplies, but also literature and lesson plans spanning every unit of science instruction in grades K-5. Our outdoor learning area, the D.I.G.S., is yet another extension and an example of our school's commitment to making science relevant and authentic to our students.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

All of our other curriculum areas support the grade level standards and have a primary goal of experiential learning for students. The staff at Sharon Elementary believes that when students experience standards throughout the school day and in addition to their regular classroom, the learning is more meaningful and enjoyable and therefore students perform at higher levels.

Students attending Sharon Elementary experience a six or seven-day specials rotation. This rotation includes forty-five minute segments of music, art, science lab/enrichment, guidance, CASTLE, and physical education. Qualifying students receive gifted and special education services based on their needs. Technology is integrated throughout the school to enhance student learning.

Our curriculum for music is based on the Georgia Fine Arts Performance Standards and uses the Quaver interactive music program to immerse students in music history and theory while learning to love the art of music. Students are exposed to various instruments beginning in kindergarten through the Orff method. In addition to the music class, students perform monthly incorporating the grade-level standards. Sharon Elementary is the only elementary school in our county to have band and chorus. Our music teacher has formed a partnership with our local high school to assist in preparing students for middle and high school band. Students practice before or after school and showcase their talents throughout the school year.

The art program is based on not only art projects but on art history and specific artistic techniques – exhibited throughout the school hallways, locally, and at state art shows. The goal of the art program is to develop artists. The students are exposed to many different mediums including clay, paint, chalk, and pencil.

The physical education (PE) curriculum follows the Georgia PE standards and incorporates relevant, high-interest activities for learning various skills to promote healthy living and movement. The PE class differentiates for students by allowing students to set goals and be exposed to unique experiences to heighten student engagement. Our community has been actively involved in the PE program and provides hands on experiences such as karate for students of all grade levels.

The CASTLE special is provided by our media specialist. This special incorporates technology and literature in support of standards at each grade level. During the CASTLE special, students participate in inquiry and project-based learning, using Chromebooks, ipads, desktops, laptops, Mediascape, and Promethean ActivPanel.

Students rotate between the science lab and enrichment special throughout the year. The science lab supports grade level science standards while making learning fun and interactive. The inquiry-based learning allows students to perform experiments, work in the outdoor DIGS classroom, and predict weather using the school-based weather station. Students interact with life-size simple machines, observe the life cycle process of eggs hatching into chicks, and explore plant and animal life. The Enrichment special supports social studies standards and incorporates technology with hands on learning. Students enjoy authentic learning opportunities, such as making a monument or creating an amendment rap.

During guidance, students participate in lessons on character education, bullying, conflict resolution, study skills, self-esteem and confidence building, internet safety, as well as the Georgia Career clusters. Additionally, the “Leader in Me” program is part of our school improvement plan.

Our gifted students receive services kindergarten through fourth grade using a resource model. Teachers provide enrichment of grade level activities while incorporating the gifted standards of learning. In fifth grade, the advanced content model was developed to offer a more rigorous curriculum for our gifted and high-achieving population in the areas of ELA and math.

Technology has been an important focus of Sharon Elementary and Forsyth County Schools. Our students are welcome to bring their technology on a daily basis to enhance their learning. Incorporation of itslearning (an online student management system) in all classrooms has been vital to learning. Students assume ownership of their learning and create discussion boards, participate in pathways, communicate with teachers, and access resources to support their learning. To avoid loss of instruction, during inclement weather days, itslearning has become a digital extension of the classroom. All teachers strive to create blended and personalized learning opportunities.

3. Instructional Methods and Interventions:

Sharon Elementary is dedicated to individualized and differentiated instruction on a daily basis. Instructional excellence is a standard at Sharon. Teachers are highly collaborative content experts and develop innovative and research-based instructional practices and strategies to meet the ever-changing needs of their learners.

One of our school-based initiatives is differentiated instruction. To support this, our school offers a variety of professional learning opportunities that mirror differentiated instructional practices, vertical conversations and instructional planning opportunities, technological resources that provide natural differentiation of content, process, and product, as well as instructional programs and materials to remediate and provide enrichment to students of varying levels and abilities.

For students needing remediation, Sharon offers support in multiple ways. The Early Intervention Program (EIP) provides support for struggling learners in the areas of Math and Reading/ELA. Our EIP teacher provides small group instruction and intervention, as well as co-teaching support to teachers at different grade levels. Our English Language Learner (ELL) teacher offers individualized vocabulary and content support to our ELL students, collaborating with teachers at multiple grade levels. For students demonstrating a need for intervention based on assessment data, Instructional Extension is offered in our intermediate grades to focus on test-taking strategies and application prior to End-of-Grade tests. Also, our fifth grade math teachers offer “math camp” help sessions twice a week for students for reteaching sessions and instructional support in math.

Response to Intervention (RTI) teams meet to discuss data, provide instructional support to one another, discuss student concerns and elicit strategies, and discuss progress monitoring. As an additional support for all students, our counselor offers coaching sessions for students who struggle with test-taking anxiety or lack of confidence.

Sharon Elementary also utilizes an “all-hands-on-deck” approach to providing instructional support to all grade levels. Our paraprofessionals are creatively utilized to support classroom teachers, both to remediate and enrich. Highly-qualified instructional aides help to provide enrichment and remediation in small groups. In grade five, advanced content ELA and math classes are offered, both to identified gifted students and high-achieving students who meet specified criteria and have qualifying data.

Lastly, technology is utilized in many capacities to enhance individualized instruction. Students are encouraged to bring their own technology to use as educational tools. Through the use of online programs, resources, and different modes of technology, teachers can pre-assess standards and content, using data to plan instruction. Also, through our online learning management system, teachers can customize activities and assignments to individuals or small groups, based on needs or mastery.

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

Assessment and data analysis is a primary driving force in instructional planning. The Georgia Milestones is the current state test which is based on the Georgia Standards of Excellence. Throughout the school year, students experience a variety of assessments that are both formative and summative in nature. At the classroom level, teachers use the data team process of collecting and analyzing pre and post test data and work as a team to collaborate on instructional planning of appropriate strategies for intervention and enrichment. Our teachers use the five step data team process, including: collecting data, analyzing data, setting SMART (Specific, Measureable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely) goals, selecting appropriate instructional strategies, and reviewing results. Students who are able to demonstrate mastery of standards in pre-assessments are given opportunities for extension and higher-level learning, while individualized instruction is designed for students on-level and in need of remediation. This data not only drives classroom instruction but informs interventions for the RTI and SST (Student Support Team) processes. Teachers collect data through interims, common assessments, and running records. In addition, students in special education and the RTI process are regularly progress monitored using the Fast Bridge program.

Teachers regularly assess student learning and progress through continuous formative assessments. Common assessments are created at the school and district level. Summative assessments are used as benchmarks to inform instructional planning and gauge student mastery. Parents are continually kept informed of student progress through Parent Portal (online grading system), progress reports, conferences, student support team meetings, and student work.

At the school level, assessment data is used to drive the school improvement plan and set goals for the current and future school years. Through data analysis, writing was identified as a focus area, resulting in the development of our school improvement plan. A school-wide writing program was implemented, along with a writing coach to explicitly target this area. Additionally, data talks led teachers to have vertical math conversations to discuss the area of fluency. These vertical conversations have led to peer observations across grade levels to view best practices.

Transparency and ongoing, open communication with all stakeholders is essential to our school improvement. Assessment data is continually used to monitor student learning, adjust instructional practices, and guide our school improvement plan. Prior to the Georgia Milestones (our state End-of-Grade assessment), parent forums are held to communicate changes in format, increased rigor and shifts in achievement levels.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

School culture and climate at Sharon Elementary are based on Daggett’s work of Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships. Of these 3 R’s, relationships are the foundation of everything we do. As you enter the building and are warmly greeted, it is evident that Sharon is a welcoming and friendly place.

In moving Sharon from “good” to “great,” our teachers and students have been inspired by the 212° philosophy. 212° is a message of persistence and additional action to reap exponential rewards, all from applying one extra degree of effort. This philosophy stems from the fact that raising the temperature of water by only one extra degree can mean the difference between something that is simply very hot and something that is boiling. 212° is a powerful metaphor used to consistently push us to do our best. One extra degree of effort can make all the difference; small things can have the biggest impact on results. The 212° initiative motivates students in their learning and promotes positive behavior. To reflect our belief that whatever we give will come back to us, students are awarded “Boomerang Bucks” for 212° effort. Every time students earn Boomerang Bucks, they place them in their grade-level jar. The end of the year culminates with a 212° celebration where every 212 minutes, Boomerang Bucks are drawn, and students have the opportunity to win individual and class prizes. Every class participates in at least one celebratory event. 212° Day is one of the most beloved events of the year.

Throughout the year, students are celebrated and showcased. Photos of finalists for spelling bee and oratorical competitions, band and chorus members, and club members are displayed in the main hallway. Included in this display are monthly classroom winners recognized for outstanding behavior in the cafeteria, music, art, and PE classes. Visible recognition motivates students to do their best. Daily, student and staff birthdays and student achievements are recognized on the morning news. Flat-screen monitors are strategically placed in the lobby and main hall to continuously stream photos of students actively engaged in daily learning. The smiles on their faces are evidence of the positive culture at Sharon.

Students aren’t the only ones celebrated at Sharon. Monthly grade levels plan outings for the staff which allows them to gather and socialize. Highly-attended events have included trivia night, a 5K run, a holiday exchange, and a weekend cabin retreat in the mountains.

Strong relationships between students, parents, and staff are critical to Sharon’s success. Students, teachers, and families who feel loved and valued want to succeed.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Sharon Elementary’s achievement can be directly attributed to the unique synergy that exists among all of our stakeholders. Our school’s success is a direct result of the collaborative efforts of students, teachers, families and community members.

Our parents are extremely supportive and highly involved in their children’s education. Parents come in daily to lead small group instruction in both reading and math. They volunteer in our media center, serve on our parent-led science committee, read in classrooms, chaperone field trips, visit during lunch, and help coordinate PTA events. Over the course of the year, we work with our PTA to host the following events: Sharon Carnival, Sharon 5K/Family Fun Run, Science Night, Breakfast with Santa, Bingo, International Festival, Talent Show, Father/Daughter Dance, and Mother/Son BMX. Recently, we have added the Watch DOGS program to entice our dads and grandfathers to help us provide a stronger male presence in the school.

Support is also provided by our parents and local business community by raising funds to enhance and enrich the educational experiences for our students. Some of the resources that have been provided include: Chromebooks, science lab materials, subscriptions to Study Island, IXL, Raz-Kids, Pebblego, and teacher grants for innovation. Our school has a strong tradition of local school governance involving staff, parents,

and community partners. Our Local School Council (LSC), comprised of administrators, teachers, parents, and business members, serves as an advisory board to improve academic achievement, involve parents in the school-based, decision-making process, and promote innovation. These partners in education have also been instrumental in supporting the creation of our Science Lab, outdoor classroom (DIGS), and renovation of our media center, CASTLE.

A variety of communication is used to keep parents engaged and informed. Our administrators send weekly e-blasts regarding school information and regularly host parent forums on topics of interest. These forums provide in-depth information on our gifted program, state assessments, core curriculum, internet safety, and itslearning (an online learning management system). Our teachers communicate through a daily agenda, weekly newsletters, parent-teacher conferences, and the use of itslearning.

Strong partnerships have been established in our surrounding community. Sharon is involved in many community outreach projects, such as canned food drives, candy for soldiers, Relay for Life, and Jump Rope for Heart. We have a reciprocal relationship with our feeder high school. Lambert High School students involved in the future educator pathway come to Sharon for practicum hours and observation. We work collaboratively with their science department on our Science Fair and Science Night. Additionally, the counselors from both schools work collectively to identify over one hundred high school students to serve as mentors to our elementary students. We also strive to engage families and the community through our afterschool enrichment clubs.

3. Professional Development:

Professional development (PD) at Sharon Elementary challenges our staff of lifelong learners. While our school diligently applies county training, we provide a homegrown approach within our system. Technology brings the formation of a Blended Learning Committee (BLC), and this year writing has included a powerful addition of an instructional coach – made available to all teachers at every grade level. Our teachers, those from the county, and even teachers/leaders from around Georgia seek out our classrooms for observation. Reciprocity has foundationally bettered us to become a PD model.

County sessions create attentiveness towards differentiation, authentic feedback, and questioning. In years past, PD has initiated book studies, opportunities for deeper understanding through national conferences, and in-house dissemination of knowledge. Redelivery of information often has taken the form of presentations, carousels, and classroom observations. These logical PD outcomes immediately affected instruction and student performance.

Teachers voice personal goals for staying abreast of technology integration. Teachers reflect on these goals for TKES, but also daily due to innovative opportunities offered. New equipment, software, and ongoing advances led teachers to join a BLC. In the BLC, teachers discuss, share, and teach each other ways to implement hi-tech activities and techniques. Students and teachers are successfully using videotaping. Both teachers and students thrive on the many innovative, ever-changing ways to learn and share mastery of standards on itsLearning.

Critical questioning of writing data over five years caused both school and teacher leaders to convene and start discourse about how to improve student writing across grade levels. Considering past experiences with regards to making systemic change, student needs were placed at the core of our PD decision-making. We asked what would be best for our diverse students. Unanimously, we decided our students needed a school improvement plan not only with a clear focus of improving writing instruction, but detailed examples of teacher support, and consistent follow-thru of the plan by a coach. We knew ongoing support for teachers would result in the biggest impact for the students. Daily, weekly, and monthly explicit modeling of Calkins' Units of Study meets teachers at current abilities and pushes instructional growth. "Job-embedded" relevant PD creates immediate improved student writing as seen in pre/post writing samples.

Self-assessment and the desire to keep learning drive our PD. Teachers are experts willing to share their

strengths. What is best for our students determines the deliberate professional development choices by our teachers and leadership.

4. School Leadership:

Describing the shared leadership at Sharon Elementary is impossible without naming the shared vision that drives the administration. The fundamental philosophy is Daggett's 3R's – Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships. With these underlying principles, students and teachers find themselves at the heart of all school decisions – from conscientiously hiring quality staff to offering innovative curriculum and programs to providing basic supplies.

The administration works as a team constructing shared responsibility among themselves and then all constituents. The principal, two assistant principals, counselor, Local School Council (parents) and the Leadership Team (made up of a rotating group of teacher leaders) collaborate and work in partnership to carry out the shared vision. Teachers have a voice in the decision-making process. Their individual, grade-level, and content area input counts. There is mutual trust that the needs of the students will be met through supportive initiatives and allocated monetary funding. Administrators serve as instructional leaders able to strategically pinpoint what matters for student achievement and identify what will continue to increase rigor, relevance, and relationships within the learning community.

The relevance of curriculum, direct instruction, learning activities, formative and summative assessments, and differentiation choices is questioned and discussed often. For all staff members, it becomes a shared responsibility to know students' backgrounds, needs, and abilities so well that no matter the situation or the adult involved, students' success is at the core.

Administration shares the viewpoint that teachers must be meticulous and thorough in their instruction as a way to increase rigor for all students, not just for some. Recent leadership decisions expanded technology throughout the school, essentially putting it into the hands of all students. State-of-the-art teaching and learning takes place both in and out of the classroom, leveraging student success, expanding leadership down to the students.

Whether decisions by administration concern students, teachers, parents, or the community, the relationship with these groups is obvious and evident. Learning about each individual – his/her needs, challenges, family, culture, and hopes – forms relationships that are lasting and long term. These relationships improve participation, involvement, and response – all leading again to student success. Such relationships have led to staff voluntarily running additional committees such as the Sunshine Club, Friday Trivia, monthly gatherings, student clubs, and faculty meeting meals. If what is proposed supports the 3R's philosophy, then administration works to make it happen.

Part VI – INDICATORS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Embracing a “growth mindset” is the practice that has had the most significant implication for education at Sharon Elementary. We recognize that the contemporary learning environments we strive to create are dramatically different from our past educational experiences. Our students need to be immersed in learning that is dynamic and focused on the exploration of authentic, real-world topics and problems in the contexts in which they occur. Through adopting a growth mindset, we have worked collectively with our stakeholders to provide opportunities for innovative ideas, new instructional approaches, and increased collaboration.

Sharon Elementary prides itself on innovation and providing a variety of exciting and challenging learning experiences, which incorporate the latest trends in educational technology and instructional methodologies. Our students are active learners and immersed in meaningful, experiential learning. The creation of a Science Lab and outdoor classroom (DIGS), along with a media center renovation and emphasis on technology integration have fostered meaningful and authentic application of learning. The Science Lab promotes exploratory learning for all students. Classes regularly rotate through demonstrations, labs, and lessons that are hands-on and inquiry-based. This living classroom houses Blaze, our bearded dragon, Speedy, our eastern box turtle, tree frogs, hissing cockroaches, and hermit crabs. Eggs are hatched from chickens, salamanders, and peacocks, and our WeatherBug station educates students on weather patterns and global warming. The Sharon DIGS is a 15,000 square foot outdoor classroom that integrates outdoor learning with classroom curriculum. This project resulted from collaboration of businesses, parents, and community members. The DIGS provides opportunities for students to discover how ecosystems and life cycles work, study rock formations, and interact with life size simple machines. It includes a chicken coop and farm area where students use their surroundings to study animal and plant life, insects, composting, and water reclamation. Our renovated media center, the Sharon CASTLE, is truly a Collaborative and Social Technology Learning Environment. In the hub of our school, students collaborate using the latest technology including a mediascape, mobile ActivPanel, and 135” multi-touch ActivWall. Technology is also integrated across all content areas in classrooms, through blended and personalized learning opportunities.

Our growth mindset has fostered creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, and communication and collaboration. Developing these skills among our students and teachers has yielded amazing outcomes. The results include exemplary levels of student achievement, college and career readiness, resilience, and strong interpersonal skills. Our students and teachers are empowered to embrace challenges, become self-directed learners, and think beyond self-perceived limits.