

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. Christi L. Thomas

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

Official School Name Geist Elementary School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 14051 East 104th Street

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

City Fishers State IN Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 46040-9599

County Hamilton County

Telephone (317) 915-4260 Fax (317) 915-4269

Web site/URL http://www.hse.k12.in.us/GES/home.aspx E-mail clthomas@hse.k12.in.us

Twitter Handle https://twitter.com/Geistgators Facebook Page https://www.facebook.com/GeistElementaryP
TO/ TO/ 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. Allen Bourff E-mail abourff@hse.k12.in.us
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Hamilton Southeastern Schools Tel. (317) 594-4100

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 Mrs. Karen Harmer
(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):
- 12 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 7 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 2 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 21 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	0	0	0
K	66	65	131
1	65	76	141
2	84	57	141
3	80	76	156
4	87	84	171
5	0	0	0
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	382	358	740

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 1 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 6 % Asian
 - 4 % Black or African American
 - 4 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 79 % White
 - 6 % 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: 8%

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	43
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2014 until the end of the 2014-2015 school year	26
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	69
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2014	834
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.083
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	8

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 1 %
11 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):
Arabic, Urdu, Ndebele, Mandarin, Hindi, Spanish, Punjabi, Russian, Vietnamese

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 5 %
Total number students who qualify: 36

8. Students receiving special education services: 8 %
60 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>15</u> Autism | <u>3</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>1</u> Deafness | <u>16</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>1</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>5</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>52</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>4</u> Mental Retardation | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |
| <u>1</u> Multiple Disabilities | <u>0</u> Developmentally Delayed |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 2
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	1
Classroom teachers	30
Resource teachers/specialists e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	10
Paraprofessionals	12
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	3

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 25:1

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.

Our mission is to provide an education that meets the needs, abilities and interests of all students while building meaningful relationships and academic self-confidence.

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

Geist Elementary (GES) is a high performing elementary school located in the Hamilton Southeastern School District in Fishers, Indiana. Fishers is a vibrant, family-centered community with innovative businesses and rich public resources that attract many new residents each year. Industries include life sciences, technology and distribution. Families enjoy many beautiful public parks, entertainment venues, sports complexes and programs. The city has often been rated among the most desirable communities in Indiana for high quality family living, affordability and safety. Hamilton Southeastern School District serves approximately 21,000 students in the Fishers area. Once a rural farming community, Fishers experienced an exponential population boom which resulted in the building of several new schools, including GES.

Named after the Geist Reservoir, GES was built in 2004 to provide high academic achievement for families residing in the community. After years of increased student enrollment, the district underwent redistricting that took effect for the 2015-2016 school year. Consequently, the student population at GES decreased by over one hundred children. Presently, the school serves 740 students in kindergarten through fourth grade. The principal leads the school with the assistance of a school counselor and instructional coach. The staff includes thirty-eight general education, special education, and related arts teachers. In addition, instructional assistants, therapists and instructors provide occupational, psychological, physical, speech and ENL (English as a New Language) support services to students. Furthermore, the families of GES provide the school with a highly supportive PTO. The PTO organizes school-wide events throughout the year for students and provides staff with supplemental funds to enrich their classrooms. The community is dedicated to building up their children by generously donating their financial resources and volunteering their time at school. A dedicated staff and involved family support system come together to build a tradition of academic excellence for all students at GES. The mission of the GES staff is to provide a 21st century education that meets the needs, abilities, and interests of all students while building meaningful relationships and academic self-confidence. This goal allows our staff to help students to not only achieve their educational potential, but also addresses social, emotional, physical and cultural components that comprise the whole child.

GES has developed a PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports) plan to promote positive student social behaviors in the classroom and throughout the school. This plan encourages appropriate student choices through clear expectations and consistent routines. Furthermore, students set behavior goals and enjoy school-wide rewards for meeting these objectives. In this way, students appreciate the need to exhibit positive behaviors for their own academic success and to serve others.

GES provides an exceptional academic program to meet the needs of all students through strong instructional methods and technological resources. First, teachers utilize a workshop model in mathematics, reading and writing. This method allows for differentiation in the classroom and addresses various student strengths and needs. In addition, GES has incorporated inquiry and Project Based Learning models into the curriculum. Lessons are built around essential questions which lead to student-driven projects that incorporate several subject areas. Children are engaged in the educational process and take ownership of their learning. Finally, GES has developed a thorough RtI (Response to Instruction) process for students struggling in reading and mathematics. Children experience academic growth through RtI that is tailored to their specific needs. GES also provides enrichment programs that promote diversity, individuality and service. Examples include “Everybody Counts” activities exploring physical disabilities, counselor talks on positive character traits, a schoolwide Marketplace service project, and the purchase of additional diversity-themed books for the library collection. Furthermore, special area teachers use art, music and physical education to meet individual interests and promote student inquiry. Finally, the staff has incorporated the use of technology into the curriculum, including iPads, laptops and a computer lab through the assistance of a media specialist. This use of technology equips children for 21st century learning.

The instructional methods utilized at GES have been highly successful for the academic achievement of its students as indicated by both formative and summative assessments. GES has received an "A" grade by the state of Indiana since 2004. In addition in 2014-15, the school ranked 14th in the state for ISTEP scores, despite more difficult curricular expectations. Ninety-six percent of third graders and 87% of fourth graders

passed the standardized test in mathematics. Ninety-six percent of third graders and 91% of fourth graders passed the reading/language arts section of the test. District use of NWEA also shows students experience growth and achieve educational goals throughout the school year. While these assessments demonstrate high academic achievement, student learning is measured daily through strong reading comprehension of various texts, creative writing pieces, application of math standards to real-world problem solving, and science and social studies inquiry projects. The vision of GES is for all students to be independent, lifelong learners who use their individual gifts and problem solving skills to lead meaningful lives and serve others.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

Teachers' blue print for instructional planning is determined by the Indiana College and Career Readiness Standards. These new standards are the result of a process designed to create high-quality, rigorous standards for all students that align with the Hamilton Southeastern 21 Best Practices Approach (referred to as HSE21 Best Practices) a district wide best practice model that focuses on student centered approaches, fundamental classroom conditions, integrated cognitive curriculum, and transfer of learning.

Reading, Writing and Language Arts curriculum follows the Balanced Literacy Framework including Word Work, Shared Reading, Guided Reading, Reading for Research and Writing across genres. Teachers plan curriculum with the Workshop structure where the model mini lesson connects to previous lessons, has a lean teaching point, active engagement and a group share that closes the lesson and links new learning to future lessons. The core curriculum resources include Units By Design (developed by teachers across the district approved by the HSEA Teacher's Association) for reading and writing. The design team approved and adopted Literacy By Design's Rigby Leveled Text in order to enrich and remediate readers of all levels. In order to determine that instruction is resulting in student growth and learning, teachers administer the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark assessment which determines current reading levels taking accuracy, fluency, and comprehension in to consideration. Teachers use Words Their Way as a supplement for word study and vocabulary development alongside Being a Writer which helps teachers coach students to write with conviction and purpose, for multiple audiences, and to demonstrate their understanding.

Curriculum for mathematics follows the Balanced Math Framework including problem solving, number work, fluency and maintenance, inspecting equations. Teachers plan for Balanced Math with the Workshop structure similar to literacy including a mini lesson. The current design team is actively looking at options for an upcoming adoption in mathematics at the elementary level including digital resources. Currently, teachers supplement with EnVision Math in partner with Pearson as a digital tool. Dr. Ryan Flessner from Butler University has partnered with GES to align Indiana's College and Career Readiness Standards with the Balanced Math Approach to empower students and teachers to shift instruction and learning from procedural understanding to demonstrating conceptual understanding with multiple strategies.

In order to meet the needs for all students that qualify for high ability services in reading and/or mathematics, GES teachers utilize Junior Great Books to create depth of knowledge with strategic questioning and writing about reading with text evidence. Wordly Wise assists with mastering vocabulary to further enhance writing skills and continue to strengthen readers and writers.

To meet the needs of underachieving students, GES teachers use the information gained from Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessments to determine a matching Leveled Literacy Intervention set of lessons to implement. This intensive small-group is designed to bring children quickly up to grade-level competency and offers opportunities for teachers to work side by side students and coach individual needs. Lexia CORE5 and Reading Mastery/Corrective Reading are other support options for teachers in need of supporting students with delays that require re-teaching or an alternate pacing of instruction.

Mathematics interventions include Do The Math, Moby Max, and Front Row. Do the Math offers hands on exploration with math manipulatives and a literature including math concepts within the text. Moby Max and Front Row require digital placement assessments in order to find out what skills students have mastered and build a series of questions that will allow exploration with mathematical thinking to fill in missing concepts and foundational skills usually pertaining with number sense.

In science and social studies: inquiry instructional blocks allow teachers flexibility with student-centered approaches such as choice, inquiry driven opportunities, collaborative situations, and evidence based learning that results in transfer of learning through application. Houghton Mifflin's Science Fusion curriculum develops critical thinking skills that prepare students for future workplace situations. Teachers are offered choice with curriculum supplements to support social studies curriculum such as StoryWorks,

Time for Kids, and National Geographics. The 1:1 Initiative approaching fall of 2016 has led teachers to explore digital resources now and shift traditional lessons to open ended inquiry opportunities with the end product unknown. Teachers are using devices as a tool to amplify instruction to help students produce evidence of their learning.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Students study Music/Performing Arts, Physical Education, Visual Arts, and Media/Library including technology. They have different classes each day and attend each class three times over a period of two weeks.

In music class, students learn to read, play, create, and improvise music with voice and different instruments including the recorder. Students also learn how to listen to and evaluate music by learning larger works and discussing the composers and their styles of their music.

There are many opportunities for our students to perform and share what they are learning in class. All students participate in two grade-level musical productions presented to our school family. The students also participate in and help to plan a Veterans Day program where our choir sings, students write and read essays and poems, and Scouts participate in the Flag Ceremony. Veterans and our community are invited to attend our program. Students can also participate in Talent Shows and Choir Concerts.

Students learn, listen to, and discuss music that enhances other subjects in their home-room classes. For example, as the students learn about Fairy Tales, they are also hearing music written about fairy tales. As students learn about famous Hoosiers, they research famous Hoosier musicians. Teachers collaborate to give these opportunities to our children.

Our Physical Education Department helps students to set individual goals and increase their own fitness levels. The use of Fitness Gram assesses increased fitness levels throughout the year in the categories of Cardiovascular Fitness, Flexibility, Muscular Endurance, and Responsible Behavior. Our third and fourth grade students are encouraged to join the Running Club which meets twice each week and trains our students to participate in local running events and increases individual fitness levels. All of our students participate in Jump Rope for Heart and Hoops for Heart events. These programs allow the students to participate in community service while enhancing the curriculum with heart-related activities. Our students also participate in an all-school Field Day with fun games and healthy snacks.

Our Visual Arts Department focuses on art processes and self-expression. All projects have a foundation of art elements, while tying in artists, art movements, arts of world cultures and/or cross curricular subjects. Geist students have many ways to display their art work at school, online and through art shows. An Artist of the Week is chosen each week, and the students' artwork is displayed in a frame in the school. Almost all student artwork is uploaded to the web gallery on Artsonia.com. Third and fourth graders photograph their own work for uploading, as well as write artist statements. Artsonia allows students to share their artwork at home and with extended family. Over 150 pieces of artwork by Geist students are displayed in our district-wide art show each year. Geist Elementary was delighted to host two Artists in Residence. The stained glass artist incorporated our students' drawings of Indiana wildlife in the finished windows installed in our library. The second artist created clay vessels that were then covered in textured medallions by students and staff. The finished vessels were glazed and installed on our patio. Students have created a chandelier inspired by artist Dale Chihuly. This piece has been permanently installed in the center of the building. Students have also learned about Chinese New Year and have collaboratively worked to create a large dragon that is also on display as it continues to grow.

Our Media Center/Technology departments have many resources. We have an iPad cart with 30 iPads for checkout for teachers. Each grade level and special areas have their own set of six iPads to rotate amongst teachers. We also have 30 laptops, 100 electronic books, 20 periodic subscriptions, 10,000 print volumes and online databases. Our library has a computerized circulation system which shows an average of 1,166 resources circulated each week. The library has recently added almost 200 titles particularly chosen to promote social and cultural diversity. We also have a professional library containing titles for growth and

development. Teachers also make full use of their computer lab time to work on projects and research. Our Media Center is an open concept facility with classroom teachers responsible for checkout. This allows our library media specialist to push into the classrooms to assist with inquiry work including, presentations, partner teaching, technology use, and small groups. This additional expert in the classroom improves our ability to engage students in their learning.

3. Instructional Methods and Interventions:

Geist Elementary has a diverse learning community. Each child is unique, and the teachers work diligently to meet each student where they are. Every child in grades kindergarten through fourth grade is assessed at the beginning of the year using multiple points of data. The methods used to collect these points are, Fountas and Pinnell reading assessment kits, AIMSweb, NWEA, M-COMP, and M-CAP to name a few. Once the data points are collected, the teacher analyzes the data to determine if the child needs additional support or enrichment. This support can be in either reading or math, with a focus on fluency, comprehension, math calculation or math problem solving.

The Response to Instruction framework is utilized throughout the building. Tier 1 starts in the general education classroom, and meets students' needs through differentiation in reading and math and inquiry based learning. The workshop model is demonstrated in both subject areas in every classroom. A whole group lesson is taught based on Indiana academic standards, and then workshop model begins. As part of that model, the teacher will meet with a small group and teach them a lesson slightly above or below the whole group lesson depending on that particular group's needs. Students set targeted learning goals with their teachers. Small group work is fluid and flexible. Inquiry and project-based learning is woven throughout our subject areas to allow for cross curricular integration.

If a child is demonstrating a need for additional support in one or more areas, the teacher recommends placement in Tier 2. Tier 2 consists of 30 additional minutes in the school day to focus on that child's area of need. One instructional method that is used in reading Tier 2 is Leveled Literacy Intervention from Fountas and Pinnell (LLI). This program includes a phonemic mini-lesson (in lower levels), reading a story aloud and having a comprehension conversation, a writing portion, and a test-prep portion in the higher levels. We have seen tremendous success through the use of this program. For example, a year's worth of growth in reading levels in a one semester.

For Math Tier 2, the teacher will use programs such as Do The Math, Front Row, or Moby Max. They will also use this time to re-teach skills, and fine tune previous skills taught that the student may not have mastered the first time through.

In addition to collecting data through the intervention system itself, the teacher will progress monitor the student every two weeks using AIMSweb.

Depending on the area of need, the child will be monitored on letter name, letter sounds, nonsense words, fluency, comprehension, math calculation or problem solving. If the data is showing the child is not meeting their projected target, the team will consider placement in Tier 3. Tier 3 consists of an additional 30 minutes in the school day. With both Tier 2 and Tier 3, the child will receive 60 additional minutes a day in their greatest area of need. Tier 3 is taught before the school day, and uses research based instructional methods with fidelity. Some of the programs used include: Reading Mastery, LLI, and Corrective Reading.

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

Assessment is used systematically to improve instruction and learning with multiple pieces of data: universal screener, state tests, advance placement, common reading benchmarks, and common math assessments. The Measure of Academic Progress (MAP), created by Northwest Evaluation Association, is the universal screener administered two times per year. Results are communicated to stake holders with CoGat scores to determine advance placement. State test results of ISTEP, IREAD for all 3rd and 4th graders and The World-Class Instructional Design Assessment (WIDA) results are shared with parents and ENL instructors for any student linguistically diverse. Teachers are constantly updating families with progress toward MAP goals and with quarterly standards based report cards per student via Skyward, the

online grading system.

State assessment results determine state grade cards and growth results for GES. Results of state tests, MAP, reading F&P benchmarks, and problem solving common assessments are collected, analyzed, and disaggregated by professional learning communities in order to identify adjustments needed for instruction, enrichment or intervention support. To qualify for high ability services, students need to meet 95th percentile with MAP or a qualifying CoGat score. In order to receive remediation instruction with the RTI process, students require multiple data points showing they are working below grade level including 30th percentile or below with MAP results. Students receiving Tier 2 or Tier 3 instruction are progress monitored weekly/biweekly using AimsWeb where the rate of improvement is observed to ensure interventions are resulting in academic growth.

PLC groups analyze both curriculum based measures with general outcome measures. In service of the PL 221 School Improvement Plan, the principal supports professional leave time to grade level teams to dive into data where the Continuum for Learning can be connected to future instructional decision planning with curriculum standards. All teachers are expected to have high standards of all students regardless of their assessment results. In order to continue to strengthen achievement gaps of subgroups, GES developed a guidance document to follow the RTI process and made an intentional effort with grant money to celebrate diversity in our school library and mentor text. GES is a high performing school and in order to maintain this status, there are high ability services and resources. These are designed to shift from traditional practices to student centered approaches through project based learning as highlighted in the district's HSE21 Best Practices initiative to amplify teaching and learning through inquiry, technology, and choice for all students.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

Geist Elementary is a school where its positive culture is evident as soon as you walk into the school. Various initiatives are teacher led and supported. With school wide PBIS programs, emphasis on creating positive relationships, and allowing students to learn through various student generated projects, Geist Elementary School's culture creates amazing things everyday.

As part of the school wide PBIS programming, the Geist Elementary staff is constantly asking themselves the question, "how can we continue to engage and motivate students?" In our classrooms you will find student created anchor charts, student created classroom rules, and student led discussions that range from what they are currently reading to how they as students can assist other students who have test anxiety. What better way to engage students than getting them to take part and start to own the environment around them. A fantastic example on how Geist Elementary School staff motivates students is by their monthly character traits and the Gator of the Month award. Each month in the school year has a character trait assigned to it. During the month, students will learn about a character trait (empathy, initiative, self-control, and gratitude are a few examples) and create classroom goals where they will work to demonstrate their character trait. As students do great things in the classroom they will earn Gator Tickets. These tickets will allow them to be entered into a drawing to see who Gator of the Month is. Each Gator of the Month will then be honored along with their parents during lunch in front of all of their peers.

Engaging students into problem solving real world school issues is another way Geist Elementary School promotes a fantastic learning environment for its students. Recently a 3rd grader noticed there was lots of trash on the playground that the wind blew after a strong storm. She asked a staff member if there were any trashcans she could place outside. Rather than just buying a trashcan, the student and staff members decided this would be an excellent learning opportunity for the student and guided her to plan, research, and create a proposal on why she felt trashcans were needed outside. The student then took her proposal to Geist Elementary' PTO and school principal and was granted funds for the project.

Walking into Geist Elementary as a student of any age means having the possibility of learning as soon as they walk in the doors. Teachers who go above and beyond what is expected to create meaningful relationships with their students. Feeling this support and trust from the teachers, students are given the freedom to learn how they want to learn. The culture of Geist Elementary is something amazing to be a part of.

GES culture supports teachers in various ways. We have math, reading, HSE21 Best Practices, and grade level team leaders that help to guide individuals in their growth needs. Specific differentiated PD is provided to teachers based on needs and interests. Teachers are allowed to observe other teachers in our building as well as within our district. Teachers teaching teachers becomes the foundation for our professional development culture. We have an instructional coach who that meets with individual teachers to assist in professional growth. We work to create a culture that is supportive and encourages teachers to be creative and think outside the box in their work with children

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Geist Elementary families value and promote community involvement. GES has utilized several successful strategies to bring together the staff, families and community members for the betterment of the school. To begin each year, families are invited into the school for a social event. This is a time for parents, new and old, to become acquainted with the staff. This also allows for all families in the school to gather, reconnect after summer break, and meet the classroom teachers in a relaxed atmosphere.

Another way the community is involved is with the annual school fundraiser and festival. The parents, staff and students of GES participate in the Gator Gallop fundraiser. This is a large event that promotes exercise as well as community involvement. Students receive pledges from outside sources as they "gallop" around a track for a day full of fun. Each student also wears a t-shirt decorated with community business

logos. All surrounding businesses are contacted and given the opportunity to become involved with this large event. To wrap up the night, the Fall Festival takes place at the school. This is a time for the students to have fun playing games and participate in various other activities. The evening ends with a silent auction that is sponsored by many community businesses. This one day of fun is not only a day when the community is welcomed into Geist Elementary, but it is also the main fundraiser of the year because of its great success.

Another event that promotes community involvement is Marketplace. This project allows for classrooms of different grades levels to team up, collaborate, and create a product at the school market. Students have the chance to receive a loan from the PTO to purchase materials needed to make the items that are sold at the Marketplace. On the day of the big event, the entire community is invited into the school to purchase the products that are made. The profits from each group are then donated to charities in the community.

Geist Elementary is known for its Veteran's Day production. For this celebration, all Veterans in the school community are invited and honored on this day. The festivity includes patriotic songs from the school choir, poems and essays read by the writing contest winners, as well as local guest speakers.

Geist Elementary works hard to involve and support our community. Our community members help in the judging of our school science fair. In addition a local group of adults come into Hamilton Southeastern Schools and provide tutoring for second grade students. The Geist Elementary community is important and contributes to the success of our school.

3. Professional Development:

Hamilton Southeastern Schools began its professional development approach with an investment in its teachers. At the district level committees were formed in various curricular areas. Many highly-respected experts were contracted to ensure quality learning among the teachers. Teachers were trained extensively across the district. Hamilton Southeastern, in its desire to align their Units of Study in reading, language arts, and mathematics, and the awareness of diversity, devoted a great deal of time in this investment. It also promotes and develops the HSE21 best practices initiative, which is to equip students with the content knowledge, unique skills, and new literacies they will need to contribute positively in their communities and succeed in the 21st century global economy. This led to them becoming leaders in their individual buildings and possess the knowledge to assist other teachers. Geist Elementary School pulled excellent support and professional development from its own teachers in the building in order to meet the needs of the school and its School Improvement Plan goals. The GES staff was required to do four professional development half-day afternoons learning about integrating CLOSE reading(a seven-step process to improve reading comprehension), the Depth of Knowledge, mathematical strategies, HSE21 Best Practices, question development, Project-Based Learning, and core beliefs. Optional professional development opportunities were put in place to enhance teachers' roles in the classroom. This differentiated professional development included book studies, strategies for students with attention-deficit disorder, math workshop model, Response to Instruction, cultural competency through the use of literature, and using technology to enhance math. Professional Learning Communities were built into the school day for all teachers twice a month. This time allowed teachers to collaborate, discuss the Indiana College Career and Readiness Standards and how it can be implemented into the Units of Study, how teachers instruct to the diverse needs of its students, and help others with solutions if Problem Based Intervention Supports is needed. All of this professional development has created a strong, well-trained teacher at Geist Elementary School.

4. School Leadership:

School leadership and direction play an important role in staff development and student achievement. We have a dedicated, talented and hard-working staff at Geist Elementary. During the twelve years Geist has been open, GES staff have seen three principals. Currently and for the past three years, the school is led by one principal, one guidance counselor and an instructional coach. The school and leadership focus is to do what is best for students and to meet individual student needs. Individual needs are met through a strong RTI and PBIS system that has solidified in the past three years. Teachers have received significant training in RTI and PBIS interventions as well as progress monitoring of these interventions. A primary focus in RTI is Level Literacy Intervention through Fountas and Pinnell as well as progress monitoring through

Aimsweb. PBIS has focused on communicating school wide expectations, a PBIS matrix, and student involvement and ownership in videos, posters and school activities. Prior to 2013, the school did not have built in professional learning communities (PLC). Last year the focus was to build PLCs and allow teachers time to meet every six days within the school day. Through the collaboration of the teachers, the school is committed to having PLC built into the day and is beginning talks of common assessments to improve our focus during PLC on knowing what children need to learn and what to do when they have not learned the content. We have started collaborating on a vertically aligned problem solving assessment to be used K-4. We are trying to create some system of consistency throughout the building while honoring teacher autonomy.

Parent and community relationships are fostered through an open door policy and by a principal and a counselor who are accessible to stakeholders. Time is spent developing relationships with parents, staff and students. This time has developed in a deeper level of trust between leadership and stakeholders in the Geist Community.

Finally, a focus of our school has been to do the right thing and treat people right. That encompasses treating our parents and community with the dignity, honesty and communication they deserve while providing an engaging, rigorous and differentiated education for our students all while providing the support, encouragement and training our dedicated staff need to accomplish our goals. Yes, leadership and direction is important; however it takes a great team of stakeholders to achieve the success experienced at Geist Elementary.

Part VI – INDICATORS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS

One of our most successful journeys towards academic success is in our work with Reading RtI. We have been providing programming through the RtI process for many years, but more recently we are starting to see consistent growth with our students that receive RtI support. We have received bonus growth points on our Indiana ISTEP ELA grade card for the last three years.

We attribute this to our reflective work as a PLC Team, our commitment to Response to Instruction as a model to meet the needs of all learners and our work with professional development in the areas of reading and writing workshop. This model begins with a strong differentiated reading block that serves all students with Tier 1 support. Needs for differentiation are identified through NWEA, Fountas and Pinnell Benchmarks and classroom assessments. The entire building uses Fountas and Pinnell benchmarks to identify students strengths, growth areas and reading levels. With the help of our instructional coach, building level reading leaders and RtI team, all teachers have been trained to use the benchmark system and most importantly utilize the Fountas and Pinnell comprehension strategies of with, beyond and about to support their differentiated instruction.

When a child does not respond to core instruction, teachers present data to the RtI team supporting a need for further researched based intervention. After our RtI team reviews the data on extensive differentiation in the classroom, we move to Tier 2 work with our use of the Fountas and Pinnell Leveled Literacy Interventions. This program is used consistently throughout the building by grade level teachers to meet the needs of students in Tier 2. We add additional support with Reading Mastery and Corrective Reading for our Tier 3 students. During Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports, students are also progress monitored using Aimsweb. RtI students receive either one-on-one or small group instruction.

The consistent use of researched based programs and reinforcement of remediation work in the core has provided us a focus that has been lacking in years past. We are tracking our students, keeping up to date paperwork, and are constantly looking at the data to help drive instruction. Our interventions are done with fidelity, consistency, and it is working for our students. By doing so we are able to minimize RtI instruction by the time students reach 4th grade because we have achieved on-level reading for most students.