

**U.S. Department of Education**  
**2017 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program**

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Mr. David A. Kross

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

Official School Name Leon Sheffield Magnet Elementary School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 801 Wilson Street N.W.

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

City Decatur State AL Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 35601-1040

County Morgan County

Telephone (256) 552-3056 Fax \_\_\_\_\_

Web site/URL http://lsm.dcs.edu/ E-mail david.kross@dcs.edu

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. Michael Douglas E-mail michael.douglas@dcs.edu  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Decatur City Schools District Tel. (256) 552-3000

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

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

The original signed cover sheet only should be converted to a PDF file and uploaded via the online portal.

*\*Non-public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, write N/A in the space.*

## **Part I – Eligibility Certification**

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The signatures on the first page of this application (cover page) certify that each of the statements below, concerning the school's eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education and National Blue Ribbon Schools requirements, are true and correct.

1. The school configuration includes one or more of grades K-12. (Schools on the same campus with one principal, even a K-12 school, must apply as an entire school.)
2. 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 and all subgroups, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
3. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2017 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.
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 2011 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: 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, or 2016.
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 has not been identified by the state as "persistently dangerous" within the last two years.
9. 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.
10. 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.
11. 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.
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.

## PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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Data should be provided for the most recent school year (2016-2017) unless otherwise stated.

### DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 12 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 3 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 2 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 17 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, 2016 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	0	0	0
1	0	0	0
2	0	0	0
3	52	60	112
4	51	50	101
5	54	63	117
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
<b>Total Students</b>	157	173	330

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 0 % Asian
  - 27 % Black or African American
  - 10 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 63 % White
  - 0 % Two or more races
  - 100 % Total**

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

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2015 – 2016 school year: 1%

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, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	1
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	1
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	2
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2015	330
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.006
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	1

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

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

Spanish

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 39 %  
Total number students who qualify: 130
8. Students receiving special education services: 7 %  
25 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.

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

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 1
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects	15
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	10
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a licensed professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	0
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	1

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 21:1
12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

<b>Required Information</b>	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012
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 2016.

<b>Post-Secondary Status</b>	
Graduating class size	0
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	0%
Enrolled in a community college	0%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	0%
Joined the military or other public service	0%
Other	0%

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.  
Yes X No

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award. 2008

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

Leon Sheffield Magnet School serves our students by providing enriched curriculum opportunities to help students grow academically, emotionally, physically, and socially.

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

Leon Sheffield Magnet School students are chosen to attend based on Kindergarten test scores and Kindergarten teacher referral. All Kindergarten students in Decatur City Schools are given an assessment. All Kindergarten teachers in Decatur City Schools are given a rubric to score their students. These scores are combined to create a list of magnet students. All elementary schools within Decatur City Schools are represented in Decatur City based on the percentage of students within their school compared to the number of Kindergarten students enrolled in the district. The selected students are invited to attend the magnet school.

## **PART III – SUMMARY**

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Decatur is a town of 55,000 located in North Alabama. Decatur City School system currently has two high schools, three middle schools, and twelve elementary schools. Leon Sheffield Magnet Elementary is the district's only magnet program. Beginning as early as kindergarten, each elementary school selects high-achieving students as well as intellectually gifted students to attend the magnet program. Since students are selected from schools all across the city, Leon Sheffield Magnet is made up of a diverse population. The program serves student learners that include students from racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse families and communities.

The magnet program began in 1980 and is Alabama's longest running magnet program. The magnet program is housed on two campuses – Benjamin Davis Elementary School serves first and second grade magnet students while Leon Sheffield Magnet serves students in grades three through five. The original building that housed grades three through five was built in 1923. It first served as a high school before becoming a neighborhood elementary. Gordon Bibb Elementary School was located in the heart of the city. In 2005, after twenty-five years of being home to the magnet program, the school system made the decision to raze the dilapidated building and build a new neighborhood school on the site. In 2006, Gordon Bibb Magnet School was moved to the campus of Leon Sheffield Elementary. This building was originally a high school named Lakeside High School. The school later became an elementary school and was renamed Leon Sheffield Elementary taking the name of a former principal. Leon Sheffield Elementary School was renamed Leon Sheffield Magnet School in 2006

Leon Sheffield Magnet School is known for the individualized and interest-based instruction in which our teachers challenge students in various ways. This year Leon Sheffield has re-structured classroom schedules which has students moving between different teachers for whole class and small group instruction in areas where intervention may be needed. This schedule involves not only classroom teachers, but utilizes all specialists in the building. Involving all the staff provides for smaller groupings and allows teachers to target and focus on individual needs. Teachers also utilize AMSTI – Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative for hands-on instruction

In 2016, Leon Sheffield earned the distinction of becoming an Alabama Outdoor Classroom School. Many hours of research and hard work was put into our outdoor space where students benefited from these learning opportunities.

In addition to classroom instruction Leon Sheffield students are offered many opportunities for extra-curricular activities to meet the diverse interests of our student body. Our Fine Arts program directs an annual musical production. For the past 18 years, 150-175 Leon Sheffield students have participated in this much anticipated event. The musical is performed at a local historic city theater. This year a total of six shows of *Mulan, Jr.* were performed by our students. Over 1,500 people from the community and beyond came to see the play. Past productions have been *Lion King*, *Annie*, and *The Sound of Music, Jr.* In another annual event, Leon Sheffield students work all year to make it to the finals of our Live Chess Tournament. Also, our students typically excel in the local and state PTA Reflections contest

Our Art department is also a student favorite allowing our student artists to showcase their talents in local and state exhibits. Students are currently getting ready for our upcoming Asian Art Festival. In music, students experience learning about musical instruments through our piano lab and a recorder program. Leon Sheffield students are also offered the opportunity to be a part of a choral and dance team called Center Stage or to be a part of an art team called Creative Crew. Students who excel in math can become part of a math team that competes in local and state events. Currently, our two Destination Imagination teams have placed first and second in competition and are headed to the State level. Also, we have a Robotics Club

Long before attending Leon Sheffield, future students hear about some of the traditions that are unique to our school. Our physical education coaches host annual games that makes physical activities fun. The annual Turkey Bowl brings families out to watch friendly flag football games between the grade level classes; Sheff Cup does the same in soccer, and a Wiffle Ball tournament is held each spring. Talent shows, Math Salute

Tournaments, Spelling and Geography Bees are favorites among the students. Leon Sheffield Student Council annually conducts community food drives and raises money for community needs.

One of our proudest moments was in 2008 when Leon Sheffield was 1 of 160 elementary schools to be recognized as a National Blue Ribbon School of Excellence. We have used this distinguished honor to help promote and publicize the potential of our school and students.



## **PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

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### **1. Core Curriculum:**

The Core Curriculum is the cornerstone of Leon Sheffield Magnet School. We provide all students with wide-ranging perspectives and opportunities for real-world application in reading, math, social studies, science, and the arts.

LSMS teachers implement an extensive variety of strategies and activities to teach our social studies/history standards and civic learning. Our teachers use current events and inquiry based learning to teach the standards. Many of these activities require a culminating project for the students to present their research to their classmates. Also, social studies standards are taught at our school through book groups and read aloud activities. The teachers use non-fiction text and historical fiction for instruction. Social Studies Weekly is a newspaper that is used for instruction that is designed to meet the standards in each grade. The third grade focus is Community Studies, fourth grade Alabama Studies, and fifth grade World Studies.

We place an emphasis on civic learning in the education of our students. Our 5th grade students participate in a program to honor outstanding citizens in our community. Our school has a retired high school teacher that teaches in our school each week. This man is a role model for our students and he teaches them about the rights and responsibilities of being a U.S citizen. A lawyer allows the students to vote using a real voting booth from our county to show them the importance of exercising the right to vote. Our school counselor incorporates civic learning into many of her counseling lessons. She also led a team at our school to research our campus, which was the first African-American school in our county.

The reading program is standards-based and central to all other areas of the curriculum. We strive to integrate the literary subjects for maximum impact on students' reading and writing. Fiction reading skills are taught alongside narrative writing, informational reading skills are taught alongside informational writing, etc. An uninterrupted ninety-minute block is used for reading instruction. During this time, students are given whole group, small group, and individualized instruction. The students develop speaking and listening skills by selecting appropriate literature sharing a book, poem, and writing to an audience of their peers. LSMS teachers make sure that students are reading from all genres. The students are given daily independent reading time, and teacher-led read aloud time to foster a love of reading. Teachers use a variety of programs and resources such as: Accelerated Reader, Wonders, paired passages, interactive notebooks, book groups, etc.

The major focus of the standards-based mathematics curriculum is procedural fluency. The students are given differentiated opportunities to accurately apply mathematical procedures by transferring different procedures to solve real-world problems, and to recognize when one strategy or procedure is more appropriate to apply than another. Students are encouraged to construct a response to real-world problems and to explain and justify their thinking. The students are given focused time in the math lab each week to sharpen individualized math concepts and procedures. We utilize an uninterrupted ninety-minute math block, consisting of whole-group, small-group, and individualized instruction. The mathematics curriculum focuses not only on a vertical, but also a horizontal knowledge of the standards. Many different methods are used to aid in retention and understanding including: Go Math!, critical thinking skills, Marilyn Burns, math games, mathematical reasoning, error analysis, and DOK 2 and 3.

The standards-based science curriculum provides a multidisciplinary research-based experience. Each class visits the STEM lab weekly for forty-five minutes. This time complements critical thinking and analytical abilities needed in other areas of the curriculum. In STEM class students are challenged to build structures or devices using basic materials in creative ways. Fourth graders built a flood barrier to keep a tiny doghouse from flooding when it rains. Fifth graders learn to calculate volume and surface area by building a box. Third graders learn about chemical reactions and then design their own experiments. The students also research, organize, and present group and individual science experiments. They are encouraged to make generalizations based upon their scientific research. Many, varied opportunities for our students to construct their own scientific knowledge are offered through field trips, AMSTI (scientific investigations), and a

seasonal outdoor classroom. These opportunities allow our students to practice the transfer of information in a real-world setting.

## **2. Other Curriculum Areas:**

Leon Sheffield Magnet School has a rich foundation of other curriculum areas that expand and enrich the essential skills and knowledge of our students. All students receive instruction in art, music, drama, STEM, technology, library, and counseling weekly. All Students attend 45-60 minute classes in these areas. Physical Education is taught daily for 30 minutes to all students as well.

The Fine Arts classes help students develop their communication, self-expression, problem –solving, fine motor, and higher level thinking skills as well as how to collaborate as a team. Students frequently work together to produce skits, musical compositions, and puppet shows in music and drama classes. Students often are required to apply their core content knowledge in Fine Arts as well. They draw on what they know from math to show an understanding of musical rhythms and their knowledge of language arts in reading and writing is required to perform skits and reader’s theater in drama. All of our third grade students are exposed to the violin for a six week unit. Art class requires students to use their time management skills to insure they finish each project in a timely manner. They also use their reasoning and communication skills when critiquing their own artwork and the artwork of their peers. Centerstage show choir, Creative Crew art club, and the spring musical production are Fine Arts activities that are optional for children to participate in after school and extend what is taught in the Fine Arts classes. We typically have over half our student body participate in these groups.

Our STEM, technology, and library classes help students develop and improve several essential skills. These skills include, but are not limited to communication, collaboration, critical thinking, reasoning, use of data, research, and technology skills. In STEM, students commonly work in teams to solve a problem or conduct experiments applying knowledge from their science curriculum. Technology class extends the students’ ability to use data and research to present information. They also learn work-place skills in how they present ideas, research, and information in word processing documents or visual organizers. They have also been earning how to code. In the library, students learn the accepted model of research adopted by our school. By using reasoning skills they learn to determine which sources are authentic and how to do genuine research based on these sources. Leon Sheffield also offers clubs to extend this area of our curriculum. They include Robotics club, Chess club, Destination Imagination, Math club, Garden Club and Tech Kids. These are groups for which the students may apply. Typically 70-75 students are chosen for these groups and they meet weekly, biweekly, or monthly.

Students meet with our counselor weekly as a class. Counseling class helps students with several skills. Our counselor covers subjects to guide students in academic development, career development, and personal/social development. Through activities in the school guidance curriculum, students expand their skills in motivation/self-discipline, decision-making, goal setting, planning, problem-solving, and communication. They draw on their knowledge of social studies and other cultures to develop personal and social behaviors acceptable in today’s society. Their core knowledge is expanded when learning study skills and test-taking strategies.

Physical Education class calls upon their teamwork skills on a daily basis. It also helps develop gross motor skills, a healthy active lifestyle, sportsmanship and physical fitness. They all participate and compete in grade level competitions in football, soccer, and kickball as a class team. The students often must coach their own teams and use their problem-solving skills to evaluate team performance and make decisions.

Leon Sheffield offers many classes to support other curricular areas. All of our students have an opportunity to shine based on their specific interest. We have several opportunities in art, drama, music, science, and technology. These classes not only allow our students extra opportunities, they also supplement the curriculum.

### **3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:**

The educational goal at Leon Sheffield Magnet Elementary School is to prepare and cultivate children to become responsible, empathetic global minded citizens who are committed to lifelong learning. We believe that children learn seamlessly, applying big ideas to learn other intricate or specialized learning objectives. The learning environment is a place where children can explore, experiment, and practice real world problem solving. We encourage our students to be creative problem solvers and to effectively work with others. Our teachers provide opportunities that will educate and cultivate the whole child, which will ultimately allow them to be competitive in the global market. We believe that no teacher is an island, and our teachers collaboratively plan and create lessons and assessments that complement their specific gifts so that student achievement can be positively impacted on a larger scale. There is no one size fits all teaching approach and we strive to challenge every child individually. Our teachers take into account the many needs of the individuals they serve.

Our teachers use a variety of on-going instructional methods to meet the different learning styles of our students. Leon Sheffield instructional practices include incorporating the 21st Century Skills of collaboration, communication, critical-thinking, and creativity. For example, our teachers use authentic literature based instruction; project based learning, hands on materials such as Legos and STEM activities. We incorporate the use of technology with student web quests, internet based research activities, and student created digital projects. Our students learn through hands on learning centers, collaborative problem solving groups, peer-tutoring and interactive Smart-boards. Additionally, many of our students learn through independent research based projects, our outdoor classroom, and curriculum compacting.

Using our STAR assessment and teacher input, our reading and math classes are divided into differentiated tier groups to aide in meeting the needs of children at similar instructional levels. This provides an opportunity for teachers to make better use of their time in small groups as well as through whole group instruction. We have small group instruction built into our week which allows one on one instructional time with the teacher while also providing the opportunity for intervention in the computer lab and with a focused library group. This practice helps drive instruction in areas where students have identified gaps in knowledge.

Additionally, our school utilizes several different instructional tools to reach students with intervention needs. Making Connections is used to help improve comprehension strategies in reading. Words Their Way covers the phonics component of reading and spelling as an intervention strategy. For students that have been identified as dyslexic or having dyslexic tendencies, Leon Sheffield has used MSLE, but is beginning to phase in a new program called Aspire for these children. The math intervention program is called V-Math.

Lastly, through the use various assessment strategies including but not limited to teacher observation of DOK 2 and 3 activities, weekly summative assessments, and rubric based assignments. As part of our project based learning, we use performance based tasks and differentiated teacher made assessments. To prepare for the yearly ACT Aspire test, our school focuses on text complexity, DOK 2 and 3 questioning strategies, and well-written constructed responses. We use the Sandbox to help familiarize our students with the format of the ACT Aspire. Along with traditional type end-of-unit tests and benchmark tests for various subjects such as reading and math, all students take a formal STAR reading and math assessment each 9 week period to help drive whole and small group instruction.

Our students come first in every decision making process, and we strive every day to provide the highest quality educational experience for each and every student that enters into our school by creatively addressing each student's physical, intellectual, and emotional needs. In order to maximize student potential and meet student's educational and emotional needs, our teachers seek to be patient and diligent with each student in order to understand each child regardless of the various issues that they may come to school with. Our teachers are willing to take the time and put forth the effort to work with each student, then each and every student can have their educational and emotional needs met.

## PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

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### 1. School Climate/Culture:

At Leon Sheffield Magnet School we strive to create a school climate and culture to support the student's academic needs, social needs, and emotional growth. In each grade level we provide students with an academic, needs-based grouping schedule for both math and reading. These groups remain fluid throughout the year and provide students the opportunity to move up based on their needs. This fluidity gives our students a sense of pride knowing they do not stay stagnant and have ownership in their learning. Each of these classes not only provides each student with learning centers that promotes a project-based learning environment, but also gives them opportunities to engage in small groups to work on specific skills in our library and math labs. Leon Sheffield Magnet School also places an emphasis on Fine Arts classes, community clubs, academic clubs, and student interest clubs. While we have a large population of children who come from families that can meet their children's needs, we do provide kids with grief counseling, small group counseling for targeted needs, and a food backpack program for weekends and extended breaks.

As teachers we work hard to ensure our students feel loved, protected and respected at school. We work hard to create an inviting environment from the moment you walk in the door. If you walk down our hallways you notice students work outside our classrooms, and classrooms decorated with in-school projects and other hands-on type lessons set up for learning. Our staff works hard each day to keep our school clean and our facilities well maintained. We encourage a cohesive relationship between our staff, faculty, administrators, and parents to provide students a school climate that reflects the attitudes and beliefs of the individuals that inhabit it. As teachers, we not only enjoy spending time together outside of school through events we schedule throughout the year, but we also have workroom gatherings that teachers support monthly by bringing food and snacks to share.

Teachers consistently work to maintain a positive school climate in which students say, "I can" and are willing to take risks. Teachers provide supportive practice, accommodate individual student's needs, and use mistakes and incorrect answers as opportunities to learn and reteach. Our school is rich in "extra" opportunities for kids to learn including: an outdoor classroom, outdoor play area that encourages students to play games in large groups, STEM, chess, and technology classes.

### 2. Engaging Families and Community:

Because it is a citywide magnet school, Leon Sheffield's influence and activities permeate our entire community to engage families, organizations, businesses, and interested residents. Last year we had three unique connections. First, fifth-graders learned about U.S. history through Liberty's Legacy and collaborated to raise funds to honor nine community members at a December assembly, including a doctor, a firefighter, a police captain, a volunteer coach, a retired master sergeant, a foster grandparent, and our PTA president. Second, we tapped into our foster grandparent's history as a graduate of this school, when it was the city's only black high school. The counselor and reading coach paired student volunteers to interview graduates of each of the 15 classes; graduates also met three times to share stories with each other and students. This activity culminated in a 112-page book and a February program, where graduates from 1955 to 1969, and their family members, attended a celebration with our students, which united past and present in a powerful way. Third, in early March community demand resulted in sold-out and extra performances of "The Lion King Jr.," which showcased the art teacher's costume talents and the theatrical abilities of more than 140 students. Numerous parents volunteered behind the scenes to ensure success. These activities included the community and gave students unique ways to work on skills in acting, writing, listening, collaborating, and expanding their experiences.

Other activities combined student efforts, school improvement, and the community. The art teacher organized Valentines for Veterans, and students created cards and collected goodies to send to active-duty military, some of whom have connections to our families. The community turned out to support physical competitions, including soccer's Sheff Cup, flag football's Turkey Bowl, and post-testing wiffleball's

Magnet Cup. The PTA/PTO was active and integral to student achievement and faculty support. Student of the Month assemblies, third-grade violin recitals, and Pizza and Pipes, a fourth-grade recorder performance, also drew crowds. Our partner in education initiated a fifth-grade field trip to its natural gas plant, tapping into the science curriculum.

In addition to activities, communication with shareholders was emphasized. Teachers connect via calls, texts, emails, newsletters, Facebook, and the school website. Student grades are accessible online, and community agencies provide assistance as needed. SchoolCast delivers dates, events, and updates to anyone who requests the resource. Our students are supported immensely by our community, and our students also work to support the community.

### **3. Professional Development:**

Leon Sheffield Magnet School made many changes in the 2015-16 school year. Most of these changes were in direct response to the new state assessment. The state of Alabama recently changed our state assessment to the ACT Aspire. This assessment is different than previous assessments in that it includes constructed response questions and also has many problem solving activities. It is no longer just a multiple choice assessment. Our students were doing average on the state assessment, but we knew they could do better. So we talked about changes that needed to be made.

Leon Sheffield Magnet School's professional development approach for the 2015-16 school year can best be described as collaborative. Teachers and administration discussed what we needed to work on as a faculty to improve student achievement. This collaboration increased teacher buy in and we all worked together towards a common goal. The list that was developed included student learning, rigor, Depth of Knowledge (DOK) 2 and 3, student engagement, setting high expectations, and more focused data meetings. We used the few professional development days before the school year to introduce these areas of focus and to learn more about them. We brainstormed professional development needs in regard to these areas. Although we grew in all of these areas, we decided to have an intense focus on DOK 2 and 3.

We focused most of our professional development activities on DOK 2 and 3. We knew that our students needed to be challenged with better classroom activities to increase rigor. We had an outside consultant come in and work with us on how to develop better activities. We met weekly and shared successes and frustrations. We all worked together to develop DOK 2s and 3s across all curriculum areas. The district was supportive of our focus and the elementary curriculum supervisor provided us with training and a few of us went to outside training that was funded by our district. The teachers and principal that went to that training came back and shared their learning with the faculty. We had monthly data meetings with two teachers at a time. These meetings included discussion on all of the goals, with specific focus on DOK 2s and 3s.

Our professional development on DOK 2s and 3s positively impacted student achievement. Our student's math scores grew an average of 16 percentile points, with a growth of 25 points in fifth grade math (62% to 87%)! Our student's reading scores grew an average of 12 percentile points, with a growth of 18 points in third grade reading (56% to 74%)!

### **4. School Leadership:**

The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.

This is the leadership philosophy of Leon Sheffield Magnet School. The main thing is our students. All decisions at Leon Sheffield are based on what is best for our students. This can be seen through the actions of our teachers, staff, and leadership team, which includes the principal, the reading coach, the counselor, and our Parent Teacher Organization. The principal oversees all activities in all areas. The reading coach works specifically with data and coaching teachers. The counselor oversees all testing and sets up non-academic small groups based on student need. The principal, reading coach, and counselor are all in data meetings making notes and listening to the teacher's needs for their students.

Leon Sheffield staff believes that test scores, school climate/culture, community engagement, and

professional development are all positively impacted by keeping the students at the forefront of all decisions. The students and families benefit when all of the day to day decisions are made based on what is best for the students. This also increases respect between all stakeholders.

Teachers are given the freedom to make decisions based on what they know is best for their students. Since our magnet students come from all areas of the city and have diverse backgrounds, many of our students need special attention based on home life and learning needs. The teachers know that their opinion is respected and that all decisions need to be made for the best interest of the students. This includes homework policies, projects, grading systems, and all areas of the school day. Fair doesn't necessarily mean that all students get the same thing, but fair does mean all students getting what they need in order to be successful. All teachers are trusted and empowered to make decisions based on what their students need.

The leadership team also believes that teachers need to be passionate about their procedures and the way they teach. Teachers are not all expected to do the same thing at the same time. Many of our teachers have different beliefs about quality education, and we believe that the passion that teachers bring to their classroom daily is positively impacted by being given the freedom to do what is best for their students. We are not a one size fits all school – and this goes for our students and our teachers.

## **Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

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Leon Sheffield Magnet School has been academically successful for many reasons, but we believe the main reason is from implementing depth of knowledge (DOK) questioning and problem solving activities on a daily basis.

Retention studies show students retain the most knowledge when they get to apply skills and concepts versus hearing, listening or reading about them. In short, kids learn by doing. Every day we start each subject off by having a problem solving activity that students work on alone, with a partner, or as a class. Implementing this strategy has taught our students how to think critically, therefore improving their problem solving abilities and making them academically stronger students as well as instilling confidence in them.

We at Leon Sheffield believe that implementing this strategy daily has reflected growth not only in the classroom, but on the state assessment as well. This is solely because of the rigor of questioning we have designed in our DOK's to assimilate the rigor shown on the state assessment. This daily activity creates rich environments to help meet the challenge where all students can learn at a high level. DOK categorizes tasks according to the complexity of thinking required to successfully complete them. We at Leon Sheffield decided to design our questions from the second and third categories. Our reasoning behind this was, we didn't want the rigor of questioning to be too easy, and we didn't want it to be too hard and students run out of time and feel defeated. In education, everything is centered on how much time is available, so we felt with how long our classes last, 15 minutes was enough time for students to engage in a category 2 or 3.

DOK isn't just implemented each day in the regular classroom, but also in the special classes – Music, Art, STEM, Library, Counseling, and Drama. For example, our students perform in a musical each year at the Princess Theater. Auditions are held in September and the students perform the show the first week in March. Music, Drama and Art work together to teach the students the skills needed to produce a professional caliber show. Students over the course of six months, learn how to analyze characters, recognize basic script formatting, perform a piece of music using effective expression and apply pitch and rhythm to various types of music. DOK is instrumental in preparing our students to not only learn the basics of Fine Arts but to be able to take what they've learned and apply in a performance based real world setting.