

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

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Dr. Douglas Tyson Arendall Jr.

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

Official School Name Vestavia Hills Elementary Liberty Park School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 17051 Liberty Parkway

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

City Vestavia Hills State AL Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 35242-7539

County Jefferson County

Telephone (205) 402-5400 Fax (205) 402-5401

Web site/URL

http://www.vestavia.k12.al.us/Doma E-mail arendalldt@vestavia.k12.al.us
in/11

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. Sheila Phillips E-mail phillipssm@vestavia.k12.al.us
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Vestavia Hills City Schools District Tel. (205) 402-5100

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

Date _____

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board
President/Chairperson Mr. Mark Hogewood
(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. 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

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):
- 5 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 2 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 1 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 8 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	52	42	94
1	43	60	103
2	50	56	106
3	64	44	108
4	64	45	109
5	59	54	113
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	332	301	633

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 8 % Asian
 - 6 % Black or African American
 - 5 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 80 % 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: 7%

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	26
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	17
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	43
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2015	633
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.068
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	7

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):
Spanish, Nepal, Cantonese, Vietnamese, Chinese, American Sign Language, Tamil, Greek, Russian, Filipino, Tagalog, French, German, Hindi, Telugu, Gujarati, Kannada, Arabic, Bengali, Urdu, Marathi, Japanese, Swahili, Korean, Farsi

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 2 %
Total number students who qualify: 17
8. Students receiving special education services: 7 %
44 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.

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

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 5
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	2
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects	33
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	12
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a licensed professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	15
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 19:1
12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

Required Information	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013	2011-2012
Daily student attendance	96%	96%	97%	96%	96%
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.

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.

The mission of Liberty Park Elementary is to ensure each student learns without limits by pursuing knowledge and igniting curiosity about the world.

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

As the sun comes up on a new day, children wearing backpacks walk on sidewalks or ride their bikes through the neighborhood eager to begin a great day of learning at Liberty Park Elementary. The assistant principal waves in the car line, while the school resource officer greets boys and girls. Aides help young students out of their cars and speak to parents before they pull away. Waves of smiling students enter the lobby where the principal greets them with a handshake or a high five. Many students eat a nutritious school breakfast in the cafeteria before heading to their hallway. Students unpack supplies in their classroom and get ready for their day. The daily live broadcast starts with music, videos, and images of the many exciting learning activities that week. In the broadcast studio, fifth grade boys and girls operate cameras on tripods, a sound mixer, and computers with video feeds. Back in the classrooms, students seated on the carpet are greeted by the young anchors on the interactive board, “Good morning Liberty Park!” After the pledge of allegiance, the “Liberty Park Promise” and the morning announcements, the students reading from prompters report on weather, sports, health and nutrition, school features and announcements. The broadcast always ends with the same words, “today is a great day for learning, let’s all be sure to take advantage of it!”

Vestavia Hills Elementary Liberty Park (VHELP) is truly the heart and soul of a thriving and vibrant community. VHELP is a public, suburban, elementary school within the planned suburban development of Liberty Park. We are truly a neighborhood school. The school serves students in kindergarten through fifth grade. Liberty Park is the newest of five elementary schools within the Vestavia Hills City Schools District -a district that is recognized for educational excellence. Since the school first opened its doors in 1999 to only 188 students in 11 classes, the school has grown steadily as young professionals are drawn to the neighborhood for its livability, beauty, and most of all for its excellent public schools. Families from other nations or backgrounds are welcomed to the community and the increasing diversity has enriched the character and culture of our school. The school currently serves 633 students in thirty-three classroom units. A \$5 million construction project completed in March of 2017 included a 14 classroom addition and lunchroom expansion to accommodate anticipated growth. Despite the growth of the community and the school enrollment, Liberty Park has maintained the spirit and feel of a smaller school. It remains a neighborhood school in spirit.

The motto of the Vestavia Hills City Schools is “Learning Without Limits.” These words are more than a slogan at Liberty Park. Learning without limits implies each child reaching his or her potential. At VHELP we strive to create a safe, positive, and nurturing learning environment that meets the needs of the whole child and provides a strong foundation for their future success. We recognize that today’s students will need a variety of skills that include both hard skills -such as knowledge and skills based on content standards and soft skills -such as communication, collaboration, creativity, flexible thinking, and problem-solving. In recognition of the wide range of abilities students will need in today’s rapidly-changing world, we maintain a broad spectrum of innovative high-quality programs and extracurricular activities that help students to discover their unique strengths and interests. In the classroom, students are engaged in hands-on collaborative learning that encourages higher-order thinking, dialogue, and building connections among interconnected content areas. Coding Club, Math Team, STEM Maker Club, Liberty Park Singers, and other after school clubs are offered to further develop unique student talents and interests. The addition of the STEM “Innovation Lab” (iLab) in 2015-2016 has provided all our students with opportunities during the school day to creatively solve practical inquiry-based design challenges using the engineering cycle. The collaboration and ingenuity on display in the iLab has been observed by several other schools in Alabama who are looking to implement a similar STEM model in their schools. An exceptional characteristic of VHELP is a focus on each child as an individual. We seek to develop each child’s unique gifts, talents, and interests. Not only teachers and administrators, but also support staff such as custodians, child nutrition workers and volunteers take an interest in each boy or girl. If students have needs; whether those needs are academic, social, or emotional, our school works proactively to provide additional support, interventions, or opportunities for development. Ongoing formative assessments are used to identify children who are in need of support and teams of teachers meet weekly in collaborative teams such as the problem solving team (PST) and their professional learning communities (PLC). Interventionists work with students needing Tier III support. A comprehensive toolbox of research-based programs that includes multi-sensory, early literacy,

comprehension, and math interventions are provided by expert teachers for any student who need support in a given area.

It helps that the community we serve shares the school staff's growth mindset. High expectations for our school are shared by all our stakeholders and the community of Liberty Park and Vestavia Hills as a whole. Our parents value education and have lofty expectations regarding the quality of their child's education and for our school in general. The community takes great pride in the school. There is a strong sense of ownership and belonging in the community. Parents seek out opportunities support the school through service or through giving. The Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) at Liberty Park is organized, supportive, and active. The PTO works closely with the school leadership to support the missions of the school, providing support in many forms -financial, volunteer hours, advisory capacity, and fund-raising. Parents are eager to take advantage of opportunities to be involved in their child's education such as Curriculum Nights, Parent Power Sessions, and book studies for parents offered by the school counselor.

While we are pleased with the positive culture of learning at Liberty Park, we recognize that complacency is the enemy of continuing excellence and we are committed to continual growth and improvement. One of the greatest challenges faced by high-performing schools can be complacency. The adage, "good is the enemy of great" can make continual improvement efforts difficult in a high-performing school; however, at VHELP a growth-mindset and a focus on individual children's needs ensures that we maintain a focus on the areas where we can improve -individually and collectively. Development of SMART Goals (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, time-bound) is ongoing at the school level, team level, and individual level. Stakeholders' involvement and input into decision making is sought out and valued. In this culture, school stakeholders are motivated, excited, and fully-invested in the school and its mission.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

Richard DuFour, an expert in professional learning communities, measures the success of a team by their specific beliefs, including the belief that all students can learn at high levels. It is this belief that drives our teams and our school to provide individualized learning experiences to help each child reach their unique potential. We believe that students learn best when learning is active, engaging, rigorous, and connected with the real world. These experiences are driven by the College and Career Readiness Standards that the state of Alabama has adopted, but at VHELP we seek to transcend these basic standards and go deeper into the content to make the learning exciting and connected to our students' experiences.

Our team of educators is committed not only to teaching students the academics laid out in the required state standards, but to modeling and teaching specific behavioral and social skills needed to develop each child into a well-rounded citizen. Vestavia Hills Elementary Liberty Park strives to integrate learning in each subject and grade to provide connections in content, subject, and grade level bands. Each team works in a professional learning community to collaborate and determine the best methods to present and engage our students in the curriculum. Our teachers utilize ongoing professional development and embedded time to work together, which assists in reaching high expectations.

VHELP is a language-rich learning environment and students are surrounded with opportunities to connect learning with reading and writing. In our early elementary grade bands, students are provided a variety of opportunities to engage in different styles of literature. In these grades, teachers organize their time using the Daily Five structure. At the beginning of the year, students monitor their stamina to build independence and confidence. This growth is visually displayed and celebrated to motivate students to be engaged in their reading. Students are provided choices that include read-to-self, read-to-someone, listen to reading, word work, and more. Teachers tailor the activities and expectations found within the choices to each student's needs. This structure of learning optimizes small group instruction. During each rotation, teachers are facilitating in a small group setting or giving an assessment to guide future instruction. In addition to the unparalleled academic growth our students exhibit through this model, our students also build independence in goal setting, task management, and teamwork.

As students venture into upper elementary, the emphasis on goal-setting for independent reading takes precedence. Teachers expose students to a variety of both fiction and nonfiction text. Text structures, reading skills, and strategies are presented in different genres to assist our students' ability to apply their learning. In fourth and fifth grades, teachers use the "40-book challenge" as inspiration to guide our students' interest in the different genres available to read and provide choice in which order students read them. Students have a yearlong goal that they work to, while teachers scaffold this goal within each quarter to help students attain and feel success along the journey. During their time at Liberty Park, students are exposed to a wide range of authors, subjects, and genres that expand their horizons and give them an appreciation of other cultures and life-experiences and help to develop a love of reading and writing.

Emphasis on independence, individualized instruction, and choice can also be found in the mathematics classroom in all grades. Students work with math menus that tailor individual tasks to students needs, giving the teacher an opportunity to work with small groups and differentiate each lesson. Every classroom incorporates Number Talks. This practice encourages mental math and builds an accepting community of learners. Students are brought together in one area of the classroom and presented a problem. Once all answers are shared, the teacher encourages students to defend their answer with the strategy of their choice. Students are provided the opportunity to see their peers' thinking about numbers and make connections to new strategies. Teachers use this as an opportunity to introduce strategies and new vocabulary as the students present it in their own words, making the learning organic. Multiple strategies and solutions are encouraged to build deep understanding. Students develop this understanding at their own pace. Teachers understand that a strong foundation in math is essential for students to be prepared for future success in school and in their careers.

Literacy and math are integrated into the Science and Social Studies instruction throughout the year. Narrative nonfiction and text features are commonly found in these areas. However, it is accompanied with the belief that students need hands-on experiences and opportunities to reenact events to build proficient understanding. In Social Studies, students in lower grade bands discover their community and how people and services work together. In upper grade bands, teachers seek to build deeper and broader understanding of history, cultures, and ethical topics by providing virtual field trips, primary-source texts, and opportunities for debate or opinion writing. The Vestavia Hills City School System adopted the Science curriculum from AMSTI, Alabama Mathematics Science Technology Initiative. This hands-on, engaging, curriculum requires teachers to undergo seven days of training on the materials, in addition to ongoing professional development to become proficient in their content areas. Instead of textbooks, this curriculum delivers kits and prepared activities that ask students to experiment and plan while teachers facilitate. Not only do students build a better foundation through hands-on discovery learning, they also experience the need to redesign or retry when at first an idea does not work. Environmental responsibility and ethics are a key component of our science curriculum as students investigate relevant issues such as the effects of pollution, energy alternatives, overpopulation on ecosystems or fragile populations. It is understood that our students need this experience to be prepared for careers in engineering and science and that talented individuals in the STEM fields will be relied on to solve the complex problems faced by society today.

At Liberty Park Elementary, civic responsibility is taught in all contexts and content areas, but is a particular area of emphasis within the social studies curriculum. We believe each student needs to understand how they can be involved and contribute as citizens of their class, school, community, state, nation, and ultimately as citizens of our world. Many opportunities for teaching civics are tied to current events. In the summer and fall of 2017, Alabama endured through one of the worst droughts in history. Our area went more than 60 days without measurable rainfall, causing loss of vegetation and wildfires. On some days, the smoke was so thick at our school, that we decided to keep the students inside for recess. Lake Purdy, the main aquifer for the city of Birmingham is only a few miles from our school, dropped to record levels feet. Many teachers used the drought as an opportunity to learn more about water restrictions –emphasizing the many uses of our water each individual’s civic responsibility to conserve water to ensure clean water remains a sustainable resource. Teachers noted that the children were very careful about washing hands quickly and turning water off when finished.

All students at VHELP were able to practice their civic duty to vote as they participated in a school-wide mock election during the presidential elections. Third grader students explored concepts, rules, and founding principles of our judicial system by transforming the classroom into a courtroom. Student learned that all citizens have the right to due process, a fair trial, and presumed innocence as they played the parts of jury, attorney, bailiff, and judge. Unit studies of immigration focus on immigration and treating all individuals equally regardless of race, ethnicity, or religion. Fourth grade students have in depth focus on Alabama history that touches on many civic themes so that students understand the past and know their responsibility in making their future brighter.

Supporting the core academic areas are learning opportunities that connect to academic, behavioral, and social needs. At Vestavia Hills Elementary Liberty Park, we strive to prepare citizens for opportunities and challenges that do not necessarily exist currently. Students need to build the skills to work with others, learn from mistakes, and be able to connect ideas to new learning. It is our goal to build these skills in an encouraging and safe environment while achieving the required standards in each grade.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Vestavia Hills Elementary Liberty Park offers curriculum areas that include art, music, physical education, library/media, technology, and integrated STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, & Math). The art curriculum at Liberty Park Elementary is designed to empower students to explore and express ideas through art, solve problems creatively, and discover new ways of seeing the world. In lessons based on the Alabama Course of Study for the Visual Arts, students create original two dimensional and three dimensional art and learn about artists, art history, and the art elements and principles. Units include sculpture, pottery, print making, drawing, and painting. Students showcase their work and visit with a local artist in an art show at the end of the year. Student art work has been featured at Board Meetings, at state art

competitions, and lining the halls of our school for all our school to enjoy.

Many of our students are especially talented in the area of music so it is important that we develop interest in this area. Students learn to appreciate music from diverse cultures and learn how music relates to our daily lives, history, traditions, and holidays. The music curriculum at VHELP is based on The National Core Music Standards for Elementary General Music and is linked to relevant learning topics in the classroom. In lower grades, students gain understanding of rhythm, instruments, pitch, and other key music concepts while performing music on traditional percussion instruments such as African drums, gongs, maracas, and tambourine. Students progress to more difficult instruments such as the recorder and guitar in upper grades. A class set of guitars and “chord buddies” was purchased two years ago with the assistance of a PTO fundraiser and the addition of this unit has been very exciting for our students. Liberty Park Singers is an auditioned group of fourth and fifth grade students that performs in the school, at mini-concerts, and at the Alabama Music Educators Association (AMEA) state festival. A school talent show this winter featured many of our talented student musicians.

The physical education (P.E.) program at VHELP seeks to educate minds, develop healthy bodies, and encourage positive attitudes towards health, physical activity, and sports skills. There is an expectation at VHELP for all physical education classes that students learn, be respectful to classmates, teachers, and equipment and most importantly to give their best effort in all they do. These foundational components are crucial for success each day, week and throughout the year. The physical education teachers shape curriculum based on national & state standards, developing skills in all sports related areas, with an emphasis on sportsmanship and student ownership in their activities. A key to the program’s success is implementing activities and instruction that are lined up with the interest and enthusiasm of our students. These units include baseball, soccer, football basketball, bowling, golf, lacrosse, hockey, hula-hooping, and dance. The P.E. department coordinates the Kid’s Mercedes Marathon and Jump Rope for Heart, which raised over \$21,000 at our school for the American Heart Association this year alone.

The Vestavia Hills Elementary Liberty Park Library Media Center is the informational hub of our school. Not only was it designed to sit at the structural “heart” of our school, centrally located between the lower and upper grade classrooms, but programming in the Library Media Center strives to meet the needs of all members of our school community. The library’s collection has been developed and designed to help students and teachers experience numerous learning opportunities through exposure to a wide variety of print and non-print materials. Our library follows the American Association of School Librarians Standards for the 21st-Century Learner. 21st Century Skills are integral in the success of our students, and it is our full intent to immerse students in quality lessons that stimulate critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration. In addition to weekly classes and additional collaborative lessons, the Library Media Center offers additional programming events: two Book Fairs are sponsored during the school year with special event parties at Barnes and Noble Bookstores to kickoff the week. Author visits are also popular at VHELP. Most recently, students met Mike Artell and learned about Louisiana folklore, drawing and cartooning, and interesting and creepy facts about animals, plants, and insects.

Technology integration provides all students with a media-rich learning experience in the classroom. Teachers provide integrated technology experiences with mobile Chromebook labs, mobile iPad labs, and in the STEM Innovation Lab (iLab). Each December, every student participates in the Hour of Code in Library/Media. This year students used Scratch, code.org, and Kodable to write two week’s worth of code. Students were able to share what they learned with their families at our school’s first STEM Family Night. In the iLab, students work as teams of engineers to solve complex challenges that go deep into content that they are studying in the regular classroom. After fully researching the problem, they conceptualize a design that might help in solving the problem, before creating mockups from found materials such as cardboard, plastics, and tape. They test their designs and utilize the engineering cycle to refine and improve their designs. A 3D printer is used to create needed components that students design in 3D software such as Tinkercad. Third graders worked to identify a problem in the school garden and created needed tools, instruments, or resources to help with the problem. Fifth grade students created roller coasters that applied learning of energy and motion. Even kindergarten students created original arcade games as part of a unit on movement and elements of space.

One unique feature that enhances our curriculum is our school garden. PTO volunteers work together with teachers and our Child Nutrition Program (CNP) Director to make the garden an outdoor classroom. Students assist in mulching, planting, weeding, and harvesting crops in the school garden. Fresh, healthy foods such as carrots, radishes, lettuce, and fresh herbs are sampled by students and even served for lunch in the school cafeteria line. Students take great pride in seeing the food that they helped to grow on the serving line. Cotton and corn were grown as part of the Alabama History social studies curriculum in fourth grade. Separate sensory gardens give students an opportunity to smell, taste, and feel the diversity of plants and their features. Our school gardens enhance the science, health, nutrition curriculum in many ways. Students come to understand our responsibility in maintaining a balance with nature and learn to appreciate where the food they see at the grocery store actually comes from.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

Our school uses a variety of instructional approaches. We utilize a tiered instructional process including Tier I core instruction for all learners, Tier II systematic, explicit intervention for students needing additional support, and Tier III research-based instructional intervention for students at risk. Instructional support is provided in the least restrictive environment for exceptional education students through differentiation and collaborative planning. The Tier I core instruction is differentiated to meet the needs of learners and involves various groupings of students, whole, small, pairs, and individuals to complete various activities. Kindergarten, first and second grade teachers use the Daily Five structure for reading. Instruction is delivered through mini-lessons. All students are involved in a variety of learning experiences including collaborative activities such as “turn and talk,” open discussion/reflection, and hands-on activities. As teachers work with small groups, conference with students, or deliver Tier II targeted instruction, young students are engaged in differentiated practice of core literacy skills through reading independently, shared reading with a partner, writing, and working with letters and words to practice phonics skills. Third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers use the Workshop model to provide conferencing and small group instruction in reading and writing. Mini-lessons allow teachers to incorporate reading and writing into the content areas. Our teachers utilize Number Talks to help students build mental math and computation strategies, deepening knowledge and understanding. “Number talks are an accessible way to reach deep into and draw upon the Standards for Mathematical Content and Practice to promote numerical reasoning and mathematically powerful students.” (Sherry Parrish, 2010). In addition, K-2 students explore counting and cardinality through Counting Collections. These activities provide the foundation for understanding numbers and for computation skills.

Through formative and summative assessments in math, reading, and writing, teachers know the diverse needs of every student. Student learning is enhanced by involving students in the process of evaluating their own attainment of learning targets based on state standards. Assessments are used to screen all students three times a school year in math (EasyCBM Common Core State Standards Math) and reading (EasyCBM Letter Naming Fluency, Letter Sound Fluency, Phonemic Segmentation Fluency, Word Reading Fluency, Passage Reading Fluency, and Multiple Choice Reading Comprehension). This data guides our educators in determining if additional diagnostic assessments are needed to determine individual needs of learners. The data gathered and analyzed from these assessments (EasyCBM, Fountas and Pinnell Reading Benchmark Assessment, Diagnostic Decoding Inventory, STAR, Primary Number and Operation Assessment, Addition Interview, Multiplication Interview, TOWRE, and TWS-5) guides instructional decisions regarding student grouping and instructional focus. Students are progress-monitored regularly so teachers can reflect on the effectiveness of instructional approaches, methods, and interventions. Concept specific assessments are often used in math for example, to determine which students may have mastered a given objective before instruction. This information helps teachers know which learners need a more challenging instructional plan to ensure high levels of learning and achievement. Students are involved in setting learning targets in all subjects. Formative assessments are used daily by teachers to take a quick look at how students gauge their own success. Conferencing in reading and writing also provides instructors with data to guide instructional goal setting. Students are involved in setting their own instructional goals and reflecting on their own progress. In addition our students create digital portfolios via Seesaw. Through this collaborative technological tool, learners can share their learning and achievements with classmates, parents, and other individuals outside the classroom.

Enrichment opportunities like Brain Bags, 20% time (independent research project), Math Menu, Coding Club, STEM Lab, and Gifted classes are provided to meet the needs of our higher achieving students. VHELP's Problem Solving Team (PST) meets monthly with classroom teachers to develop an individual goal and instructional plan for any student at risk. This team determines which students need Tier III academic or behavioral support. Research-based intervention programs (S.P.I.R.E, Leveled-Literacy Instruction, Do the Math) provide students with specifically designed instruction to help them close gaps and become successful.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

School Climate is best assessed by what is experienced within the walls of a school. On any given day at Vestavia Hills Elementary at Liberty Park, you will find active and engaged students up and down each hall. Leading those students are vibrant teachers who are just as eager to learn as the students in their care. At VHELP teachers are constantly finding new ways to model anything from social skills to math problems. Our teachers know that often a different approach is all it takes to reach the child who isn't finding success academically, socially or emotionally.

Students at VHELP are engaged because they are invested in their own learning. Clear and high expectations are set and maintained. Students understand that we all aim to work to our fullest potential. Students recite the Liberty Park creed every morning through a student-led broadcast. "I believe in myself and I am here to succeed. I am responsible, respectful, safe and prepared. I will do all I can to help myself and others learn. I will do my best because everything I do today will affect my tomorrow." Our students are motivated each day by the reminder that the learning they do today will prepare them for the future.

As a school with many high-achieving students, it can be difficult to keep students challenged and motivated to improve. At VHELP, we instill a growth-mindset in our students. Our students are learning that excellence is a moving target, that making mistakes is an essential part of the learning process, and that knowledge is an ongoing pursuit. We celebrate risk-taking, encourage student-led learning through 20% time and the Innovation Lab, and applaud the growth that comes from trying something new - even if it doesn't go as planned. This builds character and resilience while allowing students a supportive environment to navigate the emotions that come with huge successes and difficult failures.

For a school that strives to achieve so much academically, we must be equaled in heart. Counselor initiated "minute-meetings" allow students to receive extra support in difficult seasons. Our faculty and staff love like family. The sorrows of one are the sorrows of all and the joys of one are shared by the entire family. This picture of support, encouragement, empathy and sacrifice is the heartbeat of all we do and all we aspire to nurture within our community of Liberty Park.

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2. Engaging Families and Community:

One of the most unique aspects of VHELP is the unparalleled family and community support we receive as a school. We seek to partner with parents in their child's education and we encourage open communication and active involvement. We realize that the home-school connection is essential in achieving our mission. Our students see all the adults in their lives working together as a team to support them. It's common practice to see teachers at student baseball games, and parents serving as "mystery readers" for the classroom. The engagement between families, school and community is woven tightly within the culture of the community. One doesn't fully perform without the other.

The Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) is actively involved in every area of our growth as a school. School fundraisers, curriculum showcases, charitable efforts, etc. are designed, organized, and implemented in coordination with the PTO. PTO is always invested in school improvement efforts and chooses their activities to best support these efforts as well as our overall school mission. Even parents who are new to the Liberty Park community are quickly recruited to be involved in one the exciting opportunities led by PTO. There are many opportunities for parents to be involved with PTO and to use their gifts by either leading out in front or working behind the scenes. PTO provides teachers with many benefits including start-up money each fall, and a teacher-appreciation luncheon for our teachers in the spring.

We have strong relationships with our PIE Partners (Partners in Education). These partnerships with local businesses provide a "win-win" relationship for both school and community. The neighborhood grocery

store goes out of their way to donate birthday cakes for faculty and staff birthdays as well as dinner on late PTO meeting nights. Local dentists and doctors visit the school to speak with students about health and hygiene, and engineers visit the iLab to help bring STEM to life.

Every parent, educator and stakeholder in a child's life holds a unique perspective and role towards the development of a child. Within Liberty Park, we strive daily to let each role have a respected voice while modeling a team approach to support the whole child. VHELP is a host to many family events. From Family Fun Night, to parent book clubs, to Parent Power Sessions, to our most recent Curriculum Night exploring STEM, the school is truly a hub of the community. The great attendance for these events is a good indicator of strength of our parent and community partnerships and evidence of how students benefit when we work together.

3. Professional Development:

At Vestavia Hills Elementary Liberty Park, all educators are provided an opportunity to grow professionally. In addition to classroom teachers, special area teachers are encouraged and supported to grow in their area. When learning is connected to best practice, all educators collaborate and learn together knowing that each area brings a certain perspective to a child's learning. All professional learning efforts derive from data collected formally and informally. During the school year, professional development may be embedded in data meetings and professional learning communities. Our instructional coach and instructional technology specialist provide individualized professional development based on student needs and teacher interest. This organized and individualized professional development serves as a model for how instruction in the classroom takes place.

The professional development opportunities would not be as effective and abundant without the support of our district office. All educators are provided the opportunity to complete a Design-It-Yourself application to meet the needs of teachers. Teachers can team with their grade level and other colleagues to design a learning experience of their choice. These sessions take place over the summer.

During the school year, professional development is tailored to the needs of our teachers and their students. Because our district adopted the AMSTI curriculum, our school is paired with two AMSTI specialists that work with our teachers individually or in small groups to build deep understanding in the content areas and math and science. The master schedule optimizes opportunity for whole school professional development to be embedded in the day. This professional development is designed and determined after receiving and looking at survey data, having informal conversations with faculty members, and analyzing student data. In addition to learning opportunities during the school year, our teachers can be found participating or leading at the district's summer professional learning sessions. All this hard work is built on the idea that education is an ever-evolving journey. It is understood that in order to best prepare our students for the future, we must grow alongside them.

4. School Leadership:

Leaders at VHELP exemplify a "servant leadership" approach. The school leaders seek to support teachers, parents, and students as they work side-by-side towards improvement and excellence. The leaders articulate a clear vision and mission for the school that is aligned with the district strategic plan. While the school mission and core values are well-defined, the leadership encourages innovation, experimentation, and risk-taking in teaching practices. Leaders recognize that while it is important to have a well-coordinated instructional program; effective teaching comes in many forms, respecting those individual differences in each teacher. We feel that the differing teaching styles of our teachers enhance a child's K-5 experience at Liberty Park.

School leaders welcome input from teachers, parents, and students. The school's administration feels that transformative change is realized in the school by building leadership capacity throughout the school. Therefore, leaders at VHELP include teachers, paraprofessionals, parents, and students. Ideas about possible changes or improvements are shared freely among the team. The steering committee is an especially valuable sounding board for the school leaders. The leaders seek transparency and honest

communication with all stakeholders.

When changes or improvements are needed, the leaders act quickly and decisively to implement improvements. A relevant example is a replacement of the school committee structures at the school with more dynamic and effective “action teams” during the past school year. This change replaced a series of less effective monthly committee meetings on the calendar with dynamic teams organized around specific initiatives that are transforming and adding value to our school. One action team organized “instructional rounds” in which teachers open up their classrooms to be observed by other teachers. Another action team is organizing opportunities for students to lead and serve at VHELP in the school garden, broadcast, technology, and other areas of interest and talent.

Weekly job-embedded planning time for each teacher team is incorporated within the master schedule for teacher Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and collaboration. Another important way leaders support teachers is by removing barriers to learning and by insulating teachers from the many interruptions or distractions that would impede learning in the classrooms.

School leaders seek to foster continual growth and improvement by providing ongoing training, embracing improvements, and refining practices. They seek to learn alongside teachers. They recognize expertise in teachers and plan opportunities for those teachers to share their knowledge with the school community as a whole.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

The strategy that is most influential to VHELP's success is differentiation. At VHELP, we have a "whatever it takes" mindset. A key reason for VHELP's tremendous success is a willingness of each staff member to work hard to customize instruction for each student. We realize that excellence demands sacrifice and we feel a moral imperative to ensure that each child achieves their unique potential.

A key component of differentiation is using assessment data effectively. Data drives instruction at VHELP. If a child is not making adequate progress, ongoing formative assessments, progress monitoring, and benchmark assessments are useful in identifying the child's struggles. Interventions, tutoring, and other supports are implemented without delay. The goal of these supports is to ensure that the child closes the gap. More frequent monitoring is used to ensure that the child is making adequate progress, and if this is not the case, the team is responsive in further refining the child's learning plan and adding additional supports.

In some schools, high-achieving students are seldom considered. Pre-assessments revealing that a child has already mastered a standard can be important evidence that we need to provide more rigorous or deeper content that will provide a challenge for that child. This happens frequently at VHELP due to the population we serve. We realize that failing to adapt to the needs of the high-achieving students is no better than failing to adapt to struggling students. The result is much the same, because in either scenario children are unable to reach their full potential. We recognize that differentiating our instruction for those high-performing students is just as important as for students who are struggling.

Differentiation doesn't only apply to academics. An emphasis on the whole child means that the team at VHELP always considers not only academics, but social, emotional, and behavioral needs of each child. We are aware that none of these dimensions exists in isolation, and that we must consider differences within each of these children's needs in order to effectively serve them. The home-school connection is of paramount importance in the social, emotional and behavioral domains. We partner with parents in their child's education and realize that we need to communicate and coordinate with them to best serve their child.

A coordinated and systematic approach to differentiating teaching and learning is key to VHELP's success. We involve students in their learning. Students are aware of learning targets and self-assess their progress in meeting objectives. We help students discover their unique learning styles, talents, and the areas where they have opportunities for growth. We seek to truly know and understand each child's needs and to customize their learning plan through differentiation. We realize that this reality is not possible without collective responsibility. In our school we believe that every adult is responsible for every child's success. At the lunchroom table, in the hallways, and at recess, teachers can be heard talking about students, their needs, and celebrating their successes.