

***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 Ms. Reba Kristi Thomson

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

Official School Name Tuscaloosa Magnet Schools - Middle

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 315 Mcfarland Blvd East

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

City Tuscaloosa State AL Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 35404-3838

County Tuscaloosa County

Telephone (205) 759-3653 Fax (205) 759-3784

Web site/URL \_\_\_\_\_

http://tmsm.tuscaloosacityschoo E-mail kthomson@tusc.k12.al.us  
m/Domain/25

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. Mike Daria, Ed.D. E-mail mdaria@tusc.k12.al.us  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Tuscaloosa City School System Tel. (205) 759-3700

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. Lee Garrison  
(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):
- 13 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 6 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 3 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 22 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	0	0	0
4	0	0	0
5	0	0	0
6	26	29	55
7	27	30	57
8	29	25	54
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	82	84	166

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 6 % Asian
  - 37 % Black or African American
  - 1 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 56 % 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.

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	0
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	2
(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	168
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.012
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	1

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 0 %  
0 Total number ELL

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 9 %  
Total number students who qualify: 15

8. Students receiving special education services: 1 %  
1 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.

- 3 Autism
- 0 Deafness
- 0 Deaf-Blindness
- 1 Emotional Disturbance
- 0 Hearing Impairment
- 0 Mental Retardation
- 0 Multiple Disabilities
- 0 Orthopedic Impairment
- 0 Other Health Impaired
- 2 Specific Learning Disability
- 0 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: 8
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	7
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	3
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.	2

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 13:1
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  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 is to motivate students to discover knowledge, create a better world, and serve in a way that respects others.

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

Student enrollment is based on a 7 percent allocation from each city school. A final percentage score is based on student performance (report cards), state assessments, universal screener, and Learner Profile Screening Device. The number of students selected is based on the enrollment of each school. The number allocated for each school is based on the 7 percent Average Daily Membership from the 20-day report of the current year.

## **PART III – SUMMARY**

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Tuscaloosa Magnet Schools – Middle is a public magnet middle school founded in 2009 by the Tuscaloosa City School Board of Education. The school is in the center of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and is a neighbor to The University of Alabama. This International Baccalaureate World School Middle Years Programme serves 166 students who represent each city-zoned middle school. Students apply each January for the following school year. Applicants are accepted based on grades, standardized test scores in reading and math, and a learner profile screening device. The board allows the school to accept 7% of student enrollment of applicants from each city school. Thus, the school reflects the student enrollment of the entire Tuscaloosa city school district. Most students remain in the school for the entire three years, grades 6-8.

The school board hired the middle school administrator in 2008 to study and research a proposal for this school. For one year the principal studied effective middle schools, visited schools in the area, and attended national conferences that addressed the needs of the students in Tuscaloosa. As proposals were written, submitted, and returned, it became clear that a project-based curriculum was the way to address students' diverse learning styles and backgrounds. This curriculum motivates students to discover and create ideas that increase their critical and creative thinking skills. The school board increasingly became interested in the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum, and the principal advised that project-based learning would be an easy transition to an application for the IB authorization. The middle school opened in 2009 and was authorized as an IB World School for the Middle Years Programme in February 2013.

Students attending the school represent families from diverse socio-economic backgrounds in the city of Tuscaloosa. When the school opened in 2009, the first challenge was to help the students accept one another in such a newly diverse environment and to broaden their horizons in learning about different cultures. Another mission involved maintaining consistency in our expectations that students would meet the challenges of a rigorous academic program. These goals presented a learning curve for the administrator, teachers, staff, and students. The success of this school is attributed to the support of the local school board, the community and parent commitment, and the determination that our high learning standards would not be compromised.

The education philosophy of this school is to provide a learning environment where students discover knowledge for a lifetime, create ideas to improve their world, and serve the community by giving back what gifts have been provided to them. To support this philosophy, teachers provide students with many opportunities to succeed. Students and parents may review lessons and notes on key concepts, project requirements and rubrics, and student products on Canvas, our district's learning management system (LMS), or on our Google Apps for Education (GAFE) accounts. Students needing additional instruction meet with teachers for small group instruction during class time. Students may ask for help during the teacher's planning time or during the lunch schedule; our faculty is flexible with their scheduling in order to aid students in achieving at their highest level. In addition, the administrator provides tutoring and study sessions for any student requesting help. The key strategy is our commitment that all students will succeed.

In support of the education philosophy to serve the community, all students are assigned to five teams, named after IB Learner Traits. These teams compete with one another in many ways: they participate in fundraisers, such as donating to the Lymphoma and Leukemia Society or United Way; they compete for service hours at the school or in the community; and they collect canned items for our annual food drive benefitting the West Alabama Food Bank. In addition to our teaming strategy, students have formed their own volunteer groups to clean the school, to recycle all office, library and classroom waste, to work in the flower and vegetable garden, to serve at the animal shelter, to tutor students in the elementary schools that are on our campus, or to teach music and movement to the elementary students. Students recognize the need to be leaders and to take the initiative to make improvements to areas of need. Students contact the principal, counselor, or team leaders with ideas that can improve the school. One student recently received a \$500.00 grant to create a certified Monarch butterfly garden for the school.

Students are encouraged to develop their full potential academically, emotionally, physically, socially, and culturally as they participate in non-athletic school teams, school clubs, volunteering, talent shows, school

dances, field days, school presentations written and choreographed by the students, honors day, student of the month, and student-conducted musical concerts. Tuscaloosa Magnet Schools – Middle focuses on developing the child's talents and interests while challenging the child academically.

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

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

Tuscaloosa Magnet Schools – Middle follows the learning standards set by the Alabama Course of Study and the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme (MYP) for grades 6-8. MYP has eight subject groups that require at least 50 hours of teaching time for each subject per year. All students enroll in the following courses each semester: Spanish, Language Arts, Social Studies, Mathematics, Science, Arts (visual art and music), Physical Education, and Design. Arts and Spanish teachers instruct the entire student body daily or every other week. The Arts and Spanish teachers also plan interdisciplinary units with the core classes.

Reading/English language arts subjects address the six skill areas of listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing, and presenting. Working in small groups or independently, students use their Chromebooks to investigate topics, to plan projects, and to present these projects. Students write poetry, produce skits, present Readers' Theater, prepare digital presentations, and participate in simulations, debates, and speeches to show their understanding of the concepts. Teachers include the arts in their units of study by incorporating art, music, drama, and history. Online resources and technology support the instruction. On a daily basis students are engaged in class discussions, writing essays in all modes on their Google Drive, and creating technology and materials-based projects.

Mathematics includes number, algebra, geometry, and statistics and probability. Students see mathematics as useful and relevant, and they apply these skills to their studies and everyday lives. For example, students designed gardens for a farm school in Alabama, requiring math, science and design skills to complete the projects on site.

Science classes encourage critical and creative thinking in research and design. Teachers incorporate scientific, engineering, and technological practices. Our science teachers use the Alabama Math Science and Technology Initiative (AMSTI) kits to supplement their key concepts. Alabama standards outline the knowledge and skills of science and engineering in three dimensions: scientific and engineering practices, crosscutting concepts, and disciplinary core ideas. Science activities motivate students to create or invent projects that support the concept, to teach the concept to their peers, or to research information to support the key concept.

Social studies standards focus on students becoming responsible citizens by being informed and active citizens. Students study geography, economics, history, and civics and government. They engage in discussions, presentations, debates, skits, and simulations that motivate them to inquire about current events, history, and dependable sources of information. For example, students spend a day as everyday citizens during the Depression by playing roles in a soup kitchen and living homeless in the cold. Students plan the roles, the props, and the background information for the activity.

Teachers meet weekly with the International Baccalaureate Coordinator to plan and review units of study that include interdisciplinary units. For example, students visit a local church to study the art and pipe organ in that location. To prepare for the visit, students investigate the question, "How does art and music reflect the values of a society?" Students research the math and science involved in building a pipe organ, the history of pipe organs, the composers of famous organ selections, and the elements of the art and architecture of the church. This field trip illustrates the importance of interdisciplinary units for our curriculum.

Project-based learning is the most effective curricular approach for our school because it allows for interdisciplinary units, rich and meaningful student products, and opportunities for embedded service learning.

The curriculum supports college and career readiness standards in Alabama by providing the academic rigor, career opportunities, and personal-social development for middle school students. The school counselor

offers classroom lessons on career opportunities and skills needed to be successful. She meets individually with all eighth graders to plan their high school courses. Each year students attend a job fair at Shelton Community College, and this activity provides information about the many careers available in West Alabama. Students are tested throughout the school year using a universal screener to determine if they have benchmarked. If needed, students receive additional instruction to help them meet their benchmark goals.

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

For other curriculum areas the school follows the learning standards set by the Alabama Course of Study and the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme (IB MYP). All students in grades 6-8 are required to enroll in the other curriculum areas. A requirement of fifty hours of instruction per class per year is needed to maintain authorization in the IB MYP.

For the music area all students in grades 6-8 enroll in either Band or Strings for both semesters per year. These music classes are structured to stimulate the imagination and to enrich an awareness of the aesthetic in a real-world context. Students are expected to produce music by demonstrating the components essential to the production of music, by listening to other parts to create the whole, by responding and critiquing music performances, and by understanding the elements of music. Students attend music competitions and perform in two or more school concerts each year.

In the visual art area, all students in grades 6-8 are enrolled for both semesters per year. Three strands -- produce, respond, and understand -- organize the content standards. Production includes exploratory subjects, techniques, styles, and media (digital and multimedia) resources. Responding involves exploring issues in the domains of criticism and aesthetics. Understanding grows out of the themes and skills for the discipline of art history. Students are engaged in creating works of art using a variety of traditional and nontraditional media and techniques, in discussing strengths and weaknesses of a work of art, and in discussing and describing how visual arts is connected to other disciplines or to historical and cultural influences. For example, our 8th grade students participated in a full day art workshop taught by professors from The University of Alabama. This workshop included a visit to a local art museum, where students were asked to critique the art selections in the museum. Student discussions showed that the students understood art elements, vocabulary, artists' backgrounds and influences, and art connection to personal lives. As a result of this unit, our students created works that were exhibited in a local gallery. They also competed in art shows at the local and state levels.

The physical education area for grades 6-8 focuses on skill, cognitive and social development as well as physical activity and health. Students understand short-term and long-term benefits of regular physical activity, including psychological and physiological effects. It emphasizes the development of personalized fitness plans that reflect individual needs, interest, and limitations. PE courses promote opportunities to appreciate and respect the ideas of others and to develop effective collaboration and communications skills. Students build interpersonal relationships that help develop a sense of social responsibility. They learn about dances in other countries, study games throughout history, create personal fitness plans, choreograph presentations, and have access to a workout room that they designed themselves for faculty and student use.

Design is a subject area required by the IB curriculum and challenges all students in grades 6-8 to apply creative thinking skills to solve design problems, to explore the role of design in history, and to consider their responsibilities when making design decisions and taking action. Our Design course is taken as an interdisciplinary course with Visual Art. Students are actively engaged in creating projects such as designing gardens for a farm school, creating public art made out of recycled materials, designing a puppet show for younger audiences complete with theater and puppets, creating digital portfolios, filming newscasts for core class projects, or presenting an invention or project for our city.

All students in grades 6-8 are enrolled in Spanish every semester each year. The study of additional languages in the MYP provides students with the opportunity to develop insights into the features, process and craft of language as well as the concept of culture, and to realize that there are diverse ways of living, viewing and behaving in the world. The global demands of the twenty-first century require that schools promote the learning of other languages and an understanding of the diverse cultures of the world.

Instruction involves immersion into the Spanish language by interactive classroom discussion, critique of Latin/Hispanic music and art, dynamic skit productions, and other visual art-based projects.

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

The choices of instructional approaches first begin with assessing the needs of the students. The learning styles and special needs of the classroom are considered before the teacher plans the unit of study. Teachers plan an introductory or motivating activity to the lesson, 2-3 different activities, and closure for a 55-minute lesson in the core classes and a 45-minute lesson in all other subjects. Activities include whole group, small group, and individual practice. To meet the needs of the visual learner, teachers write the agenda or steps to the lesson on the board. These activities include video clips, Thinking Maps (graphic organizers), note taking, or drawing figures to explain a concept. The auditory learner will experience music, discussion, explanation of notes on board, or audio clips. Obviously, these activities happen in the same classroom, but they are designed to reach all students. For the kinetic learner, teachers provide movement as children move in small groups to plan their projects, as they present their projects, or as they participate in simulation games or skits. The instructional method for this school would be a combination of project-based learning, arts in education (music, art, and drama i.e. debate, simulation, Readers' Theater, skits, dance in most of the classes), and technology-based support since all instruction is through the use of Chromebooks.

Technology is used in all classrooms, grades 6-8, in all subjects. The school does not use textbooks in any subject area, but all students have access to Chromebooks or the computer lab. Teachers use smart boards to project power points, video clips, and other online resources for activities in their lessons. The students are expected to develop and use critical-thinking and decision-making skills as they apply their technological skills. They also practice safe, legal, and responsible use of technology systems and digital media. Classroom teachers, school counselor, and the school resource officer teach classes to all grades about digital citizenship. Technology is a daily component in the classrooms as students communicate, collaborate, research, and problem-solve in their lessons and projects.

Differentiated instruction is provided in all classes as the teachers tailor instruction to meet the needs of the students. As students work through the lesson and lesson assessments, teachers are aware of successes and areas of growth. Based on data such as tests, quizzes, and standardized benchmark scores, teachers form small groups in the classroom to offer additional, supportive instruction. Small groups may change as new concepts are taught and as students acquire the skills. Support instruction is also available during lunch break or during the teacher's planning time. Students receive a pass from another teacher to meet for additional needed instruction. The administrator also offers tutoring after school each week for two hours.

The art and music classes follow the same agenda as the core classes; however, the activities focus on a skill, practice of that skill, and closure. Teachers observe and monitor student performance throughout the class time, and students receive help as needed.

To ensure high levels of student learning and achievement, the school provides small group instruction daily during class time, teacher planning time, lunch break, or with the administrator after school each week. Students who qualify for enrollment at the magnet school are on grade level. However, as students progress in their learning, they may experience learning needs, and the school addresses these needs immediately. Since nine subjects are taught in a seven period day, this plan of support instruction has been successful.

A variety of assessment data is used to analyze and improve student and school performance. Students in all grades 6-8 receive the ACT Aspire Interim tests three times per year. Report cards are administered each nine weeks with progress reports given every 4 ½ weeks. Assessments include IB criterion-referenced rubrics for projects and teacher-made tests for units of study.

To maintain a high level of performance, our school has high expectations for all students, a school-wide discipline plan, and a philosophy that all students can succeed.

## **PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS**

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### **1. School Climate/Culture:**

Our school's positive environment supports the academic, social, and emotional growth of our students. Our philosophy is that all students can and will succeed as we first nourish the students' emotional growth to allow them to believe in themselves so they can move forward.

One way that our school fosters student growth is our Club Day extracurricular program. Club Day is held for 8 weeks per semester, and students choose their teacher-taught clubs based on interests. Choices have ranged from nutrition, cooking, tap dancing, aerobics, gardening, chess, crafts, board games, debate, Rock Band, and robotics. This is one of the favorite activities for our students and often opens up opportunities for future student learning outside of school.

Team membership is another activity where students are assigned to be on a team for three years. As students enter the sixth grade, the whole school plans an induction to the teams with much celebration. Teacher leaders (three faculty/staff members per team) serve as mentors to 10-15 students throughout their three years in the school. Team days occur once a month and activities include competitions and spirit days when skits, cheers, and dances are presented to the entire school. This activity is one of the most popular activities of the year, along with team competitions on field day. All school members wear team shirts on team days. Teaming provides a sense of community across all grade levels and sets us apart from many middle schools.

Field trips are an important part of our students' growth. The school plans trips to the sea lab at Dauphin Island, a farm school, art and historical museums, and science labs at The University of Alabama. This exposure teaches social skills as well as academic skills. Students see teachers, administration, and staff as important members of a family who represent our school. This past year, the entire school, including the custodian, attended a play at the Shakespeare Festival in Montgomery. The students and staff talked about the experience for months.

Students and teachers are recognized in the gym each morning before class for athletic and academic awards, for service to the community, for teacher awards, for teacher grants, and for student and teacher of the month. There is an understanding that we all support our family's successes. Students know we care, and we expect the best from all.

### **2. Engaging Families and Community:**

The Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) is an important part of the school family. The PTSA board meets 2-3 times each semester to plan fundraisers, to assist in school activities, and to communicate any concerns or areas that they fully support. This group is invaluable as they buy instruments, gardening supplies, support field trip expenses and offer funds for teacher professional development.

Community support is evident as our partners-in-education sponsor the teachers and students of the month recognitions. They meet regularly with the school counselor to offer support with any needs.

Families support our school as they participate in our 5K run each spring. Families come to the school and meet our teachers and students. Families also support our talent show that gives money to United Way and donate to a penny drop to raise money for cancer research. The community knows that our students believe in giving back to the city.

The university supports our students who need male role models in their lives by providing athletes to meet weekly with these students for encouragement to be successful in school. The counselor makes the arrangements and is in attendance in these meetings.

The University of Alabama provides a professor to teach weekly in our seventh grade science classes, and a

grant allows our students to attend a day at The University of Alabama where they visit the campus and the science labs. We also have a chess team that is taught by university students, and this is a very popular activity.

The school involves families as students work in small groups to complete their projects. Students plan meetings after school, families donate supplies, and parents attend the activities that show the culmination of these projects. Examples of family attendance are visible at Construction projects, art shows, talents/skit shows, field trips, technology night, and music concerts.

Parents and the community are informed of students' academic achievements through articles in the newspaper, the local news media, the school website, and e-mail. We have a very strong and active social media presence via our school and PTSA Facebook accounts as well as our school's Twitter account.

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

The professional development approach is to analyze the needs of the students, to review the goals of the school improvement plan, and to survey the teachers. The school district chooses a focus for the district, and the school supports that focus with local training. Teachers receive training from a reading coach, math director, middle school director, and the district technology team. Teachers meet with the principal on a weekly basis to analyze data and discuss any concerns. As a result of those meetings, the administrator determines the areas of focus and support needed. For example, there is interest in teaching centers in our middle school. The administrator has invited a reading coach to demonstrate how this could be successfully implemented in the middle school classroom.

Teachers approve of the Ron Clark Academy instructional strategies and discipline plan; and each year, if funds are available, one or two teachers attend the Ron Clark Academy for a day to observe the students, teachers, and outcomes of those strategies. This has certainly been a successful plan for this school.

Arts in education is important in that students need to understand that our society learns from its artists, musicians, actors, and dancers. The arts reflect the values of a society and develop the creativity and imagination of the brain. The administrator is a trained arts in education trainer, and teachers receive instruction on a regular basis of how to incorporate the arts in their daily lessons. We find this training to be very successful as an element of the International Baccalaureate curriculum.

Conferences are equally important, and our teachers are encouraged to attend conferences and workshops. We are all lifelong learners, and all teachers need to be current on the latest ideas in education. Local school funds and district funds support teacher attendance.

Book studies are part of the professional development, as well. Books are chosen by teacher recommendation, district supervisor's book lists, book lists from conferences, and topics of interest discussed at faculty meetings. Book studies are an annual part of our professional development.

These examples show how our needs are determined by the school improvement plan, teacher needs, and student outcomes. The impact of professional development on our teachers is evident in our academic and cultural success.

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

The leadership philosophy is that all students can succeed. All stakeholders play a part in that success.

The leadership structure focuses on guiding instructional improvement. Through multiple sources (district specialists, professional development, administration knowledge, national conferences, observations of other teachers or schools, and teacher training), a common expectation is created with all individuals held accountable. Teachers accept the challenge of daily learning experiences, weekly discussions about instructional strategies, weekly meetings with the International Baccalaureate Coordinator, scheduled training sessions with district specialists, book studies, and monthly data meetings. This challenge presents

a common goal of high expectations for the teachers and the students.

The leadership structure is not a “top down” style of leadership. It is a team consisting of the administrator and teachers that meets weekly to discuss goals and progress. The expertise of the individuals is shared in these meetings, and we all research the questions. We respect the opinions of others and know that we are all on a journey of continuous learning. The climate is one of all adults taking responsibility for their own and their students’ learning.

Leadership ensures that policies and resources focus on student achievement by following the guidelines set by the school board. Students have the opportunity to receive high school credit for both Spanish I and Algebra I. The school counselor completes a form for parents to give permission for the student to receive high school credit in these courses taken at the middle years programme.

The counselor ensures that students who have 504 or IEP files receive the necessary parent meetings to update these files as specified by the school board guidelines. The counselor has the responsibility of maintaining these files to provide a positive environment with our parents and students. The administration and teachers monitor the students' progress.

The administrator and teachers have a school policy of returning parent contacts within 24 hours. Conferences are often recommended when there is a concern. Parents often comment that they are surprised that we return calls and e-mails so soon. This immediate attention often encourages a better understanding of the situation.

The school leadership (administrator and teachers) focuses on student achievement by having a policy that we are always available to discuss a student. The administrator often states that most problems have a solution, and we meet to find the solution with the help of all stakeholders at the table.

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

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The single practice that stakeholders believe has been the most influential in the school's success is the focus on project-based learning strategies. It allows the students to gain knowledge, to investigate in depth, and to respond to a complex question, problem, or challenge. Students begin a project by posing a meaningful question about the content. They then plan and design a project that answers that question and fits their learning styles; i.e., visual, kinesthetic, or auditory. The student's freedom to choose a final product allows them to take ownership of their learning. Teachers relinquish some control and trust their students to research, create, and have their own voice.

Students gain independence and growth, team spirit, and attention to quality as they collaborate with their peers and teachers on projects. Managing the activities with schedules, checkpoints, and resources teaches skills that will be necessary in future careers. Students use self and peer assessments of their team and individual work as they complete rubrics about the group activities and their individual participation. Students gain personal meaning and purpose in their projects.

Examples of projects include (1) the design of an amusement park to demonstrate the systems of the human body, (2) Readers' Theater to highlight the different kinds of cells, (3) a simulation game to demonstrate bartering and values in society, (4) debates to show points of view, (5) contemporary skits to apply the universal elements of Greek myths, (6) the creation of utopian countries and artifacts, (7) international dance day in physical education, (8) puppet plays incorporating all content area skills required to build the stage and create the characters, (9) soap operas performed in Spanish, and (10) choreography for a dance performance with the faculty and students. These examples show the creativity of the students when they are given the knowledge and the freedom to cement the concepts.

The connection between practice and student outcomes is proven in the assessments used at our school. Student reflective journal entries describe steps, learning processes, and outcomes of their projects. Rubric scores are based on the International Baccalaureate criterion-referenced objectives. The school group scores on state standardized tests show a positive correlation between the project-based strategies and learning.

In conclusion, project-based learning reaches the learning styles of every student, engages 100% of our students, and teaches socio-emotional skills on a daily basis. This practice is certainly successful at this school.