

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. Carole Brink

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

Official School Name Dickerson Middle School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 855 Woodlawn Drive N.E.

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

City Marietta State GA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 30068-4256

County Cobb County

Telephone (770) 587-2710 Fax (770) 578-2712

Web site/URL http://www.cobbk12.org/Dickerson/ E-mail carole.brink@cobbk12.org

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*Mr. Chris Ragsdale E-mail chris.ragsdale@cobbk12.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Cobb County School District Tel. (770) 426-3300

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. David Chastain
(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):
- 68 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 25 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 16 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 109 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	193	206	399
7	207	235	442
8	228	205	433
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	628	646	1274

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 19 % Asian
 - 5 % Black or African American
 - 5 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 69 % White
 - 2 % 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: 9%

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	67
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2015 until the end of the 2015-2016 school year	43
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	110
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2015	1247
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.088
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	9

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

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):
Arabic, Bosnian, Chinese, Farsi, Dari, Persian, French, German, Gujarati, Hebrew, Hindi, Japanese, Korean, Other African, Other Asian, Other Indian, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Thai, Turkish, Vietnamese

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 5 %
Total number students who qualify: 65
8. Students receiving special education services: 11 %
137 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.

- 17 Autism
- 0 Deafness
- 0 Deaf-Blindness
- 5 Emotional Disturbance
- 1 Hearing Impairment
- 9 Mental Retardation
- 34 Multiple Disabilities
- 0 Orthopedic Impairment
- 47 Other Health Impaired
- 60 Specific Learning Disability
- 38 Speech or Language Impairment
- 0 Traumatic Brain Injury
- 3 Visual Impairment Including Blindness
- 0 Developmentally Delayed

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 11
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	4
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects	47
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading, math, science, special education, enrichment, technology, art, music, physical education, etc.	29
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a licensed professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	5
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	5

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 27:1
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	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.

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. 2003

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

Vision: Leading by Example Mission: Developing the Skills and Habits that Create Bright Futures

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

Dickerson Middle School is an extension of an affluent community in Marietta, Georgia, a suburban city north of Atlanta. The families we serve are well-educated, multi-lingual, and actively engaged in our school, its Foundation and our award-winning PTSA. Academic excellence is the community standard. Our students are high-achieving, and motivated both intrinsically and extrinsically to achieve success as evidenced by the large numbers of rigorous advanced-content classes and robust Fine Arts programs. The community values teachers as professionals, which in turn, leads to a low teacher turn over each year. Parents generously dedicate their time and resources. Since opening in 1980, Dickerson has achieved an array of distinguished honors, including: Georgia School of Excellence, National Blue Ribbon School of Excellence (2003), State Super Distinguished Achievement (multiple), and the Single Statewide Accountability System Platinum Award.(2014, 2015, 2016)

Serving a community with such high academic expectations provides us with a unique challenge. While state standards drive our curriculum, we strive to teach students in an age-appropriate, innovative fashion while incorporating rigor and relevance into our daily lessons.

DMS proudly serves a Severe and Profound Intellectually Disabled (SID/PID) population and a Moderately Intellectually Disabled (MOID) class, and seeks inclusive opportunities for these students such as participating in general education science labs, connections classes, Fresh Air Fridays (FAF), field days, dances, and spirit days.

Traditions that celebrate our community involvement include marching in the East Cobber Parade , conducting monthly fundraising events that support Relay for Life (DMS consistently leads the district in fundraising efforts) and showcasing our annual musical, which draws sell-out crowds including school board members, district personnel, and former alumnae. Dances, field days, spirit days, and Lunch on the Lawn all enhance the Junior Raider spirit. Our PTSA funds grant requests, provides supplies, and celebrates Teacher Appreciation Week with daily surprises. In addition, the PTSA and our counselors invite experts to community meetings to discuss relevant topics.

Since its inception, the Dickerson Foundation has been pivotal in supporting the vision of our school. During its first three months, the community donated over \$70,000! The Foundation supports a study hall like no other in the district; students arrive 70 minutes early to study and prepare for the day. The Foundation has also funded teacher grants, and provided laptops, and iPad carts and other technology to support our STEAM connections class.

One of our challenges is to work closely with the PTSA and Dickerson Foundation to seek fundraising opportunities that maintain the level of annual contributions from our stakeholders to support our progressive innovations that are not funded any other way.

Early arrivers can collaborate with peers in the Learning Commons, meet with teachers by appointment, participate in morning intramurals with our PE teachers, attend club meetings, and rehearse with their Fine Arts program.

We nurture positive relationships with our feeder schools. Rising sixth graders take tours led by current eighth grade students. For seventeen years, Dickerson has partnered with its feeder high school to provide a zero-period for motivated students to study Chinese or Latin. High school teachers also meet with eighth grade teachers to ensure appropriate placement.

Throughout the eleven years of our principal's leadership, our inclusive settings have increased by emphasizing co-taught models in each content area. Math support for each grade level is embedded in the instructional day to serve our remedial population. Earning the gifted endorsement is an expectation for all teachers to increase the academically challenging environment for ALL our students. Advanced Content (AC) courses are offered in Math, Science, Language Arts, Social Studies and Reading. Our eighth graders can earn high school credit in Science, Math and Foreign Language allowing them to have Carnegie Units

before entering high school. We strive to meet the needs of all our students, including those who have surpassed middle school math classes. Some students take upper-level high school math via Skype. Enrichment opportunities include an array of academic clubs such as: Science Olympiad, Odyssey of the Mind, Newspaper, Broadcast, Helen Ruffin Reading Bowl, Coding Club, and Math Team.

Since receiving the National Blue Ribbon School award in 2003, our school continues to leverage its reputation as a school of academic excellence. One significant change that has been made is offering more advanced content classes and adding high school credit courses. Currently, Dickerson offers twenty AC classes that academically challenge our students. As a result of the number of AC courses offered, almost all teachers have earned the gifted endorsement; our allotments have increased thus decreasing student-teacher ratios. Additionally, Reading is now offered as a separate class from English Language Arts in all three grades. Potential home buyers noticed the Blue Ribbon distinction and academic opportunities, and flocked to the Dickerson community. As a result, our principal worked with PTSA leadership to implement a systematic way to provide tours and information to families interested in our school. Overall, the recognition has increased community support and involvement as a whole.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

We set high expectations for our students today and for their future. School wide initiatives are evident in every content area, connections class, and common learning space. There is an emphasis to design and implement STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math) differentiated lessons through Project Based Learning (PBL). Teacher created lesson plan templates specific to each content area's needs coupled with weekly professional development support innovative practices in all content areas. During the second semester of the 2016-2017 school year, Dickerson implemented a Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) initiative. Students may bring their own electronic devices to use in classes for educational purposes. Teachers in all content areas plan lessons with technological integration to engage students in their learning and teach 21st century literacy skills. Students, teachers, and parents have enthusiastically embraced this initiative.

In an effort to support student engagement in every class, Dickerson's Media Center is in the process of transitioning to a Learning Commons model. The former mindset of quietly reading in the library is now being replaced with students collaborating on assignments, groups filming with green-screens, and other forms of technology integration. New, movable furniture has been purchased by our PTSA to support collaborative projects. Teachers of all content areas are now using the Learning Commons to engage their students in creating and producing every day.

Dickerson offers a variety of leveled courses for each discipline to meet the diverse learning needs of all our students. The learning environments include: small group settings, co-taught classes, on-level classes, advanced content and high school courses.

Reading is a separate course from English Language Arts. Every sixth and seventh grader takes Reading as a year-long course whereas eighth graders who do not qualify for foreign language take Reading all year. The philosophy behind this is that increased reading fluency improves performance in all content areas. Reading inventories are administered three times a year to measure growth for each student. Throughout the year each grade focuses on an interdisciplinary text that addresses citizenship: 6th-Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul; 7th-7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens; 8th-Nothing But the Truth. In addition, eighth grade Reading and ESOL students participate in Reality U, a real world experience that teaches students financial literacy and the correlation between performing well in school and preparing for a fulfilling adult life. After completing a lifestyle survey, students are provided an adult scenario complete with marital status, number of children, occupation, and net monthly income. Students visit a number of booths to 'purchase' housing, transportation, child care, food, utilities, etc. Afterwards, students reflect upon their "ah-ha" moments in their classes.

Language Arts focuses on grammar and writing skills in all three grades. Students delve into the complete writing process. Informational essays, technical writing, and persuasive techniques are skills students need for real-world writing. Eighth grade integrates literature, from the classics to contemporary articles, to prepare for high school English and Literature courses. The Foundation funded a grant for mini-iPads allowing students to conduct class discussions, Socratic seminars, and debates through digital platform such as Spiral and Padlet.

Math offers a spectrum of courses from small group sixth grade math to advanced high school courses taught via Skype for the highest achieving eighth graders. Students take Math 6, Math 7, Math 8, and the highest achieving math students take Algebra I and Geometry A for high school credit. In each grade level, the math content focuses on Number Systems, Expressions and Equations, Geometry, and Making Inferences. The difference between these units in Math 6, 7, and 8 is the depth of the content in each grade level. Each year builds upon the previous year's knowledge and concepts. In addition, each year ends with a unit called Show What You Know. This is an opportunity for students to review the year's content and get a preview of the content for the next year. Math Inventories are administered three times a year in all grades for continual student progress monitoring. Across all grade levels students have access to GA Virtual

Learning to acquire foundational math skills. Teachers use Problem Based Learning strategies, technology integration, and STEM infused lessons to make interdisciplinary connections.

Science stresses inquiry and exploration of the state standards via experimental labs. In sixth grade students learn Earth Science, seventh grade students learn Life Science, and in eighth grade, students learn Physical Science. In Earth Science students take a sample of soil from their own yards to compare the sand, silt, and clay to the soil triangle to determine the ideal soil ratio for growing plants in their own yard. Another example of the exploration the sixth grade students do is examine rocks and identify the texture, grain size, and shape to determine if the rock was formed in or outside the ground. Life Science students use labs to extract their own DNA from their own cheek cells, use microscopes for investigations when studying classifications, and dissect frogs to compare the anatomy of a frog to that of a human body. Eighth grade Physical Science students are often seen using inquiry to learn. For example, they study heat transfer by popping popcorn in a microwave, with an air popper, and with a hot plate to compare and contrast conduction, convection, and radiation. They design their own roller coasters in which a marble has to stay on track to explore potential and kinetic energy. Guest speakers are invited to speak to classes in all grades so that students can see the relevance of what they are learning in real world professions. Our PTSA supports our academic curriculum through funding for consumable products used during labs. The Foundation funds technology in the form of iPads and Ozobots to enhance science curriculum.

Social Studies teaches citizenship and continually connects geography, history, government and economy to contemporary events. Students evaluate primary and secondary source documents to construct evidence-based arguments. Recently, a representative from the Georgia State Bar engaged students in A Journey Through Justice law lessons focusing on Free Speech and First Amendment Rights. Students track legislation as it makes its way through the Georgia General Assembly and engage in simulations of our legislative and judicial process.

Dickerson's counseling department supports college and career readiness via Career Cruising in a tiered approach. During sixth grade, students take a learning styles inventory. Results teach students how they learn and provide them with strategies specific to their learning styles. A Matchmaker Inventory helps seventh graders correlate their interests to a variety of careers to investigate and explore. Eighth graders complete an Individual Graduation Plan that maps out needed classes for high school graduation. They also search career clusters of interest and choose high school electives that support their interests and possible fields of study.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

In addition to attending five content area classes on a daily basis students also take two connections classes. Students who are enrolled in a Performing Arts program remain in this course for the entire school year. Students rotate through the other connection classes every nine weeks.

Visual Arts instructs students about aesthetics and how history and culture influence art. Students in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades take art as a connection class. In sixth grade the emphasis is on skill building. In seventh grade students improve their skills, but also begin to learn about popular culture. In eighth grade students learn in depth about popular culture. Sixth and seventh grades study historical artists, while eighth grade students learn about current modern artists. In all three grades art students learn about elements and principles of art and design, art history, design 2D and 3D art, and use painting, sculpting, drawing, and paper mache. Sixth through eighth grades experiment with different media such as chalk pastel, oil pastel, watercolor, acrylic paint, scratch board, and ink. Our art instructor celebrates student work with an annual Night of the Arts and Kiwanis Art Showcase as well as continually exhibiting work around the school building and community. For civic awareness, students design bus safety posters and enter a district calendar competition. Students integrate content specific skills and knowledge into their artwork.

Performing Arts exposes sixth graders to each area of Dickerson's Fine Arts before honing in on a desired elective to pursue through future grades. Band, Orchestra and Chorus all teach music literacy, help develop practice habits, teach proper concert etiquette and how to work harmoniously as a team to benefit the entire program. Band and Orchestra teach students to play instruments. All programs participate in Large Group

Performance Evaluations. Teachers invite guest clinicians and showcase their talents around town via WellStar's Tree Lighting Concert, the Governor's Mansion Concert as well as school and community concerts.

Our Fine Arts programs also support college and career readiness by planning opportunities for students to work with and learn from Band, Chorus, and Orchestra directors at colleges and universities. One example is when the Band traveled to Columbia University for a workshop with a Master Band Director. Our students benefit from experiences at the University of Georgia in All State Honors Band, Chorus, and Orchestra. Orchestra differentiates with skill levels: Chamber Orchestra, Full Symphony Orchestra, Double Bass Ensemble, Viola Choir, Cobb Honor Orchestra, Wind Ensemble, All State Orchestra. Band differentiates with skill levels: Jazz band, Flute Choir, Honor Band, All State Band. Chorus includes Chamber singers and All State Choir.

Physical Education emphasizes team building, cooperative games, promotes goal setting through use of the Fitness Gram program and the Step it Up Challenge, and teaches sports education for all grade levels. Students and teachers look forward to the annual staff vs. students basketball and volleyball games. Additionally, PE teachers provide intramurals before school, organize unique grade level Field Days (Eighth grade has a full day devoted to physical, mental, artistic and team challenges), collaborate with an organization that provides skiing instruction before a yearly ski trip, and support Hoops for Heart.

Health allows students in all grades to participate in WellStar's Nutrition Lab, Heart Rate Lab, and teaches stress management. Eighth graders create Public Service Announcements.

Foreign Language students participate in real world application of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Eighth graders who meet qualifications choose Spanish or French and have the opportunity to receive high school credit for passing the course. Additionally, motivated students can take an additional language via zero period to study Mandarin Chinese or Latin at our feeder high school. Students must meet one of three criteria to be eligible for a foreign language class: rank in the 60th percentile in Reading on the IOWA, earn a proficient or distinguished level on the Milestones Language Arts End of Grade Assessment, or have a Lexile of 1100 or greater. These classes are part of the regular scheduled day for eighth graders.

Technology instruction is offered through two courses: Business & Computer Science and Sound Engineering. In Business & Computer Science a knowledge base of computer applications, information systems, internet safety, and careers of the 21st century are explored. Sound Engineering supports our STEAM initiative through two units: musical technology (musical composition, recording and production) and computer science, (coding, robotics, video game design, programming and marketing.) Through this course students are creators of technology rather than consumers. Through the usage of school technology resources and the BYOD initiative, students apply the skills acquired in these courses in all of their classes.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

Instructional Methods—Driven by rigor and relevance, Dickerson teaches content standards with fidelity. Course content goes beyond state standards in order to meet the demanding needs of our high achieving students. During our weekly grade-level cluster meetings professional learning is provided with a clear focus on instruction. Teachers create lessons beginning with the end in mind and use student performance data to drive instruction. For example, teachers extract students' results from the math and reading inventories in order to differentiate by Lexile and quantile levels. In addition, teachers learn how to use the Flexible Formative Assessment System (FFAS) to drill down to specific standards to determine where students may need enrichment and/or remediation. Teachers utilize this information to plan accordingly during their collaborative grade-level, subject area meetings. In addition to student performance data, teachers discuss discipline data, including the policy infractions by grade-level, along with data for our Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS) initiative.

Our school has safety nets and interventions in place to improve the skills of students who are performing below grade level including Response to Intervention (RtI), the Extended Day Program, and Maymester. RtI is a multi-tier approach to assist struggling learners. All content teachers collaborate and monitor

student progress to determine if further interventions are necessary. The Extended Day Program takes place for twelve weeks before the End of Grade (EOG) Assessments to prepare students in the areas of math and reading. Students are identified for this program based on reading and math inventory results, IOWA scores, and current math and reading performance. In addition, Maymester is incorporated during the school day for eighth graders who do not meet grade level standards on the Milestones in math and reading. These students have the opportunity to retake the EOG Milestones again before the end of the year.

Our staff is encouraged to build a healthy community by utilizing principles from Restorative Practices, a system that positively influences student behavior by reflection and personal connection. The philosophies engaged by the International Institute for Restorative Practices fosters positive, healthy school climates and helping students learn from their mistakes.

In School Suspension (ISS) is used as a behavior intervention at Dickerson. When students are assigned ISS as a consequence for negative behavior choices, the ISS teacher works with the students to reflect on the impact of his or her actions. In addition, the teacher ensures that the students have completed all their work and made up any missed assignments.

Assessments are used to place students in appropriate courses. When determining student qualification for an AC and high school credit courses, students must meet two of three indicators: results of the IOWA, EOGs, and qualifying Lexile levels. In addition, a math placement test is administered when a student enters the school to ensure correct student placement in math classes. Results from Student Learning Objectives are used in non-EOG courses to plan appropriately and to measure growth at the end of a course. Math and Reading inventories are administered three times a year for frequent progress monitoring. Eighth graders take the PSAT 8/9 as a predictor of high school readiness and to determine acceptance into high school magnet programs. Teachers are expected to create common formative and summative assessments within their collaborative teams, the results of which are used to drive their instructional planning. The FFAS was introduced to teachers this school year so that they can use a technological tool to assess students, get the results quickly, and determine the standards that need to be retaught or enriched. This allows teachers to plan appropriate differentiation to meet the needs for multiple groups of students.

Dickerson's subgroups have met the Participation Rate, State Performance Targets and Subgroup Performance Targets for CCRPI. At this time, we do not have an achievement gap.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

Dickerson’s culture is known for being rigorous, professional, positive, and engaging. Students arrive ready to learn, possessing the motivation and supplies necessary to succeed. Dickerson students and teachers continually push toward higher levels of learning. Through the support of our community, we are able to consistently go above and beyond.

Our number one concern is the students; therefore, we seek to provide a positive environment that supports the students’ academic, social, and emotional growth. All stakeholders participate in an annual climate survey that provides relevant feedback in these areas.

To facilitate academic growth, we organize, examine, and adjust instruction based on student data. By using data digs, at-risk identification, collaborative team logs, and common assessments all student needs are addressed. Teachers create differentiated instruction to reach the diverse learning needs of their students. By offering courses ranging from small groups to high school credit, teachers implement strategies to reach all levels of learners. Examples of differentiation are: text sets in multiple Lexile levels, Problem Based Learning, STEM-based activities, parallel teaching, tiered lessons, and interest inventories.

To support the social and emotional growth of students, we utilize our DMS Challenge class and the PBIS framework, a data-driven system that integrates social competence with academic achievement. We have developed a school-wide positive behavior plan in which students are rewarded by participation in FAF. Another strategy Dickerson implements to support students is school counselor facilitated groups, on topics such as grief, friendship, divorce, time management, study skills and peer mediation. Furthermore, celebrating student successes enhances the social and emotional growth of students and builds upon the positive school culture.

The environment at DMS is one where teachers know they are valued and supported. One key factor is weekly protected collaborative planning that is ensured at all costs. The principal believes that this protected planning time is vital to the design and implementation of effective instruction. Professional development is embedded within the school day. The principal also streamlines communications to minimize interruptions in the instructional day. Overall, administration leads by example, treating staff members with respect and professionalism. Teachers are also supported beyond the traditional classroom setting. The hospitality committee organizes gift cards, flowers, cards, and “Snack & Chats.” The PTSA provides duty-free lunches and shows teacher appreciation in creative ways throughout the year. The administration touts teacher successes with a brag board in faculty mailroom. By creating this supportive climate, teachers feel valued and respected, and the focus can remain on the instructional needs of our students.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Dickerson works with family and community members to support student success and school improvement by supporting all six of the national standards for PTA Family and School Partnerships with fidelity.

All families are welcomed into the school community through Meet and Greet, Open House, Newcomers Breakfast, Rising 6th grade parent night, and organized school tours for new community members. To continue building a strong school community, Dickerson hosts multiple performing arts exhibitions throughout the year. Effective communication through a variety of platforms including conference week, ongoing parent-teacher conferences, PTSA News eblasts, Twitter, letters from administration, the school website, individual teacher blogs, and classroom social media accounts supports families and the community. The principal keeps all stakeholders informed about student achievement and plans for school improvement through presentations on CCRPI and Milestone performance data. Student success is supported via quarterly Honor Roll celebrations, Student of the Month, and rotating artwork displays throughout the building all celebrate student successes. Additionally, achievement in various competitions

are highlighted via the morning broadcasts and on a strategically placed television in the atrium. School counselors meet regularly with at-risk students for reflective grade checks and to identify strategies for success. In addition, counselors meet with students who do not earn a behavior incentive three times during a quarter to reflect upon the consequences of their choices. The Special Services Administrator (SSA) and Gifted Coordinator work with the administrative team to ensure all students have an advocate. DMS Challenge allows for all students to have a voice. Additionally, PTSA grants allow teachers to support instructional needs of Dickerson's diverse learners.

Through community partnerships, Dickerson is able to better support student successes and school improvements. Our community partners increase our resources by providing literacy, PE, and music equipment beyond what the district provides. Chick-fil-A provides discounts; Publix sponsors our Student of the Month program for outstanding character and academic achievement; and student artwork is displayed in local banks. We are fortunate to foster a new relationship with the Atlanta Braves as they relocate to Cobb County. This partnership supports the development of real-world, project based learning through the Science of Sport. In turn, the Dickerson community supports our partners by purchasing their products and services. We also give back by performing at nursing homes, WellStar Healthcare, local establishments, and singing the National Anthem at Braves games. Dickerson actively participates in vertical planning. Specifically, eighth grade teachers collaborate with our feeder high school about strategies and tools for preparing Dickerson students for high school.

Because of the strong rapport with our families and community, we ease the transitions between elementary and middle school, as well as middle to high school so that our students are set up for success and our school for continuous improvement.

3. Professional Development:

Dickerson's approach to professional development is unique. It supports the school's strategic plan which is directly aligned to the district's goals and priorities. Fully aware of the many constraints and responsibilities put on teachers, our principal ensures that purposeful, school-wide, professional development is delivered during weekly grade-level cluster meetings. All topics are thoughtfully vetted by administration resulting in the highest benefit for teachers. Along with in-house staff development, the principal has received grants to fund structured release for teachers. During this time, teachers work in content collaborative groups to construct common assessments aligned with academic standards, analyze student performance data, and plan standards-based instruction. These sessions energize teachers and better prepare them for the approaching semester.

For a school to flourish, not just function, teachers must be an integral part in advancing professional learning. Therefore, the principal encourages staff members to participate in professional learning opportunities, and to redeliver salient content to the staff. Teachers in all subject areas have attended events such as: The Cobb STEM Innovation Academy, PBIS, Olweus Program, district- sponsored Teacher Leader Academy, Restorative Practices, Atlanta Braves Science of Sport Teacher Workshop, and the Georgia Science Teacher Association Conference.

Dickerson aligns staff development with the academic standards by instructing all teachers on the Cobb Teaching and Learning System and FFAS. Through both systems, teachers are able to pinpoint student strengths and weaknesses as well as access resources and instructional strategies. Multiple cluster meetings guide teachers through all the steps necessary to utilize these tools to the fullest.

Over the years, our principal has allocated staff development funds to supply all teachers with the necessary resources to support and improve student achievement. Do I Really Have to Teach Reading began the push to emphasize reading in all content area classes. Another excellent teacher resource for content reading and writing instruction that contained ready-made flipcharts, Tools for Teaching Content Literacy, soon followed. Differentiated Instruction with Menus was provided to facilitate differentiated instruction. These teacher-ready books are subject specific including one for the inclusive classroom. All of these resources, and the training provided with them, help to train students to investigate, analyze, synthesize, and create as

required by the academic standards.

As the integration of technology has increased, so has the teacher training for technology. From BYOD to hourly workshops hosted by our Technology Training Integration Specialist, Dickerson has expanded the ways teachers can bring their teaching into the 21st century and beyond.

The streamlined approach to staff development leads to teacher retention and builds capacity in the school.

4. School Leadership:

Our school has one principal, three assistant principals, and one special education support administrator. Each assistant principal works with a grade level in the areas of curriculum and instruction and student discipline. Additionally, assistant principals lead school-wide initiatives which afford them the opportunity to interact with students and teachers of all grade levels. The special education administrator ensures consistency among the practices in the classroom and services provided in IEP for students.

Teachers are encouraged to take on leadership roles at Dickerson. There is a Subject Area Coordinator for each of our content areas, as well as a Gifted and a STEAM Coordinator. Furthermore, our teachers lead professional development at the state, county, and local school levels. Teacher-led committees such as the Media Committee, BYOD Committee, and PBIS Committee allow teachers to put their leadership skills into practice, as well as facilitate student success, and school improvement.

The leaders in our school take the school vision to heart and do Lead by Example. It is important to the principal, the administration, and teacher leaders to walk the talk with professionalism. The principal arrives early before school so that she can greet each student, teacher, and visitor in the atrium of the school, just as teachers are expected to greet each of their students as they enter their classrooms. Many teachers model the importance of being a life-long learner by enrolling in graduate school to obtain advanced degrees, or participating in classes for their own professional growth. When the administration leads a Monday Cluster meeting, they model the expectations of an effective lesson plan by including an opening, work session, and closing, as well as implement research-based instructional strategies to engage the audience and differentiate when needed. When the administration is not leading a Monday Cluster, all administrators attend each grade-level cluster meeting to demonstrate their commitment to professional development and their value of learning opportunities. The principal also Leads by Example in planning for the Monday Clusters. She values the teachers' time by ensuring that all presentations to the staff are relevant and meaningful to the needs of our school.

Because the principal has established a clear vision that is well-communicated, the teachers have an effective model to follow when designing lessons and implementing practices learned from the professional development that is offered. When the administration and the teachers are all Leading by Example, students are positively impacted and want to assume leadership roles as well. Students are encouraged to take on job responsibilities in their classrooms, become section leaders within the Performing Arts programs, assist other students in the Media Center before school, serve on the Media Committee, and even serve on the Governor's Advisory Board. When administrators, teachers, and students all lead by example, student success is the outcome!

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

At Dickerson Middle School, we are driven by our school-wide vision that everyone is Leading by Example. This motto propels all daily interactions at school whether academic, social, or emotional. The most significant way we have been able to instill this mindset is through implementation of our DMS Challenge classes, which utilize the research-based curriculum of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program. The goal of our program is to reduce and prevent bullying incidents among students, and improve peer relations in order to create a positive learning environment with a focus on academic success.

Bi-monthly DMS Challenge meetings allow all students and teachers to meet in a unique, safe environment to discuss a wide range of topics. Issues in these meetings range from peer relations, to treating one other with respect, to struggles within the academic setting. By including school counselors, connection teachers, and special education staff, the ratio of students to teacher is kept low, allowing trust and relationships to grow. A crucial component in the DMS Challenge class is the circle. To begin each Challenge class, students move desks and “circle up” to help build community and allow every student to have a voice. Using this alternative seating arrangement is key because it takes away the usual hierarchy and gives each child ownership of the conversation. When students know they are valued, and that their social and emotional needs are being cared for, their overall success is limitless.

The implementation of PBIS complemented Dickerson's existing Challenge program and allowed us to connect DMS Challenge sessions with the Fresh Air Friday reward. Students who follow the school's behavior plan participate in weekly FAF celebrations. Students enjoy twenty-minutes outside socializing with their peers, throwing a football, walking on the track, playing basketball, four square, or even reading a book under a tree. The PTSA helps by providing sports equipment for free play, and board games for inclement weather days. FAF has enhanced our positive school culture and led to a reduction in office referrals. This weekly reward helps to keep students focused in class, and to Lead by Example in the hallways, locker rooms, cafeteria, and on the school bus. Visual aids throughout the school clearly communicate behavior expectations: be proactive, empathetic, active learners, self-aware and reflective. The teacher led PBIS Committee created strategic lesson plans to establish this common language and expectations throughout our school. Mid-year, administrators highlight each principle during the morning announcements to clarify the connectivity of behavior and reward. This helps minimize classroom disruptions thus allowing teachers to create an academically challenging environment.