

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 2018 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 2012 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: 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, or 2017.
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 (2017-2018) unless otherwise stated.

DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 5 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 1 High schools
 - 1 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
 - Rural or small city/town
3. Number of students as of October 1, 2017 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	32	36	68
K	41	31	72
1	32	35	67
2	35	38	73
3	36	34	70
4	32	42	74
5	0	0	0
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	208	216	424

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 1 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 1 % Asian
 - 25 % Black or African American
 - 27 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 46 % 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 2016 – 2017 school year: 14%

If the mobility rate is above 15%, please explain.

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, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	35
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	24
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	59
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2016	407
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.14
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	14

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 18 %
76 Total number ELL

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 74 %
Total number students who qualify: 312

8. Students receiving special education services: 12 %
52 Total number of students served

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional conditions. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <u>12</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>4</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>9</u> Developmentally Delayed | <u>10</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>15</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>1</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>1</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

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

	Number of Staff
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	21
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	10
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	7
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 20:1

12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

Required Information	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013
Daily student attendance	96%	96%	95%	96%	95%
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 2017.

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

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.

Yes No

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

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

Our vision is to prepare successful learners who dream, believe, and create.

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

Athens Elementary School (AES) is “Dreaming BIG!” Our school’s motto, selected by our students, reflects our heritage as well as our future. Located in the heart of downtown Athens, Alabama, we are dreaming as big as the city’s founders when the town adopted the name from Athens, Greece. Our city, nestled in North Alabama, has a population of over 25,000. Athens is the county seat of Limestone County, which is the third fastest growing county in Alabama. Although change is inevitable, the community of Athens values tradition and the concept of small, neighborhood elementary schools. Students in Athens benefit from the opportunity to attend kindergarten through 4th grade in one of four elementary schools that are characterized by this model. Keeping it traditional, however, does not mean remaining stagnant. Our curriculum is adjusted regularly to help ensure that our students are prepared for both the next grade level and for life beyond elementary and secondary school. To accomplish this, we are challenged to be creative and innovative in enriching the curriculum. We are also challenged to help ignite interests and skills in students that will strengthen their future.

AES has embraced the concept of innovation, as our school is near a hub of high-tech industries and federal operations, such as Boeing and NASA. Technology and innovative thinking are integrated throughout the curriculum and students have opportunities to problem solve and apply their learning in creative ways, from developing collaborative digital presentations to coding a robot. There is irony in the fact that we are the oldest elementary school, housed in a building constructed in 1954, yet we are transforming curriculum to incorporate technology and computational thinking.

We are the only elementary school in Athens to have pre-kindergarten classes, which along with our current kindergarten through 4th grade classes boosts our enrollment to 424, the largest in the Athens City School System. AES serves a lower socioeconomic level community with 73% of students participating in the free/reduced-priced meals program and 12% of our students receive special education services. We are also culturally diverse with a student population that includes 46% White, 27% Hispanic/Latino, and 25% Black/African American. This diversity is embraced and all students are held to high expectations regardless of socioeconomic level, special needs, or ethnicity.

Our school vision is to develop lifelong learners who dream, believe, and create. We believe all students can learn. AES shares our system’s mission to be a progressive, high-quality school that connects students and their families to a caring, traditional community. We are rich in tradition, with our annual PTO Open House, One Athens Showcase of student work, and the Athens Storytelling Festival. Our high school athletes partner as “Eagle Buddies” with AES students, building connections through reading, tutoring, and conversations. Parents and community members enjoy engaging with students during family nights and watching student performances.

With student learning at the center of everything we do, our school staff believes in the importance of teamwork and collaboration. We have grown together, and are proud of milestone achievements that have made a significant impact on teacher development and student learning including the Alabama Reading Initiative(ARI), The Ongoing Assessment Project (OGAP) training, Alabama Math, Science and Technology Initiative (AMSTI), The Leader in Me, Multi-Sensory Learning Education (MSLE), PowerUp digital 1:1 Initiative, and Title I program implementation. Each contributes to the success of AES in educating the whole child in a supportive, yet challenging environment.

The expectation for student success leads to the implementation of a curriculum that is constantly adapted to better meet the needs of our students. Teachers use a wide variety of resources to target student needs and interests. We have incorporated a coding curriculum which engages students to problem solve and persevere. During computer science theme days, students work on challenging tasks such as creating an algorithm to debug a robot’s path and programming the steps to guide a fellow classmate through a maze. Technology integration through our system-wide PowerUp 1:1 Initiative enables individualized instruction that both remediates and enriches. Students create using technology tools to demonstrate success and showcase learning. Assessment drives next steps, as teachers facilitate instruction with a no fail mentality and students work to master standards essential to developing a strong academic foundation. We implement

a strong Response to Instruction(RTI) model, as areas of needed growth are determined through a variety of assessments, including grade level assessments administered each nine weeks, and these are targeted through small group instruction and intervention. Our student data evidences progress, as 76% of 3rd and 4th graders met their annual math growth target during the 2016-17 school year. Because of our high poverty level and strong desire to help students succeed, a collective effort to do what it takes is the norm.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

Our “Dreaming Big” motto inspires our curriculum. Teachers instruct using the Alabama Course of Study (AL COS), which is comprised of Alabama’s College and Career Readiness Standards (ACCRS). These standards provide a strong basis for the rigor, relevance, and real-world application that infuse our instructional practices.

Strong foundational literacy skills are at the heart of academic success; consequently, our English/Language Arts (ELA) curriculum is the backbone of our school. Teachers provide research-based reading instruction through McGraw-Hill’s Wonders reading program, carefully selected supplementary, high-quality literary and informational texts, and providing high-quality instruction gleaned from the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI). ARI is a model of best practices for teaching the foundational reading skills. Our teachers build comprehension skills and help students learn how to close-read through instruction about craft techniques such as imagery, tone, and sentence structure. Critical thinking skills are developed by presenting questions and tasks at high depth of knowledge (DoK) levels, intentionally teaching students how to approach text and guiding them to uncover its complex layers of meaning. Additionally, teachers meet the individual reading needs of students by selecting texts based on a school-wide leveling system. This system enables teachers to ensure that students are reading texts that will be challenging enough for them to grow but not so challenging that they become discouraged. Students stay motivated to read through literature circles and school-wide, themed reading incentives. Students’ writing skills are cultivated through a writer’s workshop model. Teachers in kindergarten through fourth grade employ the Being a Writer program to help students build confidence in their writing through exposure to quality literary models and conferencing. Students successfully progress from completing simple and concrete writing tasks to tackling more complex and abstract ideas.

Because students demonstrate a wide range of readiness, ability, and interest levels in reading, our teachers employ numerous strategies to ensure students acquire the foundational skills that enable them to be strong, independent readers. At the core is our carefully constructed and vertically aligned phonics progression, which is supported by a school-wide common academic vocabulary and kinesthetic approach through Orton-Gillingham techniques and Multisensory Structured Language Education. These foundational skills are taught through both whole group direct instruction and targeted small group instruction. Foundational skills are further supported by the use of differentiated cooperative learning groups, Daily 5 rotations, and a reinforcement of skills application through interdisciplinary, project-based learning, all of which help to promote student engagement.

We believe numeracy skills are crucial for continued success in school and in life. The basis for our mathematics curriculum is the ACCRS. Success in math requires a strong foundation and our teachers seamlessly integrated training from the Ongoing Assessment Project (OGAP) and Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative (AMSTI). Our teachers engage students and build foundational skills through explicit instruction and station work using tens frames, Counting Collections, - manipulatives, and application of skills through math journals. Students stay motivated to acquire basic skills through MobyMax, which provides them with individualized, targeted math practice and instruction.

Our teachers value real-world application and promote a conceptual understanding of math that allows students to more readily transfer their knowledge to new contexts. With a sharp focus on the needs of all students, our teachers use AMSTI Investigations, Go Math resources, and constructed-response math tasks. The use of Number Talks builds students’ abilities to think mathematically using mental computation strategies. Further opportunities are provided to build critical thinking and problem-solving skills through computer coding tasks. These tasks help students persist through solutions in a methodical way, evaluate solutions, and revise their methods.

In science, our teachers build lessons using the AL COS and work toward mastery of standards through experiential learning. Students complete hands-on, project-based tasks in thematic units through AMSTI and

STEMScopes. Reading and writing are embedded in these units and are reinforced throughout the investigation process. Teachers also supplement these units through high-quality, science-based informational and literary texts found in our school and classroom library collections and through periodicals such as Science Spin and applications such as PebbleGo. Students experience science in action through field trips and demonstrations by guest speakers.

The social studies curriculum includes the AL COS and is primarily taught through project-based and thematic units that correspond to dates, events, and people of historical significance throughout the year. Our teachers use federal holidays and days set aside for remembrance to provide students with civic learning. Reading and writing tasks are embedded in social studies instruction, and students and teachers select literary and informational texts to deepen understanding and help students make connections. Print resources such as Let's Find Out and digital resources such as the Alabama Virtual Library and PebbleGo are used to enhance student learning.

Pre-Kindergarten is an important part of our school. The preschool program consists of two Office of School Readiness (OSR) classes and two Eagles Nest classes. Eagles Nest classes are made up of one half special needs students and the other half are typical peer models. Each has its unique philosophy - one is play-based and the other is more traditional. These classes have access to all of the school's resources. In addition, the Pre-K teachers rely on our "older students" to serve as role models, readers, playmates, and helpers to their younger peers. As the only public school in the system offering Pre-K, each program maintains a waiting list of families wishing to enroll.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Every teacher at AES contributes to the overall success of our students. In addition to our core curriculum, students receive instruction in art, music, physical education, library and media, counseling, and computer science. Instruction in these areas both supports and extends the core curriculum, and special area teachers collaborate with classroom teachers to find opportunities to coordinate their instruction. Special area teachers implement ALCOS standards and national standards within their discipline. All curriculum areas work in concert to accomplish the goal of educating the whole child.

Art instruction provides students with an opportunity to explore their interests, be creative, and engage in self-expression. Students further develop observation skills and motor coordination. Opportunities to work with a variety of mediums such as chalk, watercolors, paint, and clay stimulate imagination as students learn about artists and art history. Student art work is showcased throughout the school, providing an opportunity to feel pride, a sense of ownership and connection to the school. Student artwork is also displayed at the Huntsville Museum of Art, our local One Athens Showcase event, and shared with parents and retired teachers throughout the school year. Students in grades kindergarten through fourth attend art class weekly throughout the school year, and pre-kindergarten students attend weekly art class for one semester.

Music instruction at AES instills an appreciation and enjoyment of both vocal and instrumental music, while integrating opportunities for teamwork among students. Students experience a variety of musical elements, including rhythm and tempo, through voice and instruments such as bongo drums, recorders, and Boomwhackers musical tubes. Grade-level performances teach students to work together and develop stage presence while celebrating relevant learning experiences that correspond with and further the thematic units and civic learning being taught in the general classroom. Our program provides students with exposure to cultural experiences, such as a field trip to a Huntsville Symphony Orchestra concert. Students in third grade participate in a series of violin lessons, culminating in a performance for parents. These important aspects of our music program provide opportunities that would otherwise be out of reach for many of our students. Students in grades kindergarten through fourth attend music class weekly throughout the school year, and pre-kindergarten students attend weekly music class for one semester.

Our librarian/media specialist not only instructs all students in the school every week, she also serves as a crucial resource for the entire faculty. The media specialist provides classroom teachers with collections of books that correspond with their units, helps teachers to integrate technology into their lessons, and monitors the Accelerated Reader (AR) program. With her event team, she encourages reading by designing fun

incentives and activities around a school-wide theme. During scheduled library time, students practice research skills, explore their interests through books, and enjoy read-alouds. Students in grades kindergarten through fourth attend library class 30 minutes weekly throughout the school year, and pre-kindergarten students attend library class 15 minutes weekly throughout the school year.

Our counselor provides social-emotional learning and instructs students in valuable life skills. She uses literature and direct instruction to teach students about ethics, manners, and making smart choices and provides them with the vocabulary to understand and express themselves. During weekly scheduled classes, topics such as safety, bullying, social skills, and maintaining a positive attitude are explored. Additionally, the counselor provides instruction in study skills and helps students to explore career interests. Through the counseling program, students are able to develop leadership skills by serving as peer mediators or safety patrol team members.

Our students receive computer science instruction from their classroom teachers who are trained to teach the Code.org computer science curriculum, which includes instruction in computer science terminology, coding, engineering and design, and computational thinking. Teachers supplement this curriculum with coding experiences through apps, such as Tynker and Scratch, Jr., that use a basic programming language such as Blockly. Weekly time is dedicated to computer science instruction at all grade levels.

Physical education (PE) is often mentioned as our students' favorite time of the day! Our PE program encourages a healthy and active lifestyle. In PE, students learn teamwork and cooperation, hand-eye coordination, how to adhere to the rules of sports, competition and fair play. Each class begins with a warm up while learning to exercise properly and then students progress through skills stations or play group games. All students receive 30 minutes of physical education daily.

3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:

At AES, we look beyond circumstances and apparent obstacles to see the full potential of every child and ensure he or she reaches that potential, and every adult in the building assumes responsibility for achieving that task.

Instruction, intervention, and assessment are interdependent components of our academic program. Our Response to Instruction (RTI) model of tiered instruction best exemplifies the connection among these three components. In tier one, our teachers provide high-quality instruction through whole-group instruction, small-group differentiated instruction, and cooperative learning in a 1:1 technology-rich environment. Teachers use tier one small groups to provide targeted remediation or acceleration. We use Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) and Performance Series (PS) testing to identify student needs. Based on these test results, our teachers identify students who show learning gaps, select appropriate interventions, and deliver those targeted interventions in the classroom as tier two instruction. Tier two instruction includes MSLE phonics lessons, Read Naturally and Rewards. In some grades, teachers group students based on common skill deficits to close gaps in an efficient manner, so that tier two is a shared responsibility with teachers, interventionists, and administration.

Students who continue to struggle are referred to our Student Support Team (SST). Through SST, our teachers, administrators, and tier three intervention teachers look at data and discuss the individual needs of the student, including interventions that have been successful and unsuccessful. Together as a team, we decide whether intensive tier three interventions, including Sounds Sensible, WonderWorks and SPIRE, are needed, and if so, which will lead to student success. Tier three interventions in our EL program target our Hispanic population, which has been a focus subgroup based on assessment data. The SST monitors data through universal assessments, classroom assessments, and progress monitoring to determine if each student should continue to receive services.

Another invaluable component of our instructional program is the use of data to drive instructional decisions. Our teachers collect data through school-wide formative and summative assessments and through classroom assessments.

Performance Series (PS) is a norm-referenced, computer-adaptive test administered three times per year in second, third, and fourth grades. The first administration is a baseline to provide teachers with an overview of what students currently know and are able to do. Teachers use the data to plan lessons and develop initial instructional grouping. Mid-year assessment results are used to help teachers plan instruction, but they are also used to measure student growth and help teachers reflect on their practices. Spring administration is used to measure annual student growth from the baseline, enabling teaching teams to reflect on what factors may have contributed to growth, or the lack thereof, and make adjustments. Additionally, PS results are used to develop and evaluate the effectiveness of the Individual Education Plan (IEP) for students receiving special services.

We administer Achievement Series (AS), a criterion-referenced standardized test, to second, third, and fourth grade students at least four times a year through common assessments, which are tests built at the district level. These results allow our teachers to measure mastery of the standards and reflect on their practice. The program provides advanced data analysis concerning the patterns of student responses, and teachers are able to identify whether students missed questions due to a lack of understanding or an actual misunderstanding. Teachers then use these results to determine what standards may need to be retaught and to whom. Our teachers also use the Common Core question banks within AS to build their own tests to use as pre- and post-tests and standards-based skills checks. Teachers then use these tests to make decisions regarding instruction and differentiation, to group students, and to identify students in need of intervention or extension.

Our third, and fourth grade teachers triangulate data collected from PS, AS, and classroom assessments in order to measure the reliability of each data source and determine the overall level of performance for each student. Based on the results of the data comparison, teachers collaborate to plan classroom interventions to address the individual needs of the students.

Our kindergarten, first, and second grade teachers use data collected from DIBELS to identify the individual needs of their students. DIBELS is administered three times per year: fall as a baseline, winter as progress monitoring, and spring as a measure of growth and for teacher reflection. Kindergarten and first grade teachers triangulate data using DIBELS, standards-based skills checks, and teacher-constructed classroom assessments, and second grade teachers add PS and AS as data sources.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

At AES, children, adults, and visitors are greeted with a friendly smile or a welcoming hug. The comfortable atmosphere is the backdrop for the busy hum of learning. Painted murals and student work adorn the hallways. Processes and procedures are in place to make the workings of the school day flow. Adults value the relationships they build with students. This positive learning environment for teachers and students is a place where growth is celebrated and learning from mistakes is encouraged.

Learning is fun and students enjoy our school environment where they have the opportunity to participate in various academic activities and challenges. We use the AR program to motivate our children to increase their volume of reading. Students read to earn points for AR Parlor where they make their own ice cream sundaes, and AR Fun Day, where points are traded for store items and time playing on inflatables. Computer Science Olympiad events are highly anticipated days for our students. Our young scientists participate in a variety of coding activities like moving a robot through a maze and stringing beads representing binary code. They work in multi-grade level teams, allowing mentor opportunities for our older students while building team work and school spirit.

We foster a culture of student leadership in our school. Homeroom representatives are elected to serve on the Student Council Association, supporting our community by sponsoring the collection of supplies for soldiers, writing letters, and sharing treats with teachers. Each classroom develops its own system of leadership for daily routines. Student leaders also greet special visitors to our building. Fourth graders, who volunteer for Safety Patrol, assist with the loading and unloading of students at car line. Fourth graders also take responsibility, as Recycling Rangers, for the collection of recyclable materials. Our counselor uses a positive behavior program and students are trained in conflict resolution.

AES supports the growth of our students. School-wide experiences create a sense of community, school spirit, and family/community connections. Special programs include Jump Rope for Heart, a Fun Run obstacle course, and Field Day. Teachers intervene to secure assistance from local churches and organizations for families in need. Social and sensory needs are supported in many classrooms through flexible seating, where teachers provide a variety of spaces and places for learning.

No matter what their job title, adults at AE consider themselves part of a strongly knit community. We enjoy occasional tailgates with duty free lunches, professional learning team gatherings, celebrations of milestones, and meetings in our Team Room. Teachers are frequently asked to respond to surveys and emails sharing their “voice.” They are encouraged to take the lead on various initiatives and to freely voice their opinions.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

AES is committed to engaging our students’ families and our community. We begin each year with our Back-to-School orientation where families are invited to meet the students’ teachers and staff. Open House is held annually in the fall. Students bring their parents to visit their classrooms and share their learning projects. Family Nights are also held annually. On Family Night, students engage with their families in reading, math and/or computer science learning activities. The focus of learning during Family Night is purposely chosen based on goals of student assessments. During the summer, our library is open a few days a month for students to read with their families and take AR tests. Read Across America/Book Fair Week is a time for families to have lunch with their students and visit the book fair. There are a variety of opportunities for families to participate at AES. These include school volunteers, PTO, Title I Parent Advisory Committees and the AES Computer Science Academy Council.

Many community organizations support our students. Our Partner in Education provides funding for various projects and school improvements. They have provided attendance incentives, funded classroom projects, and supported numerous school initiatives. The Haven, an after school tutor center located within

our school zone, is supported by a local church. We have a partnership with Athens State University, supporting future educators who work with AES teachers and students. In addition to pre-service lessons and observations, they provide a summer enrichment camp for our 1st through 3rd grade students.

Parents are informed of school events through our monthly AES Calendar of Events, monthly e-newsletters, The Eagle Express, from the principal, phone recordings from the principal and weekly classroom newsletters from teachers. Students keep information concerning their academic achievement organized in their Take Home folders provided by Title I funds and student portfolios. Their progress is communicated through the Seesaw class/parent app, the DoJo app, report cards and mid-nine week progress reports. Parent conferences are held to work collaboratively on student goals, responsibilities, and organization. The team celebrates successes and makes a plan to strengthen weaknesses. Students' families who are supported through the Response to Instruction (RtI) process, receive progress letters each time their plans are reviewed.

3. Professional Development:

The comprehensive Athens City Schools' One Athens Strategic Plan guides instructional leadership at all levels, including administrators, instructional partners and teacher leaders. In coordination, Athens City Schools (ACS) has a collaboratively developed One Page Instructional Target based on the framework for instructional improvement in Jim Knight's book, *Unmistakable Impact*. System-wide professional development days are structured around a "One Athens" mentality, to build teacher and administrative capacity and a culture of collaboration in place of competition. Administrative staff plan professional development activities in coordination with instructional partners and teacher leaders within ACS. Principals and instructional partners attend monthly meetings to reflect and determine next steps.

AES has aligned our plan with system targets in mind, visioning aspirations for students and teachers that would have the greatest impact on student learning. This information, along with data from summative and formative assessments guided our AES faculty in the development of a fluid One Page Target to direct initiatives and instructional goals for our school. Our AES principal, assistant principal, instructional partner, and teacher leaders use focus areas from our target plan to steer the development and delivery of all professional development activities. Teacher leaders at each grade level drive weekly grade level collaborative meetings, planning lessons and interventions based on specific data and building capacity as they learn from and with each other.

An ongoing professional development focus for ACS has been building capacity for all aspects of unit development resulting in a common understanding of the process with principals, instructional partners and teacher leaders. This training has been turned around to all ACS teachers and applied to grade level units system-wide. Our AES faculty has worked as a whole and within small groups to continue the work of unit development, while incorporating the work of Ron Berger in *Leaders of their Own Learning*. This focus is helping our staff understand the importance of student-engaged assessment in guiding students to be responsible and motivated to attain academic achievement. AES students are now setting measurable goals and tracking their success through conferencing and portfolios, leading to increased motivation and achievement.

Our AES motto encourages students to "Dream Big" and this sentiment is also reflected in our vision statement which sets the standard that we will "prepare successful, lifelong learners who dream, believe, and create." This is tailored to the challenges our students face as they must work hard to overcome poverty and related disadvantages in order to dream of a bright future. Our faculty strives to help students believe in their dreams and create the motivation, work ethic, and academic foundation necessary for success. Professional development at AES focuses on elements that will impact our efforts to lead to the reality of our vision.

4. School Leadership:

Leadership at Athens Elementary starts at the bottom of the education pyramid – with the students. Our focus is on doing what is best for our students and our energy is poured into making sure their educational

journey is supported and successful.

We believe that leaders are learners. Since everyone here is committed to growing, everyone is a leader. Teachers are busy collaborating with coworkers to design effective learning. They anticipate challenges and work together to find solutions. We are on a quest to increase the quality of our instructional delivery. Teams work in small, fluid groups that change with the identified needs. Strategies that work are shared and studied with colleagues. Teachers are free to adapt innovations to meet their own growth needs and the needs of their students. Teachers are supported with highly targeted professional development and maintain an active relationship with our Instructional Partner, a full-time, site-based resource coach.

We believe that routines and procedures are important structures that support the work of our school. We are constantly gathering feedback and data to inform our improvements and then we adopt and adapt them. These structures insure safe classrooms, provide learning supports for students, and provide a framework for shared decision-making. Our staff is organized so that every adult has responsibility for student success. The Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) is made up of the principal, the assistant principal, the instructional partner, Title I teachers, the counselor, the media specialist, and classroom teachers. Each ILT member leads a teacher group. These groups consist of Vertical Alignment Leaders (VALs), Team Leaders, Academy Development, Continuous Improvement, Planning/Theme Day, Student Support, and the Problem Solving Team. The work of these groups drive our learning and growth.

School leadership recognizes the capable strength of the staff and builds leadership capacity throughout the school. Working within our agreed-upon instructional framework, teachers are free to innovate. Ideas and conventional ways of thinking can be challenged with safe, professional dialogue. Most often, these challenges lead to effective change in routines, procedures, or instruction.

The strength of our school's autonomy is that we operate under the umbrella of strong district leadership. The district leadership provides clarity of direction and expectations while supporting us with professional development and resources. And, then we are given the freedom to do our jobs.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

At AES, teachers believe that all students can learn and they have a deep commitment to themselves, their team, and their students to make sure students grow. The drive to do right by our kids creates a strong bond among our staff. We believe that, together, we can move mountains. We have a data room that we appropriately refer to as our TEAM room, because we believe that “Together, Everyone Achieves More!” It’s that powerful collective efficacy that guarantees academic success.

Jenni Donahoo defines collective efficacy as “the belief that, through collective actions, educators can influence student outcomes and increase achievement.” We achieve collective efficacy through high expectations, accountability, collaboration, and support, all of which are driven by a shared vision and common goals.

Knowing that students will rise to high performance expectations, we embrace the struggles that our students face due to socioeconomic or other issues. These expectations are clearly communicated through specific learning targets and success criteria, as well as through positive relationships between faculty and students. Likewise, our faculty do not allow external distractions--political, societal, or otherwise--to diminish their capacity for providing high-quality instruction. We hold high expectations for ourselves and for our students, and, because we do, we are able to achieve more. Our students exceed their growth targets on standardized tests - often scoring the highest in the district - and our teachers shine as respected, dedicated professionals.

Students are empowered to take ownership of their learning and measures of accountability ensure that high expectations are met. Accountability through data binders, goal sheets, and reading and math challenges helps students strive for personal achievement and is a pathway for teachers to monitor, encourage, and support student growth. Similarly, teachers are accountable to their grade-level teams, and teams are accountable to the next grade level. However, our teachers are not left just to sink or swim; they collaborate both within and outside their teams in order to overcome weaknesses and maximize strengths. Our culture of success leaves no room for weak links, and our teachers do what it takes to ensure that all students receive high-quality, standards-based instruction.

AES students and teachers know that they are expected to climb high but will receive necessary scaffolding and encouragement along the way. We support each other. Our students are supported academically through our tiered intervention system. We build strong relationships with our students and they receive additional emotional support through our robust counseling and outreach programs such as community tutoring and our Full Tummy Project. Our teachers have the confidence to take risks and try new practices because they are supported by our instructional partner and administrators. That security of support grounds our school family.

Because of our collective efficacy, our school is greater than the sum of its parts.