

**U.S. Department of Education**  
**2018 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program**

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

Name of Principal Mrs. Ashley E. McCombs

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

Official School Name Mountain Brook Elementary School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 3020 Cambridge Road

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

Mountain Brook AL 35223-1225  
City State Zip Code+4 (9 digits total)

County Jefferson

Telephone (205) 871-8191

Fax

Web site/URL

https://www.mtnbrook.k12.al.us/mb

e

E-mail mcombsa@mtnbrook.k12.al.us

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent\*Dr. Richard Barlow

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other) E-mail barlowd@mtnbrook.k12.al.us

District Name Mountain Brook City Schools District Tel. (205) 871-4608

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board

President/Chairperson Mrs. Emily Dunn

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

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_

(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

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

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

## **Part I – Eligibility Certification**

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

1. The school configuration includes one or more of grades K-12. (Schools on the same campus with one principal, even a K-12 school, must apply as an entire school.)
2. All nominated public schools must meet the state's performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group and all subgroups, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
3. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 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

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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):
- 4 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 1 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 6 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
<b>PreK</b>	10	10	20
<b>K</b>	34	38	72
<b>1</b>	39	31	70
<b>2</b>	36	33	69
<b>3</b>	30	41	71
<b>4</b>	35	25	60
<b>5</b>	29	37	66
<b>6</b>	44	33	77
<b>7</b>	0	0	0
<b>8</b>	0	0	0
<b>9</b>	0	0	0
<b>10</b>	0	0	0
<b>11</b>	0	0	0
<b>12 or higher</b>	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	257	248	505

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 1 % Asian
  - 0 % Black or African American
  - 0 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 96 % White
  - 3 % 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: 2%

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.

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	4
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	6
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	10
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2016	508
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.02
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	2

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

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 0%  
Total number students who qualify: 0

8. Students receiving special education services: 12 %  
63 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>9</u> Autism                  | <u>1</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>13</u> Other Health Impaired                |
| <u>9</u> Developmentally Delayed | <u>13</u> Specific Learning Disability         |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>16</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: 2
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	29
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	15
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	14
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	4

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 17:1

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

<b>Required Information</b>	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013
Daily student attendance	97%	96%	96%	96%	96%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

13. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**

Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2017.

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

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

Yes  No

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

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

Providing an effective, challenging, and engaging education for every one of our students. Lancers Lead!  
Mountain Brook Elementary promotes the 3Bs: Be Safe. Be Responsible. Be Respectful.

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**

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Mountain Brook Elementary (MBE) first opened its doors to students in 1929. As the oldest existing public school in the Mountain Brook area, Mountain Brook Elementary enjoys a rich history of community support and educational excellence. The school is located in a suburb southeast of Birmingham, Alabama surrounded by families with a sense of pride and a collective pursuit towards leadership development and academic accomplishment. With an enrollment of more than 500 students in preschool-6th grade, MBE celebrates over 87 years of service to the community. Throughout its history, many of the improvements to the school have been made possible through the support of loyal parents, former students, and neighbors, who comprise the MBE community. Even with the rich history that thrives within the school community, the possibilities for customization of learning and leading continue to develop. Empowering learners to leverage their individual talents and worth are what makes MBE unique. Diversity is evident in religious preferences, personal interests, and specialized learning needs. Steps are being taken to address the ongoing challenges of developing empathy and increasing awareness of diversity with a global perspective. Efforts to maintain high quality learning align with the purpose of Mountain Brook Schools -- to provide an effective, challenging, and engaging education for every one of our students. All school-based decisions are filtered through this lens to further contribute to the collective success of the district.

Mountain Brook Elementary helps students develop in all aspects of their lives by endorsing an environment where teachers provide meaningful and relevant opportunities for learners to grow and thrive. High levels of engagement are seen throughout the day in a variety of special activities, such as Morning Meetings (a time for community-building with explicit instruction around leadership principles, digital citizenship, and social skills), Lancer League (student leadership group), 6th grade electives (self-selected courses provided in lieu of special area curriculum), student-led news broadcast, and Guilds (cross-grade level clubs held at during school at least twice a year that serves as an effective venue for building schoolwide community and increasing engagement with student-generated topics such as outdoor sports, movie-making, and 3D printing). These opportunities promote social-emotional growth and foster a community that supports individual learner academic development. The emphasis on developing positive relationships has a direct correlation to the affirmation and feedback needed to achieve at high levels.

In addition to creating and operating under intentional systems and structures focused on leadership development, the school encourages and challenges all learners to develop their full potential academically through goal-setting and tracking. Students take ownership of their learning and take pride in sharing their work towards self-selected goals. Setting and tracking personal goals is a fundamental belief at Mountain Brook Elementary that is modeled by faculty and instilled in students to promote self-efficacy. Schoolwide attainment of goals is acknowledged during bi-annual schoolwide celebrations. Instructional staff consistently demonstrate their commitment to the vision of MBE through their involvement in supporting the creation and attainment of individual goals and in leveraging resources to develop all leaders and learners. Parents and community members are also dedicated to the advancement of the school through their financial contributions and active participation in schoolwide events. The vision is further communicated by highlighting happenings of students and teachers via the monthly Lancer Hour sessions, monthly Lancer Living newsletter, and annual leadership events.

Mountain Brook Elementary has reached several milestones as a result of a continued focus on improvement and a collective pursuit towards excellence. MBE was most recently named a 2018 Alabama School of Character alongside 63 schools nationwide and has been nominated to be further considered as a National School of Character. According to Character.org, “The Schools of Character program offers a path to school improvement by providing a proven framework, professional feedback, and models of excellence.” This marks the first year to have earned this designation. Members of the school community are most excited about the possibilities this opens for networking with other schools who focus on development of character through a comprehensive approach that includes Leader in Me principles, digital citizenship, and an emphasis on anti-bullying. The school wants to recognize students for personal accomplishments and academics and believes these coexist to make one another possible. In addition, MBE received the acclaimed Leader in Me Lighthouse School status in 2017 as the 241st school among approximately 3020 schools across the nation to reach this milestone. This distinction is awarded by the Franklin Covey

organization to honor the attainment of a well-rounded leadership model. According to Franklin Covey, “Lighthouse Schools serve as exemplary models of leadership and mentors to other schools.” Additionally, Common Sense Media, a national nonprofit organization dedicated to helping families thrive in a world of digital media and technology, recognized Mountain Brook Elementary as a Common Sense Media School in 2017. The journey towards excellence at MBE will continue with the belief that it is not the recognition that matters; it is about developing individuals who share their gifts and talents in ways that positively impact others in the world.

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

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

Mountain Brook Elementary provides a comprehensive, research-based core curriculum across all content areas with a focus on developing individual learners. While it is common practice to adopt curriculum programs, teachers are prone to adapt selected curriculum to meet individual learner needs. This requires supplemental supports, as it is necessary to utilize a plethora of strategies and resources to customize instruction. A shared belief is that success comes from a comprehensive approach, which includes social-emotional learning linked to academic success. While the core curriculum is aligned to the Alabama College and Career Readiness Standards, teachers increase rigor and capitalize on student engagement through balancing experiences based on the needs of the class as a whole and the specific needs of individual students. In all academic areas, teachers strive to empower students to take ownership of their learning. A workshop approach is employed in every classroom and provides a framework where learners gain new content and are immersed in tasks requiring application of skills. This instructional model provides equal access to grade level content through mini-lessons with opportunities to grow individual learners at their current performance levels through independent practice.

Lucy Calkins' reading and writing units of study provide a floor for curricular decisions. Recipe for Reading and Words Their Way along with Orton Gillingham multisensory strategies are applied during Word Study. The content comes directly from the state standards outlined in a Course of Study for each grade level. The language arts curriculum at MBE speaks directly to customizing experiences for students through a balanced literacy methodology where word study, reading, writing, and communication skills are addressed in an explicit way. Students confer with teachers, collaborate with peers in partnerships or small groups, or work independently on setting and tracking goals during workshop. Teachers focus on creating a classroom community where students enhance reading skills, produce quality writing, and employ effective speaking and listening through sharing ideas and presenting work for an audience. These communication skills are needed for the optimal development of young learners. In both reading and writing practices, other subject areas such as science and social studies are seamlessly woven into instruction in order to augment understanding through a cross-curricular, contextual approach.

The mathematics curriculum at Mountain Brook Elementary relies heavily on a student's ability to demonstrate conceptual understanding of core content in a variety of ways. Students are asked during number talks to explain their thinking using the most efficient strategies and are encouraged to access more than one strategy for problem-solving. Teachers provide immediate feedback to students, and this process of making thinking visible often has the greatest impact on student understanding. Number talks provide insights for instructional next steps and reinforces the sense of classroom community for learners. Students collaborate with peers during math workshop by working together to solve problems using the Investigations curriculum in conjunction with quality questions posed by the students and teacher. Project-based learning is incorporated to help students generalize mathematical concepts within the context of real-world problems. For example, 4th grade students partner with 6th grade students to design 3D treehouses with specific criteria for area and perimeter. Engagement levels are high and the opportunity for originality and collaboration lead to successful learning outcomes for all students.

Science curriculum is presented in a variety of stimulating ways through both STEMScopes (kindergarten-5th grade) and Project Lead the Way modules (kindergarten-6th grade). DiscoveryEd Techbook is utilized by 6th graders and provides a digital platform that makes learning relevant and dynamic. Students of all ages participate in hands-on learning which requires critical thinking while promoting creativity. Mountain Brook Elementary has an inquiry-based approach to learning science content that encourages students to think outside of the box and be fearless in exploring ideas. There are specially-designed innovative spaces that support customized learning, especially in science. The STEAM room, Ramps and Pathways room, MakerSpace, and 360 room are just a few spaces in the building, which promote student participation in Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math. In these specialized rooms, students can be found coding with robotics, programming, or designing prototypes using specified constraints. Collaboration in 5th grade science classes on water purification projects across international borders with student peers in Bogotá,

Columbia also engages learners to be leaders that help solve real-world problems.

Mountain Brook Elementary recognizes the importance of an integrated language arts approach within the social studies context as a way for students to make connections and conceptualize content. Each grade level has a digital textbook, further embedding technology as a tool for knowledge acquisition. The curriculum for kindergarten-3rd grade is Studies Weekly while 4th grade links their study of Alabama history to Alabama Weekly Studies newspaper. Units include multimedia presentations correlated to Alabama's Course of Study for Social Studies and infuse technology as a way to engage learners. High interest primary photographs and articles are provided for learners to manipulate with inferences and inquiries. 6th grade enriches the core studies with Document Based Questions which stimulate curiosity and analysis within authentic historical documents alongside an Integrative Thinking approach. Essential questions for units link the learning to a broader context of being a productive and contributing citizen to society. Through group projects and opportunities for research around current events or relevant topics of historical value, MBE infuses civic learning and engagement strategies that advance academic achievement across the curriculum.

Mountain Brook Elementary is fortunate to serve the foundational needs of preschoolers. Classroom dynamics are based on a 50/50 model that contains half of the students with Individualized Education Plans, and the other half are typical peers serving as role models. The core curriculum maintains a focus on immersion with functional life skills combined with a strong social-emotional skill emphasis. Routines include daily calendar, weather, counting, and peer greetings. Interactive TVs, song, and dance provide a multi-modal approach that enhances motor skill development. Preschool teachers collaborate with instructional coaches and primary grade teachers to align foundational reading and math skills needed to be successful in grade school. Participating students exhibit a higher level of school readiness and are more easily able to acclimate to the setting, school expectations, and academic rigor from preschool to kindergarten.

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

From academic instruction to classroom routines and management, Mountain Brook Elementary teachers integrate social-emotional learning in every classroom every day during Morning Meetings. While primary students use a Responsive Classroom approach with greetings, sharing, and social skill games to promote expected behaviors, intermediate students kick off each week by developing executive functioning skills needed to be productive learners. Fifth and sixth grade classes access the week's academic assignments published on Canvas (Learning Management System), and each student plans for the academic week using time management skills in personal agendas. The school counselor seeks student voice for ways to improve these systems by facilitating small group discussions and piloting new organizational techniques. Schoolwide, teachers provide every student opportunities for collective responsibility and leadership in caring for and managing their classroom spaces through self-selected student leadership roles (Chief Executive Officer, recycling manager, etc.). MBE believes in personal investment for the well-being of the whole group.

Mountain Brook Elementary incorporates digital citizenship lessons across kindergarten-6th grade classes on a regular basis. Staff collaborate about the Common Sense Media curriculum to facilitate sound lessons about appropriate online behavior, avoiding pitfalls, and promoting a positive digital footprint, which are essential skills needed to successfully navigate the digital world. Through implementing this specific curriculum, lessons are strategic, developmentally appropriate, research-based, and incorporate parental education which targets home-school consistency. By preparing students to use technology safely and responsibly, the school is providing them unlimited opportunities to maximize and personalize their learning. Technology is widely embedded with preschool and special education classrooms housing interactive TVs, kindergarten-2nd grade classrooms operating Promethean Boards, and kindergarten-6th grade classrooms incorporating Chromebooks into lessons where each student has access to a single device. Technology-based support through Seesaw portfolios in preschool-4th grade and Canvas in grades 5th and 6th are venues where academic and personal goals can be tracked with evidence of growth over time.

Alongside the academic classroom, curriculum enhancement is infused throughout the other specialized classes in the school. Every preschool-5th grade student attends a special class once a day for 30-35 minutes.

All students are provided art, music, Spanish, and library media. Instructional assistants assist in extending STEM lessons weekly for kindergarten-5th grade classes. All kindergarten-6th grade students attend physical education once a day for 30-35 minutes. Physical Education (PE) coaches illustrate how students can apply the 7 Habits with synergizing during team activities and sharpening the saw when taking care of oneself physically. Sixth grade students actively participate in a self-selected elective matched to their interests and talents. What makes this model effective is the ownership students have as they engage with a smaller group of peers pursuing similar passions. Electives include special education assistant, PE assistant, broadcast, art, theater, Spanish, library assistant, technology classroom assistant, and beginner band.

Other off-site opportunities connect curriculum to the world beyond the school walls. Fourth grade students explore the outdoors at Camp McDowell Farm School over a two-day period where they learn how to harvest, clean, and cook their own food in addition to gaining knowledge about food conservation through composting and reduction of food waste. Fifth grade students attend Camp Alpine for an entire week where they engage in team sports, observe natural rock and waterfall formations, and discover the impact of land erosion. These camp experiences offer a time to enhance science standards in authentic settings and promote application of social skills in meaningful ways. 6th graders may also apply for Junior United Nations Assembly, a team of students who choose an issue of global importance and write a resolution detailing the problem and a possible solution which is presented in a public-speaking format before a forum of other 6th-8th grade teams across the state. This special opportunity develops debating skills, critical thinking, and diplomacy. Lights, Camera, Action is the school's 6th grade student-led broadcast team. Broadcasts have live audience capability where kindergarten-5th grade students observe 6th grade leaders prepare and record live news reports of school happenings, current events, and daily inspirations.

This will be the school's second year with a 4th-6th grade robotics team initiated and led by the math coach who has been trained in VEX IQ Robotics. The students develop teamwork, critical thinking, and problem solving along with engineering and coding skills. VEX IQ robot kits and RobotC coding platform are used as guiding curriculum for the team. State and world competitions are held throughout the year. Recognitions have been awarded to the students such as Best Build, and the team has participated at State Finals.

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

Instructional methods utilized at Mountain Brook Elementary align to inform high quality instruction. Tiered instruction assists the school in being responsive to student needs and allows customized learning for every child. Tier I instruction consists of teachers personalizing content to ensure that each child is engaged in the learning process based on his/her instructional level. Through the workshop approach, teachers present grade level content to the whole class, lead small groups with common needs, and confer with individuals about learning goals. Teachers meet with instructional coaches to determine what Tier II instruction may look like if students are struggling to grasp content during Tier I. Instructional coaches provide strategies and tools for teachers to use in order to ensure students do not fall further behind.

If both tiers of instruction provide unsuccessful, teachers present student concerns to the Student Support Team (SST). During regularly-scheduled SST meetings, instructional coaches, school counselor, academic interventionist, classroom teacher, special education teacher, and administrator listen to concerns and collaboratively design a plan to close educational gaps the child may have. Parents are notified of concerns and progress is communicated each time the SST reconvenes. The team determines if Tier III instruction provided by the academic interventionist is necessary, where students receive specialized instruction from a scientifically-based program. The team may also discuss the potential for special education referrals. It is the hope of the team that the collective sharing of ideas can provide a path forward for these students to grow with adequate progress towards goals being tracked periodically.

There is intentional time built into the master schedule secured for teachers to provide the interventions needed to develop multi-level learners performing below and above grade level such as enrichment, cooperative learning, mentoring across grade levels, guided reading groups, strategy groups, and tiered instruction from the classroom teacher or academic interventionist. To maximize efforts, teacher teams share responsibility for providing research-based techniques and strategies to small groups exhibiting common needs, especially in the areas of reading and mathematics. Data meetings are held regularly with

instructional coaches, grade level teams, and administration to continuously monitor and evaluate the impact of instruction on learner engagement, outcomes, and overall success.

The workshop model provides the foundation for all literacy instruction. Classroom teachers use mentor texts to serve as the basis for thoughtfully constructed teaching points, which are delivered in the form of a scaffolded mini-lesson and derived from Lucy Calkins' Reading and Writing Units of Study. Students are then provided ample time to practice these skills and strategies in a differentiated environment, such as reading just-right texts, strategy groups, guided reading groups, and flexible small group instruction. Additionally, teachers are currently working alongside the school's literacy coach to design language arts frameworks that identify and vertically-align Webb's Depths of Knowledge to each Alabama State standard as a tool for pushing student thinking forward at all levels. Developing these frameworks has been a dynamic process, highlighting the interconnectedness of curriculum, instruction and assessment.

In order to ensure assessments are effective in customizing instruction for all students, teachers also often meet with instructional coaches to create assessments, norm and analyze student work, and discuss appropriate interventions and enrichments for individual students. Some examples of assessments regularly utilized include Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessments, Jennifer Serravallo Independent Reading Assessments, Lucy Calkins Performance Assessments, and Words Their Way Spelling Inventory. While it is beneficial for summative assessments to be common amongst grade level teams, teachers also use formative assessments daily to ensure understanding, provide immediate feedback, and adjust individual instruction to result in optimal growth. Conferencing is one of the most powerful examples of formative assessments used at Mountain Brook Elementary. During individual conferences with students, teachers reflect on content, determine mastery of skills, and help students set measurable academic goals. The goal-setting process requires teachers to have a deep understanding of their students as readers and writers, and conversely provides an opportunity for students to have increased ownership over their own learning.

Likewise, classroom teachers provide an abundance of instructional strategies for mathematics that are both rigorous and engaging. Strategies include number talks, whole class mini-lessons, differentiated practice problems that are incorporated into math workshop through centers, math bins, and/or math menus. Students may work individually, in pairs, or in small groups, but whatever they are working on has been chosen to meet specific needs of the students. While students work, the teacher typically confers with individuals or small groups while they grapple with the math task at hand. Teachers work to find the balance between conceptual understanding and computational proficiency. They emphasize the development of number sense and multiple strategies to arrive at solutions as opposed to memorizing a procedure. All instruction and curriculum materials are aligned to the Alabama State standards. The core curriculum is Investigations III (K-5th) and Carnegie Learning (6th), and teachers use supplemental materials to meet the needs of their students. Teachers work with the math coach to develop lessons and activities as well as opportunities for enrichment. For example, math teachers in 3rd-6th grades have formed a cohort with the math coach where they align math standards to programming and robotics, then practice teaching with coaching support. All students in 3rd-6th grades have completed rich and challenging robotics lessons including operations, measurement, area, perimeter, and comparing numbers.

Teachers use several types of assessments to determine a student's math level. They use beginning-of-the-year and end-of-the-year assessments developed with the math coach, benchmark assessments (Assessing Math Concepts by Kathy Richardson in kindergarten-2nd grades, and Scantron Performance Series-Global Scholar in 3rd-6th grades). These assessments are used to determine needs at the beginning of the year and to inform and drive instruction throughout the year. Teachers may also make use of Ongoing Assessment Project (OGAP), Primary Number and Operations Assessment (PNOA), and Math-U-See assessments if they need more detailed information about a student's math abilities. Teachers also use formative assessments as they progress through a unit. Sometimes these assessments come from the core curriculum, and sometimes teachers create their own depending on their students' needs. Formative assessments can be quizzes, work samples, observations, or interviews. The formative assessments guide teachers in their instruction of the class as a whole and their instruction of individuals and small groups. Although formative assessments may vary among teachers depending on their students, grade-level teams use common summative assessments. This consistency ensures that students in different classes across the same grade level experience similar pace and rigor. Both formative and summative assessments are used as talking

points for vertical discussions. High expectations are expected across grade levels. Teachers work to develop and communicate these expectations consistently among themselves and to students as they move through the grade levels. All assessments are aligned to the Alabama State standards.

### 1. School Climate/Culture:

Climate and culture at Mountain Brook Elementary has transformed significantly over the past five years under the continuum of the Leader in Me process. What began as 100% of faculty and staff being trained in the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People has melded into a community of leaders at the individual, classroom, grade, school, and local levels. The achievement of Lighthouse School status reflects the continued commitment to developing life skills, a leadership culture, and personalized academics. Every student and teacher employs a leadership role, self-selects and tracks goals, and maintains a leadership portfolio highlighting personal accomplishments and academic achievements. Learning and leading are visible through monthly Lancer Hour student-led sessions and annual leadership events designed to engage families in this journey. Leadership is expressed to those outside the Mountain Brook community through grade level-selected monthly service projects aimed to help those in need. Opportunities for individual leadership promote a passion for learning where each member of the organization feels like a valuable contributor that thrives socially and emotionally. The school's culture fosters high expectations, a positive learning environment, acceptance, increased student voice, and pride in student achievement.

Devoted time spent on establishing relationships allows Mountain Brook Elementary the capacity to effectively engage stakeholders in order to enhance learning outcomes and foster a healthy culture. Engagement is a core principle in the Mountain Brook School System and it is essential that all learners (teachers, students, community members) be involved in decisions regarding school improvement and participate in community events. These aspects promote a cohesive and comprehensive model that includes the input of each school community representative. MBE has shared values, beliefs, written and unwritten rules, assumptions, and behaviors of stakeholders within the school community that shape the school's social norms and create opportunities for everyone to be successful. The environment is collaborative, kind, safe, fun, and supportive. The focus of the school is on developing the whole child through social-emotional development with an embedded schedule allocating time for intentional instruction in every classroom during Morning Meetings where leadership principles, digital citizenship, and community-building activities take place. As indicated by the 2017 AdvancEd Student Climate and Culture Survey and Student Experience Survey, 95%-98% of MBE students feel safe, supported, and encouraged. Students often discuss ways the school has helped them learn how to solve problems, set goals, and develop as leaders. MBE has taken strides to assure that all stakeholders have a voice and that the school is continually making improvements through reflecting on feedback. In a recent survey of 3rd-6th grade students, 85% believe the Leader in Me principles will benefit them as adults.

The Mountain Brook Elementary community has consistently supported a school system that excels at creating an environment of high expectations. This is evidenced in the 2017 AdvancEd Climate and Culture Student Survey that shows a significant number of students reporting that they spend most of their class time 'thinking' and feeling 'challenged'. The school respects all learners, develops their character, and helps them to succeed academically to further the district's purpose. There is a rigorous academic curriculum and customized instruction that promotes student ownership. Students set and track academic goals that are monitored periodically. Evidence of learning is presented through online leadership portfolios in Seesaw and Canvas where growth is tracked over time and shared with a secured digital audience. Students place quality work, accolades, videos of independent practice with reflection, and student goal-setting forms in their portfolios. MBE strives to personalize instruction and learning spaces to meet the needs of every student. The school's administration also builds a foundation with high expectations for students and faculty, which are modeled during Brand Camp at the beginning of each semester. These lessons balance behavioral expectations with a sense of ownership where students and teachers feel welcomed, valued, and trusted at school. MBE constructs a model that balances both academic and character development, creating a positive environment for all members of the school community. Although it is important to keep academic achievement at the forefront of expectations, it is equally important to grow students as leaders.

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

At Mountain Brook Elementary, the core of all work lies within the relationships built with others. These strong bonds are palpable. The school embraces a culture of caring through comradery with students, parents, the larger community, as well as with one another. MBE engages families and community members as partners in the academic and character-building efforts in several ways. MBE has the capacity to effectively engage stakeholders in order to enhance learning outcomes. School Improvement Surveys, AdvancEd Surveys, BrightBytes Surveys, informal dialogue, and scheduled parent conferences provide avenues where feedback is elicited. There is a marked commitment towards continuous improvement in the areas of both leading and learning as a result of open dialogue and invitations for guests. New students and their families are welcomed to the MBE community with a celebratory lunch. New families are paired with mentor families who foster a relationship by aiding them through the transitions associated with acclimating to a new learning environment. New students are assigned a student buddy who introduces them to new peers and answers questions. The school counselor and administrators help newcomers adapt to the school community through regular school luncheons. Strong relationships help students feel valued knowing they have others advocating for their success.

Communication is critical to enrich relationships. Conferences are held each fall between teachers and parents in kindergarten-2nd grades while 3rd-6th grade students lead their own conferences where they showcase their leadership portfolios housing evidence of their contributions and progress. The administrators, teachers, and students work in tandem with the Parent Teacher Organization to regularly highlight school happenings during monthly Lancer Hours. These workshops welcome parents into the learning environment and allow for interactive dialogue. Some examples of Lancer Hour topics include monitoring digital media, differentiating reading instruction, analyzing writing performance, coding and robotics, and parenting the gifted child. During this time, students lead conversations about their learning and facilitate parent small groups where they model instruction and answer clarifying questions. Lancer Hour is a valuable time for students to build leadership capacity while parents learn strategies to reinforce further development at home. Another means of communicating school information to all members of the MBE community is via the monthly digital Lancer Living newsletter. It gives details about the monthly service projects, allows for parents to sign up for various school activities, and acknowledges individuals for their contributions with Lancer Shout-Outs. Lancer Living and Seesaw are also platforms for inviting parents to provide feedback and keeps the lines of communication open between home and school.

Mountain Brook Elementary family partnerships make schoolwide events possible. There are a wide-range of opportunities designed to bring the school community together for fellowship, food, and fun. The Boosterthon Fun Run is an annual fundraiser that joins the community together for the promotion of fitness and character development festivities. Children's Hospital Bike Rodeo and Jump Rope for Heart Monster Mash further promote safety and health. Fall Festival, Lancers on the Lawn family picnic, Writer's Festival, Scholastic Book Fair, Open House, Thanksgiving feasts, 6th Grade Honors Day and Lancer Walk, student-led leadership events, and Kindergarten Orientation are effective means of deepening relationships between the school, home, and broader community. Parents also work in collaboration with the school counselor to connect the school to speakers like meteorologists, local chefs, airline pilots, and civil engineers who teach the students about their specialized fields of study. A district Showcase each spring makes visible the school's accomplishments alongside those from other schools within the district. During the Lighthouse School evaluation process, it was reported that school traditions and annual events involve significant student voice in creatively infusing leadership principles. It was also noted that schoolwide events are beginning to improve through a system of planning, execution, and reflection by students, staff, and families. Parents and community members are an integral part of the school's healthy culture, as seen through continuous visibility when participating in various committees, volunteer opportunities, class placement input, and open dialogue between home and school.

## **3. Professional Development:**

At Mountain Brook Elementary, the mindset has always been that growing teachers leads to student growth. Professional development is essential to support the unique needs of individual learners in the most effective and efficient ways. Because of access to quality resources from parent and district sponsorships,

the school is able to offer a multitude of personalized learning that ultimately contributes to classroom, grade level, and schoolwide achievement. Vertical Action Teams and Cohorts, grade level and one-on-one (literacy, math, technology) coaching support, Leader in Me training, district collaborative team meetings, annual district Learning Conferences, summer small groups, and attendance at educational conferences (local, state, national) are vehicles for accessing and sharing knowledge, as well as networking with others in the profession. Each professional learning opportunity is directly aligned to school strategic plans and is adapted to meet the needs of the learners being served.

The culture of the school is one that focuses on supporting growth where the development of teachers parallels the way learning is customized for students. Teachers participate in and embrace continuous professional development matched to their professional needs and interests. Teachers are given the opportunity to build leadership capacity by facilitating self-selected Action Teams and engaging in personalized Cohorts. Both types of teams provide a platform for vertical collaboration, which improves goal attainment and builds cohesion across the school through the identification and implementation of best practices. Action Teams are intended to provide viable structures for sustaining leadership efforts while Cohorts further academic success through vertical collaboration led by instructional coaches and personal goal attainment.

Embedded professional development opportunities have been a hallmark in teacher growth over the last 10 years and have evolved greatly since their inception. Although they began as weekly grade level meetings with topics chosen by administration and/or instructional coaches, teachers now participate in vertical meetings aligned to self-selected topics of study. This has resulted in greater buy-in from teachers and ultimately much deeper learning. Instructional coaches lead these meetings with work being sustained through modeling lessons, supporting lesson design, providing teaching tools, and coaching side-by-side with immediate reflection.

In addition to academic professional dialogue and learning, training for character and leadership development is also provided. Each August begins with intentional Leader In Me staff training paired with a re-focusing on the school's brand and core values. Additional training is provided for new personnel throughout the school year. All experiences at Mountain Brook Elementary foster personal development with an emphasis on academic excellence for all members of the school community. Careful planning by the school's Lighthouse Team, grade level teams, and ongoing participation in Leader in Me training give MBE a clear direction for promoting the school's brand. Kimberly Haydn claims that, "Branding is about so much more than what people see. It's about how you make people feel." Building people up and recognizing their individual talents and worth are what makes the Mountain Brook Elementary brand unique.

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

Mountain Brook Elementary believes in providing a multitude of collaborative activities where learners are able to demonstrate, reflect upon, and appreciate the core values that enable them to develop into their best selves and be productive citizens. As a current Lighthouse School, the administration fosters shared leadership by encouraging everyone to lead. Leadership capacity is leveraged by including all stakeholders in the process. This promotes the high level of trust that can be found at the core of the leadership efforts at MBE for teachers and students alike, as well as a service-oriented mindset that focuses on giving to those in need.

All faculty and staff have opportunities to lead by being involved in the Lighthouse Team, Action Teams, Cohorts, district showcase, leadership events, and as Lancer League sponsors. Stakeholders are polled regularly in order to measure the effectiveness of current practices as well as identify areas for improvement. The Lighthouse Team is selected based on an application process and is comprised of administration, special area teachers, classroom teachers, and parents who meet monthly to strategically plan and guide the school towards goal attainment as determined by survey results. The Lighthouse School review team indicated that the Lighthouse Team is a shared effort with clearly defined roles rather than relying on one person or the administrator and is an inclusive group with equal representation. Each member of the Lighthouse Team is involved in an Action Team which aligns with the school goals and

provides feedback on behalf of their groups so immediate adjustments can be made to maximize efforts. Before the Leader in Me, school improvement goals were generated by a core group of leaders and now all stakeholders contribute to developing and tracking school goals. With Leader in Me, not only does every member of the Mountain Brook Elementary school community self-select goals, they also make them visible for others. The school continues to search for ways to grow everyone as a leader.

In addition to faculty and staff, all students have a voice and an opportunity to lead. All students can select classroom leadership roles. Students in 4th-6th grades can apply to be a part of the Lancer League, which are specialized service groups that meet regularly and are facilitated by staff sponsors. Lancer League provides the opportunity for students to grow in areas of interest including art, public speaking, and serving as the student Lighthouse Team. Students promote the 7 Habits through leading by example and by incorporating the language into their work. The Lancer League is comprised of Heralds (present weekly announcements to homerooms and celebrate birthdays), Knights (provide a student voice to the Lighthouse Team and work alongside teacher sponsors to select texts tied to the 7 Habits for the whole building to read and discuss monthly), Legacy (designs and teaches Morning Meeting lessons that promote positive peer relationships with a focus on being radically inclusive with an appreciation of diverse needs and talents), Parchment (writes and publishes the student-created school newspaper), Scribes (design and display character-driven bulletin boards and help make school goal tracking visible), and Squires (provide tours to guests and recognize guest speakers at special events). Special education students also serve on the Lancer League. This is a time for their genius to shine when they might otherwise find it challenging to shine socially or academically in specific subjects. There is an increased level of student ownership of core values as a result of the Lancer League. Intermediate students also have the opportunity to participate in safety patrol and greet students and parents in the carpool line. In addition to greeting guests during special events, the school is working to add a primary student group where even the youngest students can take on schoolwide leadership roles.

Outreach now encompasses a schoolwide approach where each grade level chooses and facilitates their own service projects. Last year, several 6th grade students presented administration with an idea for enacting a Food Fight drive to collect necessities and donate them to a nearby low-income school. They believed including everyone at MBE would maximize their collections. Student-initiated ideas have become a hallmark of the school's character develop success.

All stakeholders are integral parts of the evolving leadership transformation where everyone can be a leader. This includes students, teachers, support staff, and parents that help communicate, design and implement, and bring diverse perspective towards a common vision. There is evidence of unified, well-functioning teams of leaders that help to further the school's success by staying focused on decision-making that directly impacts student learning. At MBE, learners know that change starts with them and they have the capability to initiate outreach to others as a way to give back. The ability to adapt and change to the needs of the students is something the school is continuing to improve.

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

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The single practice that has been the most influential and instrumental in student outcomes and the school's success is the implementation of Leader in Me. The foundational component associated with being a Leader in Me school is ensuring that 100% of the Mountain Brook Elementary faculty and staff is trained in the 7 Habits. Teachers participate in ongoing training and reflection with a certified Franklin Covey coach focused on goal-setting, aligning academics, and empowering instruction. The school believes this training provides teachers the tools to effectively teach and implement the Leader In Me framework. School administrators put first things first by beginning the school year with a Brand Camp for all students and staff where they ensure a full understanding of expected behaviors to be followed throughout the year with examples of what these behaviors look and sound like. Through this experience, all members of the school community explore the 7 Habits in meaningful ways that promote ownership of learning and an intrinsic motivation to lead. Leader in Me provides a sound framework for maintaining a positive classroom and school environment that fosters character in every individual. Every morning, students are greeted by a plethora of smiling faces from students opening doors for car riders to teachers at morning stations welcoming students into the classroom. .

The first piece of the framework requires that the master schedule reflect Morning Meetings as the intentional time committed to leadership development. During this time, the classroom community is re-acquainted with the 7 Habits and apply these skills in greetings, team building activities, and discourse with peers. Students are taking leadership roles in both designing and facilitating these Morning Meetings alongside their teachers. Intermediate students use this time to mentor students in the primary grades. In fact, 6th grade students are utilized as role models for younger students by leading Morning Meeting sessions through the use of student-created games, activities, and role play experiences. Each class generates a mission statement focused on how they work as a community of leaders and learners. Parents periodically attend Morning Meetings, making them part of common language and strengthening the sense of community. When visitors enter the school they see the 7 Habits displayed on banners and embedded in student work. Faculty and staff incorporate this language throughout the day in classroom lessons and hallway interchanges. Morning Meetings have resulted in improved social and cultural practices that generalize across a variety of settings. This supports a cohesive culture focused on developing leadership principles that ultimately lead to exemplary academic success.

Because the school believes that reflection is an integral part of sustaining positive behaviors, teachers assist students as they set and reflect on academic goals. Teachers have embedded time during the school day in which they confer with students about tracking these goals, creating an action plan, and collecting evidence towards achieving identified goals. Each student can share goals digitally through Seesaw, an online portfolio that captures learning over time. This gives students a chance to provide and receive meaningful feedback from peers, teachers, and parents. Teachers revisit school and classroom goals and model goal tracking. Reflecting on learning goals creates a sense of ownership in their work and gives learners a sense of pride and self efficacy when goals are achieved. Student ownership in learning promotes intrinsic motivation that supports continuous self improvement. There is built-in accountability where students see goal tracking in progress, ways others achieve their goals, and how the 7 Habits help them develop leadership skills that directly impact their academic performance.

The Leader in Me process has drastically improved social-emotional, academic, and life skills for the members of the Mountain Brook Elementary school community. This five year journey has resulted in the core values now being visible throughout the entire school with a common language and commendable achievement results. Throughout the year, teachers continue to stay abreast of best practices by participating in school visits to observe effective strategies, attending the Leader In Me Symposium to network with other educators, reflecting on the impact of current online trends promoting digital citizenship, and engaging in ongoing conversations with the Leader In Me coaching community. MBE is committed to continuous improvement in the areas of both leading and learning which has resulted in the faculty and staff maintaining high levels of effectiveness that directly impacts students. Families of the school trust the staff to implement actions that result in improved learning outcomes for their children. The Lighthouse School

recognition received from Leader in Me demonstrates the school's ongoing commitment to developing student leaders who exhibit exemplary performance.