

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

Official School Name Austin Elementary School  
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 5435 Roberts Drive  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

Dunwoody GA 30338-3328  
City State Zip Code+4 (9 digits total)

County GA

Telephone (678) 874-8102  
Web site/URL

Fax

http://www.austines.dekalb.k12.ga.u  
s/

E-mail Ann\_Culbreath@dekalbschoolsga.org

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent\*Dr. R. Stephen Green  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other) E-mail RSGreen@dekalbschoolsga.org

District Name Dekalb County Tel. (678) 676-1200

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 Dr. Michael Erwin  
(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):
- 85 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 19 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 23 High schools
  - 4 K-12 schools
- 131 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>	8	14	22
<b>K</b>	55	49	104
<b>1</b>	58	68	126
<b>2</b>	55	65	120
<b>3</b>	49	55	104
<b>4</b>	52	37	89
<b>5</b>	39	38	77
<b>6</b>	0	0	0
<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>	316	326	642

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 25 % Asian
  - 3 % Black or African American
  - 6 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 62 % White
  - 4 % 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.

<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	29
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	63
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	92
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2016	673
(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: 9%  
57 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):  
Amharic, Bengali, Chinese, Dutch, English/Non-American, Gujarati, Hindi, Indonesian, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Other Asian, Portuguese, Spanish, Tamil, Teluga

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 2%  
 Total number students who qualify: 16

8. Students receiving special education services: 5 %  
31 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>5</u> Autism                  | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>7</u> Other Health Impaired                 |
| <u>3</u> Developmentally Delayed | <u>7</u> Specific Learning Disability          |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>20</u> Speech or Language Impairment        |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment      | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>0</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: 6
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.	31
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	16
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	4
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 21:1

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%	97%	97%	97%	97%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

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

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

Austin Elementary School, in partnership with staff, parents, and community, provides a safe, nurturing environment where challenging and creative teaching occurs utilizing state of the art resources. Individual learning needs will be met and students will develop into confident, productive members of society.

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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Located just north of Atlanta in suburban Dunwoody, Georgia, Austin Elementary is a traditional Pre-K through fifth grade neighborhood school that has been educating DeKalb County students since opening in 1975.

The Austin student population reflects the racial/ethnic composition of our area, with roughly 60% Caucasian, 25% Asian, and 15% representing a mixture of other races. We have a very low transiency rate of 13%, with many of these students withdrawing and returning after an extended trip to visit families internationally or renew visas.

While our 1975 open-classroom concept building may be old, our instructional practices are not. Austin's dedicated team of educators are committed to their ongoing growth and development in order to most effectively meet the diverse academic, social-emotional, physical, and cultural needs of our students.

A unique example of this is the fifth grade Immigration Project. This Ellis Island simulation incorporates writing, math, geography, civics, and health standards. Students research and create fictional immigrant personas that they enact while parent volunteers serve as Ellis Island inspectors. This experience broadens students' cultural and civic understanding of immigration and what it means to become a citizen of the United States while supporting their social-emotional growth.

We are fortunate to live near Atlanta, an urban center that attracts families from around the world. Our international families are an important, growing part of our community who enthusiastically embrace opportunities to share their culture. Our annual International STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) Celebration provides a cross-curricular culminating experience that has resulted in increased cultural awareness. Students adopt new perspectives as they think critically and creatively to address global environmental challenges. This community event showcases both student solutions and the traditions and culture of our international families. Other annual school-community traditions include Kindergarten Hurray-for-the-USA Performance, Second Grade Circus, and Fourth Grade Patriotic Performance.

An advantage of our family and community commitment to education is the amount of resources they provide. Our students benefit from the volunteers who donate their time, expertise, and physical/monetary resources through opportunities sponsored by our PTO.

Austin students benefit from the responsive leadership of our administrative team. Acknowledging the challenge of almost 30% of our school population being identified as gifted, our leadership team was prompted to re-evaluate our gifted education services. Previously gifted-identified students were served through a pull-out model of instruction in a single content area. As a way of benefiting not only our gifted students but also our large high-achieving population, we decided to adopt an advanced-content model that employs multiple means of differentiation for students of all levels in all subjects.

Students are prompted and encouraged to advance academically, not only through rigorous instruction, but also through self-reflection, personal goal-setting, and student-created progress tracking. By using the engineering design process as a problem-solving model, students gain confidence in analyzing failures and utilizing insights to reach goals and experience future success. As an AdvancED STEM certified school, we continually analyze our learning environments using the ELEOT rubric to ensure that all classes are equitable, supportive, well-managed, and provide high expectations for the use of digital tools in active learning with many opportunities for progress monitoring and feedback.

Students increase their social-emotional intelligence when they express care for others through projects like Pinwheels for Parkland, in which Austin recently partnered with two other local schools to send messages of hope and love to the students and staff of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. Students created pinwheels that were displayed around the perimeter of the school on the one-month remembrance of the tragedy. Each year Student Council members also lead and promote participation in a book swap, canned food drive, and Socks/Hats/Mittens tree to support fellow schools and the local community. PTO Spirit

Nights provide opportunities for the Austin community to create strong connections beyond the school day.

While our students' minds and hearts are growing, so are their bodies. Students engage in many activities that promote a healthy, active lifestyle. Daily unstructured breaks/recess, PTO-sponsored Walk to School events, and Farm to School experiences with our neighbor and partner, Dunwoody Nature Center, provide opportunities for students to develop habits that will help them grow physically. For the annual Eagle Bowl, music, art, and PE teachers collaborated to develop a football unit encompassing a wide range of cross-curricular standards. Fourth and fifth grade students organize teams, design logos, adopt mascots, and write and perform fight songs. The unit culminates with students participating in a single-elimination bracket tournament until one team wins the coveted 3D-printed trophy. Football players from the local high school officiate as the cheerleaders lead the parent, teacher, and student fans in rooting for their team.

The collaborative efforts of students, parents, teachers, and the community continue to positively impact student performance and academic growth. Under Georgia's Single Statewide Accountability System, Austin has earned the Greatest Gains Platinum Award in 2015 and 2016 and the Highest Performing Platinum Award in 2015, 2016, and 2017. This means Austin is not only one of the best schools in Georgia for performance, but that we are always striving to be better as we learn and grow.

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

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

Austin supports students in many ways as they progress towards mastery of the Georgia Standards of Excellence and develop into confident, productive members of society.

Reading and Language Arts standards focus on developing comprehension strategies through guided reading that allow students to examine grade-level literary and informational texts of suitable complexity and effectively respond and inquire with sound reasoning that is specific and relevant. They analyze passages to identify main idea/theme, determine impact of word choice/narrative voice, and understand character and plot development. Students use features of nonfiction to find information within resources and extract relevant information. They visualize, question, make connections, predict, infer, determine importance, and synthesize parts of knowledge into a whole. Our balanced literacy instruction follows a scaffolded approach to learning which utilizes the gradual release of responsibility and ultimately allows students to take ownership over their learning. During daily writing instruction, teachers utilize Units of Study developed by Dr. Lucy Calkins as a resource for planning their writer’s workshop model. Students engage in six-week units on a variety of genres including narrative, informational, and opinion writing. In addition to building a community of writers, our teachers also utilize writer’s workshop time to support our students in building key life skills such as self-reflection and communication.

Austin’s rigorous math instruction prepares students for the twenty-first century, with greater emphasis on problem-solving, reasoning, representation, connections, and community. Students gain a strong foundational understanding of number sense in the primary grades and progress to a more conceptual understanding as they become lifelong learners and problem-solvers. Fact Fluency is a school-wide daily focus that builds the mathematical foundation needed in order to apply higher-order thinking skills. Students practice math literacy independently and collaboratively by justifying their chosen problem-solving strategy and explaining their reasoning in multiple ways. Their appreciation of multiple solutions and “more than one right answer” grows as they demonstrate their understanding through the use of manipulatives, graphic organizers, models, technology, and real-world simulations. Interactive student journals monitor growth in math literacy, organize thinking, and assist in the exploration of new mathematical strategies.

Our science instruction engages students in raising questions about the world around them, exploring phenomena, making observations and answering questions, constructing meaningful models to gain understanding of the natural world, and investigating scientific concepts. Study is organized into three disciplines: Earth & Space Science, Physical Science, and Life Science. Core knowledge is integrated with the science and engineering practices needed to engage in scientific inquiry and engineering design. Students build knowledge not only through nonfiction text and academic vocabulary but also with hands-on experiments that provide real-world connections. Students practice working in scientific teams through standards-aligned choice boards and centers. Our curriculum includes creating circuits using household items, cultivating school gardens, lunar tracking, and celebrating students’ individual knowledge as Scientist of the Week. Younger students learn about habitats and classification of animals from older students through peer instruction. As students progress, they become more independent and assess their learning using rubrics and technology-based assessments. Students engage in cross-curricular projects on topics such as endangered species and the colonization of Mars, with evidence-based writing grounded in experiment results and nonfiction text. Through Austin’s Fernbank Science Center partnership, each grade level is provided standards-based enrichment.

Social Studies instruction engages students in examining history, geography, government, and economics through cross-curricular activities that build competency in information processing skills. Primary students build a solid foundation by identifying United States symbols, holidays, and important figures; exploring the diversity of American families; appreciating rules and positive character traits; understanding how maps and globes represent the world around them; using words and phrases related to chronology and time; and differentiating producers and consumers. Second grade students focus on our state of Georgia, while third through fifth graders investigate United States history in three segments: American Indian Cultures through

Colonization, Revolution to Reconstruction, and Industrialization to the Digital Age. Older students increase their map and globe reading skills while also evaluating how cultural and geographic systems are related. They examine the form and role of our government and the rights and responsibilities of citizens as outlined in founding documents. They grow their economic understandings by synthesizing information on supply/demand, opportunity cost, and productive resources to explore entrepreneurship.

Bright from the Start, our state-funded Georgia pre-K program, provides our students with instruction in foundational skills that support physical, social, and emotional development. Students also gain practice with fine and gross motor skills, communication, and language acquisition. Our pre-K students are introduced to foundational literacy skills with an emphasis on letter identification and letter sounds. Students also explore mathematical concepts through manipulatives to gain a basic understanding of number sense. Georgia pre-K standards are not only designed to progress with the students' developmental levels, but also aligns with the Georgia Kindergarten skills ensuring a seamless transition into the primary grades.

In all curriculum areas, our goal is to foster students' enduring understandings, encouraging their development into confident and competent learners.

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

To account for the broad range of human potential, Austin Elementary provides curriculum that allows students to demonstrate their multiple intelligences.

While in weekly art classes, Austin Kindergarten through fifth grade students explore different media and express their creativity. Our Art teacher works to maintain an encouraging space that fosters artistic vision and guides students through the creative process. Students receive hands-on experience in painting, collage, weaving, drawing techniques, and other art techniques that foster higher-level problem-solving. The art classroom library encourages students to explore a variety of artists and cultures through books and reading. Core subjects are regularly integrated as students create, present, and respond to art, connecting the world of art to other areas of learning and personal endeavors.

In weekly classes, kindergarten through fifth grade students are introduced to an engaging music curriculum that allows students to explore various instruments, discover details of music history, and join together to showcase their skills through ensemble performances. Austin students express themselves through music, lyrics, and kinesthetic movements. Fifth grade students also have the opportunity to elect Band instruction and collaborate with our Band teacher to perform for the fifth grade Academy Awards of Books, Walk to School Days, and International STEM Celebration. In addition, students in grades three through five participate in Honors Chorus performances.

Kindergarten through fifth grade students participate in Health and Physical Education (HPE) two days per week and learn through a variety of movement, locomotor, and manipulative activities. A key component is the promotion of good sportsmanship through team sport activities such as soccer, flag football, hockey, volleyball, and basketball. Students learn about important health concepts such as healthy eating, dental health, disease prevention, and school safety, as well as participating in annual Fitnessgram assessments. Students exhibit responsible personal and social behavior that respects self and others in physical activity settings. In addition to our HPE classes, additional opportunities for physical fitness occur through our Early Risers Club, After-School Yoga, and a minimum of twenty minutes of daily recess for all students. Our goal is for students to value physical activity for health, enjoyment, challenge, self-expression, and social interaction.

In 2016, Austin became an AdvancED STEM certified school. Our STEM program helps students work together to solve problems in the classroom and beyond. All students in second through fifth grades have weekly sessions in our STEM Lab, a specifically designed space to facilitate student collaboration in connecting engineering to standards they are learning in content classes. Each student has the opportunity to demonstrate their learning using Lego robotics, Sphero robots, 3D printing, Little Bits, Makey Makey, and computer programming. Second grade students study geometry by creating and printing their own models on our school's Makerbot Replicator Mini 3D printer. These unique designs give students a real-world

example of how two-dimensional shapes become three-dimensional. Fourth graders build Civil War telegraphs and communicate secret codes to their partners using Little Bits electronic building blocks. A Sphero robot becomes a tool for teaching U.S. History, as fifth graders create mobile, talking timelines detailing the events that shaped the twenty-first century. Makey Makey word problems make math computation interactive as third graders add touch, sound, and animation to story problems they write themselves. This school year, seeing a need for our younger students to strengthen their computer literacy skills, we added a technology rotation to our schedule for first graders. These students learn foundational computer science concepts such as keyboarding and coding. First grade students bring reading to life as they use coding to animate and retell their favorite stories. This aligns with our district's Digital Dreamers initiative and prepares students for the growing demands of the twenty-first century learning environment.

The mission of the Austin Library Media Center is to ensure that all students are effective users of ideas and information, as outlined in the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) Standards for Students. The certified librarian and teachers together facilitate lessons that integrate information literacy and technology skills into each content area and cross-curricular unit. These learning opportunities motivate student growth as empowered learners, digital citizens, knowledge constructors, innovative designers, computational thinkers, creative communicators, and global communicators. Austin students benefit from daily, flexible access to their school library and are encouraged to be active library patrons who independently check out books for reading and search online resources with point-of-need support. The library embraces the STEM culture by building on co-taught lessons with scaffolded opportunities for independent success (and the possibility of age-appropriate failure) within a supportive environment.

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

Austin uses multiple assessment data to determine a pathway for each student's success. We utilize several online personalized assessments that precisely measure student progress aligned to all content learning standards, including Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), IXL, and Moby Max. IXL and Moby Max are used daily to provide formative data that informs instruction and supports differentiation for each standard. MAP scores including Lexile levels and guided reading levels through the Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System (BAS) are generated in fall, winter, and spring. These personalized, independent reading levels are the cornerstone of our most influential instructional practice, our balanced literacy framework. Additional tools include common assessments such as math fluency tests, Georgia Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (GKIDS), Global Strategies Stages Assessment (GloSS), and math and reading Early Intervention Program (EIP) checklists.

This comprehensive data collection is used to determine instructional strengths and weaknesses during our building leadership team's year-end reflection, which identifies goals for the next school year. In the classroom, teachers synthesize assessment data to determine students' needs and form flexible, differentiated groups for guided reading and math, writer's workshop, and project- and problem-based learning; to plan targeted instruction; and to generate a learning continuum using multiple resources for instruction. Teachers employ differentiated centers/stations, choice board activities, and interest surveys to strengthen student voice in process and presentation.

Our Response to Intervention (RTI) process is multi-tiered and provides teachers and students with a variety of researched-based instructional strategies. All students begin in Tier 1. When students are identified for additional academic, social, or emotional support, they then enter our Tier 2 process called Kid Talks. On a monthly basis, grade levels meet with the RTI chair, principal, and counselor to analyze student performance data. The goal is to provide a systematic process for support of struggling students by providing interventions to ensure success. Students will return to Tier 1 when instructional goals are met, remain in Tier 2 if continued support is warranted, or move into Tier 3, Student Support Team (SST).

Our SST process provides students with intensified interventions. Our counselors, school psychologist, lead teacher for special education, teachers, and parents work collaboratively to identify a comprehensive plan for each student's success. Plans are re-evaluated monthly by the entire team to determine growth or additional needs. When necessary, students are provided additional testing to determine if they meet eligibility requirements for Tier 4, Special Education services.

We employ six models of intervention to meet individual student needs beyond Tier 1: EIP Resource, EIP Reduced Class Size, English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Advanced Content, Special Education Resource, and Special Education Co-Teaching.

Students who perform below grade level in math or reading and are identified for Tiers 2 or 3 are served through one of two EIP models. In the EIP resource model, intervention strategies prescribed by the RTI Team during Kid Talks occur in pull-out sessions with an EIP teacher as well as in the content area classroom. In some cases, the content area teacher serves identified students through the reduced class size EIP model. In both settings, students are in a smaller class with a highly-skilled teacher who can support students in the area of reading and/or math. Both models provide intensive instruction and monitor progress with the goal of students performing on grade level and exiting from EIP in 12-16 weeks.

Students in Kindergarten through fifth grade who qualify for ESOL, as identified by the WIDA language assessment, receive services in a pull-out resource model. The ESOL program assists students in developing and improving their English proficiency in the areas of listening comprehension and speech production, and guides students as they apply their receptive and active language skills to reading and writing.

Beginning in the 2017-18 school year, Austin implemented the advanced content model to serve our gifted-identified students. This model allows all students to engage in rigorous instruction in all content area classes with a gifted-certified teacher rather than receiving services in a single content area through a pull-out resource model. The benefits of this model include smaller class sizes, acceleration and rigor throughout the day, and differentiated instruction that addresses the needs of all students.

When a student is identified to receive Special Education services, they may be served through either a resource pull-out, co-teaching model, or a combination of the two. Eighty-eight percent of our special education students are instructed in a co-taught setting and are provided specialized instruction based on their individual education plan and required services while remaining in content area classes.

Our assessments, interventions, and instructional methods create individualized pathways to future student success in college and twenty-first century careers.

## PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

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

The mission of Austin Elementary is to provide a safe, nurturing environment where challenging and creative teaching occurs. From the moment they enter the front door, guests to our school observe a school that is warm, friendly, and bustling with activity as students engage in learning through collaboration and experimentation.

Many students arrive at Austin before the sun rises. Our students have a variety of opportunities to get their day off to a great start. Weekly tutoring sessions for reading and math support are offered by content area teachers. In the Austin Early Risers Club, students experience movement, dance, and Yoga to get their bodies stretched and their minds ready to learn.

Throughout the day, there are many opportunities for students to develop service leadership skills. Upper grade students support our balanced literacy framework by serving as Book Buddies for beginning readers in Kindergarten and first grade by modeling reading fluency and verbal expression, fostering a love of reading, and providing an authentic audience for younger students. Media Squad members support the media program by maintaining a welcoming library environment, ensuring that resources are organized, preparing common area technology devices, and helping students locate information. Safety Patrols model positive interactions by greeting and conversing with parents and students as they assist during arrival and dismissal. Student Council representatives communicate school-wide charitable initiatives and motivate students to participate.

When the school day ends, activities at Austin are far from over. Students participate in a variety of clubs such as Honors Chorus, Reading Bowl, and Lego Robotics. Using the engineering design process, students in the Austin Innovators Club create new products to solve real-world problems. Students showcase their inventions at competitions like the K-12 InVenture Challenge at Georgia Institute of Technology. In partnership with our school community and based on the needs of working families, we piloted a new after-school program this year. Austin's Awesome Aftercare supports students through homework assistance, interest-based clubs, and weekly STEM challenges.

Our leadership team understands that teachers are the most important factor in creating a positive and supportive learning environment where each student can reach his or her potential. Our administration cultivates a congenial atmosphere by valuing relationships, promoting trust, and sharing decision-making powers. Professional Learning Communities, staff celebrations, and Sunshine Club social events bring our faculty together as an extended family. Recognizing the hard work of Austin's teachers and in support of common planning time, our school leadership team secured funds to add four paraprofessionals. This instructional support lowers the student-teacher ratio in kindergarten, first grade, and Physical Education and also assists in meeting the needs of the library program. Our 96% retention rate indicates that our teachers feel valued and supported.

Austin's supportive and caring environment encourages teachers to be innovative facilitators and students to take academic risks and interact in positive social ways.

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

Austin is fortunate to be located in a community that values education. Parents and neighbors affirm the importance of education by enthusiastically supporting Austin's overall success while local community groups extend and enrich learning beyond school walls.

Austin's robust and committed Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO), plus the financial backing of the Austin Eagle Foundation, strengthen all aspects of student growth and fosters a sense of community. Parents serve as PTO committee chairs and members of the Foundation board and run for election to our Local School Advisory Council (LSAC) that includes business partners and community leaders as

members.

PTO coordinates volunteers to support learning initiatives within the classroom. Parents are eager to help students maintain school gardens, organize books in the library and leveled book room, or conduct school tours for prospective families. Parents and community members support College and Career Readiness initiatives by volunteering as Career Day speakers and exposing students to a plethora of professions.

In addition to PTO's volunteer efforts, the Austin Eagle Foundation provides financial support that allows a wide-range of enriching experiences. Budgets are allocated to all classroom teachers and instructional departments. The Foundation also funds specific needs, such as the recent purchase of ninety Chromebooks to create a 1:1 distribution in upper grades.

PTO-Foundation sponsored fundraising events bring the community together. Spirit Nights, in which Austin families patronize a local restaurant who has agreed to donate a portion of the evening's sales, provide an opportunity for families to socialize. The annual Dunwoody Dash gathers the community for a 5K race and one-mile fun run. Bi-yearly book fairs stimulate conversations about favorite authors and illustrators, foster a love of reading, and present new book choices for all ages.

Back-to-School Curriculum Nights provide parents an opportunity to gather information about grade level standards and classroom procedures, while Volunteer Rallies allow parents to explore opportunities within various PTO committees.

Our community provides an authentic audience for student performances. Presentations such as the Academy Awards of Books, Second Grade Circus, and Patriot Picnic encourage students to engage with friends, parents, and neighbors. The Dunwoody City Map cross-curricular project, in which students create coordinate grid maps of important civic locations and communicate ideas and reasoning for future development, are shared with city government officials. Students participate in (and win!) community-sponsored engineering, art, and writing competitions. Our next-door neighbor and partner, Dunwoody Nature Center, extends learning from our backyard to theirs.

Austin's faculty and PTO work together to ensure that all stakeholders are aware of the opportunities at our school and our students' achievements. District, school, and teacher websites, personal and automated emails and phone calls, class Shutterfly accounts, electronic newsletters, and platforms like Seesaw, Remind, and Class Dojo, and weekly Thursday Information Packets (TIP) facilitate communication. Special Friends Days provide grade-level opportunities for students to showcase what they have learned to invited guests. Parents are provided detailed feedback on student achievement through access to online parent portal and regularly scheduled conferences.

Continued collaboration among our school, Austin Eagle Foundation-PTO, and the local community will ensure the academic success and life skills development of our students.

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

Collaboration, teamwork, critical thinking, and problem-solving are all skills that will prepare our students as contributing members of our society and global community. One of the ways our teachers prepare to meet these needs is through ongoing job-embedded professional learning.

Austin's teachers engage in professional learning communities (PLC) throughout the year. As with our students, we encourage staff members to be reflective of their areas for growth and development. Each faculty member self-selects a PLC based on their individual SMART goals (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, time-bound). This element of choice results in a staff that is invested and committed as a community of learners.

Teachers commit to their chosen PLC for a minimum of two years in order to have the time needed to become a cohesive team. Members of our PLC's represent each grade level, content area, and special area throughout the building allowing for vertical planning that positively impacts the school as a whole.

This year's PLC's are Project-Based Math, STEM, Guided Reading, Cross-curricular Integration, and Gifted Education. During monthly PLC meetings, our teachers engage in book studies, unpack standards, and disaggregate relevant data as they develop goals for the PLC. These goals focus teacher learning on the areas identified as most important for impacting student achievement.

Austin's instructional team believes in meeting the varied needs of all students in our learning community. With a large gifted population, the administrative team has encouraged and supported teachers who are not yet gifted certified to pursue the endorsement. This professional development opportunity benefits all our students by enabling teachers to effectively increase rigor and boost student achievement by implementing instructional techniques focused on creative and critical thinking skills.

Additional professional development classes are offered throughout the year by our school district. Austin's teachers take full advantage of these opportunities as well as a variety of workshops and classes offered regionally. Workshop attendees share their learning with colleagues by presenting relevant information to all staff during monthly in-house professional learning sessions.

Austin's teachers are first and foremost a community of learners. Their commitment to continued growth results in academic success for our students as we prepare them to meet the ever-changing demands of our world.

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

Austin has an experienced administrative team that demonstrates a commitment to shared leadership. As the building leader, the principal sets the tone and vision for learning. The leadership team exhibits an atmosphere of professionalism, sets high expectations, and provides opportunities for leadership among the staff. The team consists of our principal, an assistant principal, two counselors, a literacy coach, and a lead teacher for special education.

The principal embraces our school's motto "TEAM...Together Everyone Achieves More" and fosters relationships with the community through our Building Leadership Team (BLT), PTO, Foundation, and Local School Advisory Council (LSAC). In addition, the principal collaborates with teacher-leaders to recruit new faculty and provide engaging professional learning.

Our BLT consists of grade chairs, special area teachers, and our administration. The BLT meets monthly and on an as-needed basis. They participate in shared decision-making. Topics addressed include safety, student needs, student achievement, and school-wide improvement goals. Representatives ask questions, garner clarifications, and discuss concerns. The teacher leaders disseminate information from these monthly meetings to their teams. The BLT also meets over the summer to reflect on our school improvement plan and look at our school's data to identify our successes and plan for the following school year.

The assistant principal, along with the principal and literacy coach, is responsible for monitoring and supporting implementation of the curriculum and teacher observations and evaluations. The assistant principal also oversees scheduling, grading, school-wide discipline, textbook distribution, and standardized testing.

Our two guidance counselors provide weekly classroom guidance lessons to model positive social interactions and emotion management. They address specific identified needs through individual counseling, grief-crisis intervention, and creative programs like Lunch Bunch. These affectionately named, counselor-led small group sessions during lunch include topics such as making good choices, friendship, test-taking and other social skills. They work with students' academic needs through the implementation of RTI, SST, and 504 plans. In addition, the counselors are responsible for coordinating Career Day, providing specialized programs, such as Junior Achievement, and overseeing the implementation of Austin's Lifeguard League, a mentoring program that focuses on helping students who struggle academically.

The lead teacher of special education (LTSE) oversees the Special Education Department. She has an extensive background in special education processes, procedures, law, and working with students with a variety of exceptionalities. The LTSE is responsible for ensuring IEP compliance, mentoring and assisting special education teachers, writing eligibilities, coordinating Extended School Year program, and guiding the team through the referral process.

Our literacy coach is an experienced reading/English language arts content expert. She is instrumental in providing professional learning to all teachers, supporting, coaching, and training as we implement our balanced literacy framework. She is also responsible for coordinating and implementing our professional learning communities.

Our experienced, cohesive leadership team aligns our focus on student achievement and empowers stakeholders to set and reach goals for success.

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

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We recognize the critical importance of reading and writing as foundational skills that support success in all content areas. Each spring since 1996, the year we first implemented a balanced literacy framework, the value placed on quality literacy instruction is demonstrated through scheduling decisions, staffing selections, and budget allocations for the next school year.

The key components of our balanced literacy model include a focus on an effective assessment program, research-based instructional practices, ongoing professional development, and access to a wide range of instructional materials.

Our comprehensive assessment system includes the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System, which is conducted three times annually to provide diagnostic and formative data. Tests are administered individually and provide the teacher with specific information on each student's reading, writing, and problem-solving behaviors when encountering unfamiliar text. This data is then utilized by the teacher to form small groups and plan targeted instruction to address needs.

All newly hired teachers commit to thirty hours of intensive training on the components of balanced literacy including observations and ongoing help from the literacy coach. Support is available for new and veteran teachers through ongoing staff development opportunities, coaching and modeling of lessons, and frequent feedback. The consistent implementation of this schoolwide instructional model provides teachers and students with a common language and uniform expectations. The school's master schedule is designed to maximize instructional time for implementation of the workshop model with fidelity.

Daily reading and writing instruction includes a standards-based mini-lesson, small group guided reading instruction in which students are paired with a text at their instructional level, and opportunities to practice skills in differentiated stations. Student-led conferences with the teacher provide timely feedback on performance as well as the opportunity to set goals for future growth. During share time, students build their leadership and verbal skills as they provide meaningful feedback to their peers by making relevant real-world connections.

The home-school connection is a powerful tool that is leveraged to support our students as they grow to become strong readers and writers. Throughout the year, teachers provide parents with engaging strategies to support their child's reading and writing development beyond the school day.

Teachers have access to a robust library of books for guided reading or literature circles. Each year the principal prioritizes funding for the addition of new books so that the guided reading library provides thousands of options for students based on their reading level and interest.

For over twenty years, a balanced literacy framework has been the single most influential practice in Austin's success. Our students' comprehension scores and love for reading grow significantly each year while also positively impacting student performance in all areas. The implementation of a balanced literacy framework equips students with the essential skills and depth of knowledge to be prepared for college, ready for yet-to-be-discovered careers, and productive in an ever-changing global community.