



## 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. 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, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
2. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2019 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.
3. 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.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2013 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, or 2018.
6. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. If irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state, the U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school’s application and/or rescind a school’s award.
7. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as “persistently dangerous” within the last two years.
8. 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.
9. 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.
10. 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.
11. 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 (2018-2019) unless otherwise stated.

### DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
  - 20 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 3 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 2 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools

25 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, 2018 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	17	17	34
K	23	18	41
1	32	20	52
2	29	26	55
3	20	22	42
4	27	17	44
5	18	8	26
6	15	16	31
7	6	10	16
8	8	10	18
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	195	164	359

\*Schools that house PreK programs should count preschool students **only** if the school administration is responsible for the program.

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 3 % Asian
  - 10 % Black or African American
  - 12 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 60 % White
  - 15 % 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 2017 – 2018 school year: 20%

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

Because Maxwell Elementary/Middle School is on an Air Force Base, our student population is highly transient. This is due, in part, to the unique mission of Air University. Many of our parents come to Maxwell for courses that last just 10 months, the duration of one school year.

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, 2017 until the end of the 2017-2018 school year	25
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2017 until the end of the 2017-2018 school year	39
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	64
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2017	317
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.20
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	20

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 3%  
10 Total number ELL

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 11%  
Total number students who qualify: 38

8. Students receiving special education services: 17 %  
61 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>8</u> Autism                  | <u>10</u> Multiple Disabilities                |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>12</u> Other Health Impaired                |
| <u>5</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>7</u> Specific Learning Disability          |
| <u>2</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>17</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: 4
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	21
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	14
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	11
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	6

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>	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014
Daily student attendance	96%	96%	96%	95%	95%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

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

Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2018.

<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.

Educate, Engage, and Empower military-connected students to succeed in a dynamic world.

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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Maxwell Elementary/middle School (MEMS), a Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) school, was established in 1963 in Montgomery, Alabama. Since its inception, the school has provided superior education for pre-Kindergarten through fifth grade children of United States military personnel living on Maxwell Air Force Base (AFB). The middle school, sixth through eighth grade, was added in July 2011.

We have the honor and privilege to teach students whose parents serve our country. However, with military service comes a unique set of challenges. Our parents are frequently deployed for extended periods of time. This takes a toll on our students who might not see a parent for months. Military life also means having to relocate frequently. Our student population is highly transient; approximately 20 percent of our student population moves during the year and more depart at the end of the school year. This is due, in part, to the unique mission of Air University. Many of our parents come to Maxwell for courses that last just 10 months, the duration of one school year. This presents a significant challenge to our families and the school.

MEMS has experienced many changes in recent years, particularly an increase in the special education population. The school has two mild to moderate teachers, a self-contained classroom for moderate to severe learning impaired students, and a separate classroom for emotionally impaired students. In addition, a preschool for children with disabilities (PSCD) serves identified three and four-year-old students. MEMS also has a full time school psychologist, occupational therapist, physical therapist, a part-time speech and language pathologist, and a teacher of English as a second or other language (ESOL).

Over the past four years, we have implemented the DoDEA College and Career Ready Standards (CCRS) in math, ELA (English Language Arts), science, social studies and fine arts. Changes in standards required paradigm shifts and new instructional practices in the classroom. In support of the new standards, new curricular resources and assessments were adopted. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) meet daily to plan collaboratively using common planning tools based on High-Leverage Team Actions. Our grade level PLCs clearly identify what we want our students to know and be able to do and we take actions to ensure all students are learning. Kindergarten through fifth grade classes have daily English language arts and math blocks that help maximize instructional time. In addition to the dedicated blocks of instructional time, they also have in intervention and enrichment period. Middle school grades have added a differentiated advisory period. We pay for all eighth grade students to take the PSAT as a benchmark to assess their college and career readiness. Students across all grade levels receive Response to Intervention (RTI) as needed to ensure their needs are being met.

Middle school athletics was implemented in 2014-2015. Now in its fourth year, the athletics program has grown to offer coed cross-country, girls' volleyball, boys' basketball, and coed soccer for grades 6-8. The school was also chosen to become a DoDEA STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math) school. As a result, the school has implemented project-based learning throughout the school, including a STEAMposium in April every year. Maxwell's First Lego League team has won several regional competitions and participated in the State competition multiple times. One team made it to International competition!

Future plans for MEMS include continuing to refine the role of Professional Learning Communities, one of our school-wide goals. We continue to hone our collaborative backward design process, how teachers look at student work to differentiate instruction as well as create common homework, grading protocols and curricular activities across grade levels. MEMS is also awaiting the completion of a new 21st Century Facility. While the new building will provide some changes in logistics, we are making necessary cultural and instructional shifts prior to the move in order to help ensure a smooth transition. The new building will provide a 21st century environment that supports student collaboration, integration of technology across the curriculum, and integrated cross-curricular project-based learning.

With so much transition among teachers, staff, and students, MEMS collaboratively adopted a new vision, mission, and core values at the beginning of the 2018-2019 school year. These were collaboratively adopted

to support part of our school-wide organizational goal. Our vision of Focusing on Excellence in Education for Every Student, Every Day, Everywhere has helped to align the school with the direction of the organization. The vision, mission, and values help to drive all of the decisions that we make at the school, from what we purchase to how we teach.

We know that we have an amazing school. Nevertheless, we are committed to making it better and to improving our professional practices. We take continuous school improvement very seriously at MEMS. As mentioned previously, we have organizational goals regarding institutionalizing our mission and vision. Our climate goal involves providing more support to teachers through collaboration, volunteers, and improved workflows. Most importantly, we have two overarching academic goals to improve math and literacy. Every grade level has a specific goal as well as unit goals. We want to provide the best education possible for our students. As one of our values states: Students are the heart of all we do!

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

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

#### **1a. Reading/English language arts:**

Language arts for MEMS students in grades pre-K-8 is centered on a balanced literacy approach to reading, writing, language, speaking, and listening. College and Career Ready Standards are addressed through a standards-based curriculum. Students are engaged using a variety of language arts formats, ranging from traditional print to electronic iterations. The curricular materials for pre-K-8 use a thematic approach and incorporate fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and media analysis.

Elementary teachers incorporate research-based strategies from *The Core Six: Essential Strategies for Achieving Excellence* in “Reading for Meaning.” Guided reading is the foundation of the reading program for students in grades K-5. The literacy block includes whole group and differentiated small group guided reading instruction as well as tiered independent literacy stations. Middle school teachers incorporate research-based strategies from *The Core Six: Essential Strategies for Achieving Excellence* to reinforce writing and literacy skills across content areas through whole class and small group instruction. All students and teachers use technology daily, with devices such as listening stations, laptops, and Smart Boards to meet literacy standards.

Professional Learning Communities, consisting of grade level teachers and specialists, meet on a daily basis. Teachers share best practices, analyze student assessment data, and create a common planning tool in order to differentiate lessons and meet student needs. The Benchmark Assessment System (BAS), Scholastic Reading Inventory, and unit assessments are used to monitor student reading growth throughout the year. Spelling and writing assessments are used to ensure students are meeting grade level standards. Teachers use a common planning tool to provide scope and sequence and consistency across grade levels and content areas to ensure equity for all students. Balanced Literacy Walkthroughs are completed frequently by the principal and district literacy instructional specialists to ensure fidelity of curricular implementations.

#### **1b. Mathematics:**

The goal of the MEMS mathematics program is to offer a balanced curriculum that includes hands-on learning, problem solving, mathematical discourse, conceptual development, and procedural skills practice organized by following content progressions and Standards for Mathematical Practice. This is accomplished through an instructional sequence focused on the ability to reason and think mathematically. Teachers backward design units of instruction based on College and Career Ready Standards for Mathematics. They identify effective learning strategies, provide ongoing assessment of student progress, and use data to differentiate instruction. Teachers create technology-rich classrooms as a powerful way to differentiate learning, effectively helping students in mixed-ability classrooms.

Teachers often introduce concepts through discussion and reflection. Students build understanding through experience, discussion, justifying, and reflection, while the teacher facilitates by questioning and making connections. We place emphasis on understanding concepts rather than arriving at a correct answer. Procedural skill and fluency is another approach taken by the school, in addition to application.

In grades K-5, mathematics is centered on student learning and the ability to reason and think mathematically. Curriculum standards, effective instructional strategies, and the ongoing assessment of student progress are essential components of the DoDEA comprehensive mathematics program.

In the middle school, we focus on problem solving and the application of mathematical concepts. Concepts and skills are developed through a rigorous and coherent progressions of understanding. Technology such as Schoology and the Community of Practices are used to enhance the teaching and learning of mathematics. Students who enroll in Math 8/Algebra 1 in middle school, can receive high school credit.

All classrooms at the school use the 20/60/20 model to address the learning standards. The first 20 percent of math instruction is used to establish the purpose of the lesson. The next 60 percent constitutes the work session, where students are engaged in workstations and direct modeling from the classroom teacher with a small group. The last 20 percent is the closing, which builds toward an exit activity or formative assessment, the intent of which is to determine student readiness to move on.

### **1c. Science:**

While we have always had a fairly robust science and STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math) focus at Maxwell Elementary/middle School, the recent adoption of the College and Career Ready Standards for Science (CCRSS) and new curricular materials has helped propel us further along. The standards have caused a change in the way we teach science because the goal is to provide students with experiences that will form the foundation for continued learning about science and will help advance their understanding of the world.

Teachers are implementing the science standards through the Full Option Science System (FOSS) curriculum which includes many more hands-on experiences for students and keeps them engaged in real world problem solving, using the engineering design process. One of the things that we have really enjoyed about FOSS is helping students to think and act like scientists. The new literacy standards have also impacted instruction as students are reading more non-fiction science related texts as well as writing and recording scientific observations. The shift from learning about science to doing science has been great for teachers and students alike.

Data is collected using beginning of the year and end of year test data, quarterly tests, and rubrics to provide support. Teachers in both elementary and middle science use assessment data to provide excellent instruction to students. The teachers use PLC time to effectively plan and collaborate on lessons, review data, differentiate instruction, and progress monitor students.

MEMS students also participate in a school-wide Project-Based Learning (PBL) project using the Engineering and Design Process (EDP) to solve school and community problems. By grade level, with a team of teachers, students are given a problem and challenged to come up with a workable solution to the problem. MEMS Middle School projects include Maxwell Wellness Solutions to Encourage Movement and Water Contamination and Filtration to solve selected countries' water pollution problems.

### **1d. Social studies/history/civic learning and engagement**

At all levels, the social studies curriculum is structured around the growth and development of good citizens. Emphasis is also placed on developing literacy skills through the use of historical content at all grade levels. Students are regularly required to use a variety of literacy skills, such as close reading, studying graphics and diagrams, analyzing multimedia, and examining political cartoons. The curricular focus is on fostering the growth and development of citizens who are prepared for global challenges while maintaining their roots within their local communities through civil responsibility.

In grade levels K-5, social studies standards are integrated within the Benchmark Assessment Reading System which provides a framework for learning about citizenship, economics, government, history, and geography. Middle school students take History of the Eastern Hemisphere (6th grade), US History I from the colonial period to the Civil War (7th grade), and US History II (8th grade) from Reconstruction to the present.

Rigorous, differentiated instruction is evident in activities which include integrated leveled reading, writing, along with speaking and listening opportunities. Large and small group collaboration provides students with the opportunity to research, plan and share in discussions and projects with diverse partners, building on others ideas and expressing their own. Instructional teaching and responsive decisions are based on ongoing assessments such as teacher observation, rubrics, projects, plays and digital means. Technology is used to assess student performance, to conduct research, to collaborate, and to present original work.

### **1e. For secondary schools:**

Although not a high school, our school programs support college and career readiness in two primary areas: Rigor and STEAM. All of our classes have an extremely high level of rigor, starting in pre-K. Our students can communicate what we expect them to know and be able to do. Using student language, they can describe what the standards ask of them. Our school is also infused with STEAM. The engineering design process is used in project-based learning from pre-K-8th grade. Beginning in kindergarten, students learn the basics of programming with Beebots. Middle school students are able to continue programming as an elective. Our students work with 3D printers and robots. We have an award winning Lego Robotics team.

### **1f. For schools that offer preschool for three- and four-year old students:**

Preschool at MEMS is offered in two half-day sessions in which four-year-olds are encouraged to explore, investigate, and respond to a variety of materials using a hands-on, interactive, interest-based approach. Creative Curriculum provides the basis for the preschool instructional program. DoDEA standards are embedded in centers where children experience various activities, including block building, dramatic play, picture books, art materials, music and movement. Assessment is ongoing, authentic and is used for the purpose of planning, addressing individual children's needs and monitoring progress. Preschool teachers meet together regularly as a Professional Learning Community to ensure alignment of standards and instructional practices. According to kindergarten teachers, students who have had a preschool experience tend to have future social, emotional, and academic success.

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

Co-curricular learning opportunities at MEMS include art, PE, health, music, and Spanish, taught as classes for students in grades K-8 by a dedicated specialist. Technology and library skills are also supported by dedicated professionals.

Every K-5 classroom at Maxwell has a computer center and a Smart Board, which are used to teach a standards-based curriculum using both commercial programs and teacher-created activities. K-5 students use classroom technology and two computer labs to create, produce, and publish works, assess learning, and reinforce curricular skills. Daily, middle school students use laptops, available on a 1-to-1 basis in their classrooms. Writing, researching, manipulating data, etc. are skills developed using technology in curricular areas. The school's educational technologist works with teachers to ensure they have the tech skills necessary to support students. In some form, coding is taught at every grade level. In addition, interested students can participate in one of three technology extracurricular activities.

Spanish Levels I and II are offered as an elective for high school credit to students in grades 7-8. Spanish is taught to all K-5 students on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. The elementary curriculum consists of thematic units with standards, assessments and resources for instruction. Ninety percent of the class is taught in the target language, and performance assessments are administered to guide instruction. The Spanish teacher collaborates with classroom teachers and other specialist teachers to integrate content of other subjects.

Serving students from pre-K through 8th grade, two PE teachers provide physical education instruction in 45 minute increments. Striving to educate the whole child, physically, academically and emotionally, the physical education program provides vigorous activities ranging from dance to fitness programs. With a goal of developing skills for lifelong health and fitness, age appropriate skills and activities are included in the curriculum. The SPARK Curriculum program is utilized to provide differentiated physical education instruction that supports all student populations. Fitnessgram and Personal Best assessments are used to evaluate fitness and skill levels. Student health and wellness, also supported by the school nurse and Wellness Committee, are a part of the school culture. The driving question for this year's 7th grade STEM project was "How can we promote Wellness at MEMS by getting students moving throughout the day?" Students created brain break games and sensory pathways in the hallways to promote extra movement for all students throughout the school day.

lessons are framed by artistic literacy and artistic processes, articulated as anchor and performance standards. The connective threads of this conceptual framework are designed to be understood by all stakeholders and ultimately, to ensure success for students.

The MEMS music program provides beginning band instruction as an elective for students in grades 7 and 8. Through a combination of individual lessons and group practice sessions, students prepare for 2-3 public performances each year as well as providing music for schoolwide events such as the Read Across America assembly. K-5 students receive 45 minutes of music a week, during which time they experience a combination of vocal music instruction, music theory, and music history.

The MEMS Information Center provides space, materials, and instruction for both recreational reading and curricular research. Pre-K through 8 grade students visit the Information Center weekly with their classes. Time is provided during the academic day for students to come to the Information Center individually or in small groups to exchange books, research, or read. In addition to print materials, MEMS offers a wide variety of eBooks and online databases that can be accessed either on the school network or at home. The Information Specialist is available to collaborate with classroom teachers and/or the Educational Technologist to provide instruction in research, documentation, and organization on an as-needed basis. MEMS parents are invited to establish parent Information Center accounts and to check out books to read at home with their children.

### **3. Special Populations:**

Maxwell Elementary/middle School adheres to the fundamental belief that ALL students will be successful. Support specialists and special education teachers work collaboratively with general educators. Together, they share the responsibility for ensuring success for students who have a wide range of individualized needs.

The MEMS Special Education Team provides programs to all students who fall under the fourteen categories of disabilities as outlined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Our team is comprised of specialists certified in developmental delay, emotional impairments, intellectual impairments, learning impairments, and speech language impairments. MEMS is fortunate to have additional services offered from the occupational therapist, physical therapist and school psychologist.

Decisions regarding special education services to be provided and the provision of such services are based on a student's individual need. Students with disabilities are educated in the least restrictive environment from full participation in the general education classroom, co-teaching and inclusion in the regular education classroom, part-time resource classrooms or self-contained programs. It is the expectation that all students have access to the DoDEA College and Career Ready Standards and are supported to achieve the goals and objectives in their individualized plans.

The gifted program is committed to the belief that gifted potential should be identified in all student populations grades K-5, particularly among underrepresented groups. Designed to provide challenging experiences that build on the identified individual strengths, we offer a continuum of services. Through Level I service, all K-5 students receive "Critical and Creative Thinking Lessons." Levels II through IV incorporate cluster grouping, cross grade grouping, content or grade acceleration, academic extensions, and quarterly advanced academic units. The gifted resource teacher collaborates with classroom teachers to assist with differentiation for advanced students.

MEMS offers outstanding reading support to students in grades K-5. Our Tier III reading interventions include Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI) for students in grades K-3 and Read 180 Next Generation for students in grades 4-5. Qualifying students receive daily, small group intervention with our reading specialist. The LLI program is an intense 10 week program. Because of the high fidelity of implementation, many students are exited from the program having achieved grade level standards. These successes allow additional students to receive support throughout the year. Although Read 180 is a yearlong program, we have experienced similar success and have exited multiple students as they achieve proficiency.

Math Support is also offered to all students in grades 1-5 by a math interventionist. Potential strugglers are identified at the start of the school year with a prerequisite skills inventory administered to students scoring below proficient on the end of year assessment and to new students. Throughout the year, students receive push-in support and pull-out math support, depending on the level of needed intervention. Additionally, the initial data from the prerequisite skills inventory is used to prepare standards-based reteach packets for students and parents. All students that return the completed reteach packets are re-tested before the end of the first nine weeks. While a major undertaking, we saw tremendous growth in all of our students.

Due to the nature of the base, we also have to pay particular attention to our transient students. No matter when they arrive, students are assessed in reading and math. Based on the data, they are grouped within their classrooms accordingly. Students who need additional support first receive it through Tier two interventions from the classroom teacher. They will also be supported by the classroom teacher through guided reading and guided math. Students who continue to struggle are quickly guided to other support programs at our school such as the Student Support Team or the Case Study Committee. We also have a strong counseling department who help students transition in and out of MEMS.

We have made purposeful decisions to improve our special programs and will continue to hone them. At MEMS, we truly are trying to provide “Excellence in Education, for Every Student, Every Day, Everywhere.”

## PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

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### 1. School Climate/Culture:

Maxwell Elementary/middle School is located at Maxwell Air Force Base. The majority of MEMS parents are active duty Air Force enlisted personnel or officers. In addition, many staff members have military connections, either as veterans or spouses of military members. The school has a high turnover rate. Many families move to new duty stations every 1-4 years. It is helpful for students to be among peers who also move frequently; they tend to easily welcome new students.

To support positive emotional growth for students, the school counselor and Military Family Life Counselor (MFLC) meet with students who need transition support when they enroll at a new school, when a parent is deployed, or when there are family concerns. They offer specialized programs such as The 7 Habits of Healthy Kids, Girl Talk, and The Kindness Project. A full time school psychologist and school nurse are available to also provide emotional support for students as well as the classroom teacher.

Student social and physical wellbeing are supported through the efforts of teachers, teaching assistants, coaches, the school nurse, a wellness committee, and occupational and physical therapists, many of whom sponsor before or after school programs. These activities include Morning Math Skills, FIRST Lego League robotics, Jr. Lego League, Technology Club, Homework Club, Book Club, Art Club, National Junior Honor Society, Soccer, Basketball, Cross Country, and Volleyball. Student achievement, both academic and interpersonal, is recognized with the Eagle Bucks program, as well as grade band Honors Assemblies throughout the academic year.

Positive health practices are taught through the health/PE curriculum as well as the Puberty Program, Dental Health Presentations, second grade Bike Safety program and a hallway TV monitor that displays slides depicting the positive effects of exercise and good nutrition. The Recess Before Lunch program was initiated in response to studies that show a reduction in behavior problems and injuries on the playground along with decreased food and milk waste when free play is scheduled prior to lunch: as students are more hungry and thirsty after playing and are more settled when they return to the classroom after lunch.

At Maxwell, we maximize our resources to support teachers' needs and try to ease their burdens. As frequently as possible, teachers are given time back to work on things that are valuable to their programs and students. Educational aides are assigned to each team to support with any work needed. The PTA also has an established system to help with copying, cutting and preparing materials for teachers. Our leadership team recognizes that there is wisdom spread throughout the school. Teachers are regularly encouraged to share ideas and concerns with team members or to visit with the principal, who maintains an open door policy. After each professional training, we seek feedback from all participants through our electronic exit tickets. All of our meetings start with celebrations of the great work that our teachers do.

### 2. Engaging Families and Community:

Maxwell Elementary/middle School continuously strives to build and strengthen the bond between home, community and the school. Dedicated parents support the school's mission despite short military tours to Maxwell AFB, which leave many families in attendance for only one academic year. At MEMS, this goal is achieved with a focus on service, academics, and communication.

Maxwell EMS is proud that all stakeholders take an active role in the learning community. Every year, parents and teachers are eager to join the Parent Teacher Association to better support learners. This year 100% of staff members joined the PTA and more than 100 participants were involved with various activities and events. During this academic year, the PTA has supported MEMS students by providing funds for the Auburn's 4H Research Center presentation during STEAM week, purchasing break out boxes and subscriptions to educational websites, tuning school pianos, and supporting teachers with classroom expenses. PTA volunteers have also sponsored events such as the Scholastic Book Fair, Holiday Shop, Monthly Spirit Days, Picture Day, Month of the Military Child events, and Field Day. Service to students,

teachers and families is the main focus of our local school board. Parents serving on the board and meet monthly with school administration. Meetings are open to all stakeholders.

Communication is key to any successful program. At Maxwell, several avenues are used to communicate with stakeholders, including email, phone calls, class newsletters, the school website, and the Principal's Perspective monthly newsletter. A Sneak-A-Peek night welcomes students to a new school year and an Open House night provides insight into curriculum and classroom instruction. During the year parents are invited to chaperone field trips and work in classrooms. Two musical programs, one scheduled before winter break and another during the spring, highlight student performance. Stakeholders are invited to assemblies, including a Veterans' Day program, Dental Health Month assembly, and STEAM presentations.

Several community events occur during the span of the school year. STEAM week is scheduled each spring, when families, community members and stakeholders are welcome to observe and participate in project based learning presentations. Read Across America in March honors Dr. Seuss, and holidays and achievements are marked with invited guests in the classroom. A middle school sports program at Maxwell allows students to compete in volleyball, basketball, soccer, and cross country. Maxwell boasts one of the best First Lego Leagues in the district, making it to state competition in 2018!

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

At Maxwell Elementary/middle School (MEMS), professional learning is driven by needs assessed at both district and school levels. Sessions are planned by combining data with best practices. In addition to system-wide trainings that occur throughout the year, we are also fortunate to have early release time every Tuesday that is dedicated to differentiated professional learning for our staff.

Some professional learning is provided through our District Instructional Support Specialists (ISS). They primarily support system initiatives such as quarterly training on College and Career Ready Standards for areas such as fine arts, math and literacy. They have also supported other initiatives such as the new DoDEA Summative Assessment. While many professional learning opportunities are face to face, we use technology to bridge the geographic gap that distance creates in our district.

Some training is a collaborative effort, such as in the case of math. Initial training was offered by the district ISS which included developing a common understanding of the new standards for mathematics and gaining a strong working knowledge of the standards' effects on teaching and learning. Our Math Support Specialist co-taught later trainings that involved sessions on rigor, coherence, and focus. Gradually, the training came down to the classroom level as our math specialist worked with grade level teams of teachers who collaboratively planned units of instruction using a backward design model.

Our weekly early release trainings are primarily managed by our School Leadership Team. They are based on data gleaned from exit tickets submitted by teachers. Weekly professional learning may be offered by a member of the leadership team, a school specialist, or a teacher willing to share a particular strength.

There have been several threads of training this year. Professional Learning Community topics have included using data to differentiate instruction and creating common assessments. Climate and culture topics have included the adoption of our new fundamental beliefs and team building. Literacy trainings have included Vocabulary's Code and Guided Reading. Math professional learning has included best practices for the 20-60-20 model of instruction and best practices in Response to Intervention. Technology topics have included the implementation of Schoology as a digital learning platform and how to effectively use Google Apps in education.

At MEMS, we have strong teachers who are both willing to share and to learn. We have created a climate in which teachers feel comfortable experimenting with new techniques, strategies or technology. Sometimes, we are met with amazing success. At other times, we experience glorious failures. We are, however, always willing to learn and make changes that will benefit students.

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

Maxwell Elementary/middle School has approximately 370 students from preschool to eighth grade. Leading a school with ten grade levels and many students with diverse needs requires shared leadership. While leadership here begins with the principal, it is a shared responsibility established on guiding principles. Our principal sets clear and high expectations for teachers, staff and students, but relies on many others to move the work forward.

As the instructional leader in the building, the principal far exceeds the number of instructional walkthroughs required by the district. The best way to understand the needs of individuals is to spend time in the classrooms. With each walkthrough comes feedback and questions to help teachers ponder and make adjustments to improve their instruction. In addition to regular daily walkthroughs, the principal conducts formal observations and has face-to-face meetings three times a year with each teacher. The data gleaned from walkthroughs and observations are key to informing the weekly professional learning. Our school is fortunate to have a strong leadership team and others who work to offer quality professional learning that is differentiated to the needs of various teams or individuals. Throughout the years, many have willingly stepped up to share their talents and best practices so that all might grow and benefit.

The principal also firmly believes in teaching correct principles and letting teams govern themselves. Therefore, Professional Learning Communities are key to leadership at MEMS. A risk-free culture has been established in which teams can plan, review data, share failures and successes, and collaborate on how to best meet the needs of all students. Grade level teams are regularly supported by the PLC chair and other interventionists. The principal also meets regularly with teams, as a participant in the work. Over the past three years, we have seen some amazing cultural shifts, as teachers have moved from working in total isolation to teachers sharing students in order to provide more effective Response to Intervention.

The PLC process has truly built leadership capacity throughout the building. Most challenges are collaboratively addressed. Instructional insights and best practices are largely addressed at the team level and in a much timelier manner. Empowering individuals has been the best leadership strategy for this school. It has been a work in progress, but the growth has been remarkable.

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

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Teachers and administrators at Maxwell Elementary/Middle School begin each school day with thirty minutes of uninterrupted Professional Learning Community meetings. During morning PLCs, grade level teams, interventionists, specialists, and administrators focus on student learning and success. Team members have a shared mission and vision. These are the PLC driving questions: What do we want students to know and be able to do?, How will we know if they know it?, How will we respond if they don't know it?, How will we respond if they do know it?

MEMS PLC collaboration is a systematic process in which team members work together interdependently to modify and enrich instruction using a district-wide PLC agenda to guide the session and record minutes. Initially, SMART goals are developed based on pre-assessment data. Then team members use formative and summative data to plan rigorous, tiered lessons that focus on the College and Career Ready Standards. On an ongoing basis, teachers review student data, look at student work, and modify their instruction to increase student achievement. Each PLC session concludes with identifying the next steps to improve student achievement.

In the past, MEMS teachers focused only on the students in their individual classrooms. More recently, team members have adopted a growth mindset and have shifted their thinking to consider all students at a grade level, embrace learning, and embrace change. During PLCs, MEMS teachers use data to create tiered groups. It is not uncommon for students to be a part of a cross-classroom flexible group, based on their individual data.

MEMS was visited by the AdvancED accreditation team in February 2019. The team praised MEMS faculty and staff for their cohesive dedication to putting students first. They noted evidence of collaboration among teachers and staff by visiting PLCs meetings. MEMS' PLCs are not teacher business meetings, but rather data driven sessions that focus on student learning and achievement. MEMS prides itself in the progress made in implementing focused collaboration/PLCs.