

**U.S. Department of Education**  
**2019 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. Doug Daugherty

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

Official School Name Sope Creek Elementary School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 3320 Paper Mill Road

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

Marietta GA 30067-4956  
City State Zip Code+4 (9 digits total)

County Cobb

Telephone (770) 916-7085

Fax (770) 916-7087

Web site/URL https://www.sopecreekes.com/

E-mail Doug.Daugherty@cobbk12.org

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

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

Name of Superintendent\*Mr. Chris Ragsdale

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

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

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

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

Name of School Board

President/Chairperson Mr. David Chastain

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

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

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

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

## **Part I – Eligibility Certification**

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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):
  - 68 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 25 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 18 High schools
  - 1 K-12 schools

112 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
<b>PreK</b>	0	0	0
<b>K</b>	86	90	176
<b>1</b>	93	94	187
<b>2</b>	95	91	186
<b>3</b>	104	90	194
<b>4</b>	105	89	194
<b>5</b>	104	100	204
<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>	587	554	1141

\*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
  - 24 % Asian
  - 6 % Black or African American
  - 5 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 61 % 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 2017 – 2018 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, 2017 until the end of the 2017-2018 school year	105
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2017 until the end of the 2017-2018 school year	53
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	158
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2017	1141
(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: 8%  
92 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):  
Amharic, Tigrinya, Tigre, Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Dutch, Farsi, Dari, Persian, German, Gujarati, Hebrew, Hindi, Korean, Other Asian, Other European, Other Indian, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Spanish, Thai, Turkish, Ukrainian and Vietnamese

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 5%  
Total number students who qualify: 58

8. Students receiving special education services: 12 %  
134 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>29</u> Autism                 | <u>71</u> Multiple Disabilities                |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>9</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>21</u> Other Health Impaired                |
| <u>8</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>40</u> Specific Learning Disability         |
| <u>3</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>22</u> Speech or Language Impairment        |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment      | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>2</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	4
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	51
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	30
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	19
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	10

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 22:1

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	97%	93%	94%	93%	94%
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.

Our mission is to prepare students for the future that awaits by teaching them how to be thoughtful stewards, kind citizens, and global leaders.

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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Sope Creek Elementary School is in Marietta, Georgia, a Metro-Atlanta suburb, approximately ten miles north of the city of Atlanta. Sope Creek is a 30-year old public school that serves kindergarten through fifth grade students. We were named after nearby Sope Creek, part of the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area. This natural preserve is rich in history and ecology.

Sope Creek is one of the largest elementary schools in Cobb County with a population of nearly 1200 students. Our student population consists of 587 males and 554 females. Approximately 61% are White, 24% are Asian, 6% are African American or Black, 5% are Hispanic and 4% are Multi-Racial. We have 8% of our student population participating in the English Language Learners (ELL) program, 5% of our student population receiving free and reduced lunch, and 12% receiving special education services through an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Our special needs population includes students served in speech, two Autism Units (AU) and two Orthopedically Impaired (OI) units, two Special Needs Preschool and students served in co-taught classrooms. We pride ourselves in being an inclusive learning environment for all students.

At Sope Creek, we are driven by our mission to prepare students for the future that awaits by teaching them how to be thoughtful stewards, kind citizens, and global leaders. Our mascot is the soaring eagle which is a symbol of our belief that all students should have high expectations, use their time wisely, contribute to a safe and orderly environment, and respect all people and their property. Our teachers and staff are highly committed to providing a well-rounded, rigorous, and authentic learning environment for all our students. In addition to growing adept stewards, citizens, and leaders, and to meet the overarching goals of the Cobb County School District, teachers at Sope Creek utilize a variety of instruction, research-based strategies, and innovative tools and resources to provide challenging, engaging, and authentic learning experiences at every grade level, every day. Our teachers pride themselves on their professional competencies, and work to ensure all students' academic and social/emotional needs are met through quality, creative instruction.

A great emphasis is placed on preparing students for the wonderful world that awaits them beyond the classroom. With that in mind, Sope Creek teachers delve into the Georgia Standards of Excellence, teach foundational skills, and provide rich experiences through a balanced, interdisciplinary approach to teaching and learning. We ensure that teachers have the necessary materials to reach students by providing access to leveled reading libraries in each classroom, providing rigorous up-to-date, job-embedded professional development monthly, and providing a framework for instruction that incorporates large-scale, problem-based activities into their instruction.

Our teachers are fully invested in ensuring our students' needs are being met and we continue to strive for innovative and challenging ways to pursue excellence through embarking on a cross-curricular, STEM embedded approach to instruction. From the opening of our first STEM labs in 2015, to our recent AdvancED STEM Certification and pending Georgia Department of Education (GADOE) STEM Certification, we have provided students with real-world, problem-based, experiential learning opportunities to develop them into the collaborative problem-solvers our world needs. Subsequently, beginning in the 2017-2018 school year, and in collaboration with the GADOE STEM Program, we have strategically initiated an interdisciplinary STEM framework of instruction such that STEM practices are consistent and pervasive throughout Sope Creek. All elements of the curriculum are integrated into what is now a STEM culture of learning at our school. As a result, our students' and teachers' abilities to communicate, collaborate, think critically and creatively have soared.

To further enhance our students' connections to the real world, Sope Creek actively partners with a plethora of community and business groups, as well as our parents and families. Georgia Tech, Boosterthon, Jet Propulsion Laboratory, NASA, Chattahoochee Nature Center, and Cobb County Water Conservatory are among a host of partnerships that benefit our students' learning and expand their thinking. Each year we highlight the contributions of our PTA and Foundation by providing community-based events that are family-centered and feed their overwhelming desire to continue to invest in our school. Our International Children's Night, as well as our Exceptional Children's Week spotlights the diverse population of students

and families at Sope Creek.

Our students are at the heart of all we do at Sope Creek Elementary. We understand that at the foundation of every decision we make, every event we host, and every successful accomplishment is the relationships that are cultivated that help grow our students' abilities to take on the great challenges that are waiting for them. Our students are becoming stewards, citizens, and leaders of tomorrow and we are so proud to watch them soar.

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

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

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

The teachers and staff at Sope Creek Elementary understand that the success of our students is dependent upon quality instruction that is standards based, data-driven, and rigorous. Instructional decisions in each content area are carefully considered with the best interests of students at the core.

Sope Creek Elementary believes in a balanced literacy approach, and through the Cobb County Teaching and Learning Standards in English Language Arts, we provide a rigorous set of required proficiencies in reading, writing, listening, speaking, and language. We begin with the foundation of language which is embedded and ongoing in our balanced literacy instruction. In grades K-5, students are learning to become fluent and proficient readers and receive explicit instruction in phonics, spelling, and vocabulary. This year, over thirty Sope Creek teachers are earning certification using the Orton Gillingham approach, which is a direct, explicit, multisensory, structured, sequential, diagnostic, and prescriptive way to teach phonics. This approach is a powerful tool of exceptional breadth proven to have a positive effect on reading achievement.

Our reading and writing workshop models are an efficient and engaging method of teaching reading and writing. Within the workshop structure, our teachers are able to address both the whole group's needs while also differentiating for the needs of small groups and individuals. Sope Creek's workshop model is standards based, driven by student assessment, and differentiated instruction by level, interest, and groupings. During a workshop lesson, our teachers model reading and writing strategies and then have students spend time engaged in independent reading and writing while conferring with individual students or instructing small, flexible groups. Our students are engaged in meaningful activities and instruction based on assessed needs. Sope Creek's teachers use ongoing, formative assessment practices to drive instruction. This could be through a whole group lesson, small needs-based skill or strategy group, or conferring with individual students about their writing or reading. Our teachers engage with students in the essential components of balanced literacy, which are interactive read aloud, shared/close reading, small group reading instruction, independent reading, writing, word work (grammar, spelling), and speaking and listening. Our teachers have been trained extensively on the Teachers' College Writing Workshop Units of Study program.

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

In mathematics, we use McGraw-Hill My Math, which engages students with the focus, coherence and rigor required by the Georgia Standards of Excellence (GSE). My Math combines three components of rigor – conceptual understanding, procedural skill and fluency and application which enables students to progress toward their mathematical goals and higher levels of thinking. My Math not only provides traditional math workbooks, but also manipulatives kits, reading text to weave literacy with math, and a fully digital platform that teachers can utilize to input data and adapt lessons based on student progress. Furthermore, our teachers utilize Cobb County School District's defined math scope and sequence and online resource bank called Cobb Teaching and Learning System (CTLs) Teach and online assessment tool called CTLs Assess. CTLs provides our teachers with county and teacher created materials that can be used with the GSE to aid in learning and track progress in the area of math. Our teachers work in PLCs once a week to review math data which drives instruction, remediation, and acceleration. During the math PLC, teachers dive into the data collected through CTLs Assess to identify not only students that need more support, but also standards that could be revisited in the future. Teachers collaborate and communicate to ensure that each student is receiving the appropriate level of instruction in math.

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

In science, Sope Creek utilizes HMH Georgia Science, which was specifically engineered for the Georgia Standards of Excellence to promote inquiry-based, hands on learning experiences for all students. Georgia Science supports our students' learning by incorporating multi-model learning, STEM and 21st century

skills acquisition, and a vast set of unique resources that students can access in their workbook or with an online log in code. CTLTS Teach and Assess are also utilized with Cobb County's scope and sequence.

Sope Creek is also Cobb County School District STEM Certified and AdvancED STEM certified. We are working towards completing our Georgia Department of Education (GADOE) STEM Certification in the coming school year. During our recent pre-walk with the GADOE STEM Team, we showcased our innovative approach to planning interdisciplinary connections between subjects. The GADOE requested that we serve as a model school for the planning and implementation of STEM curriculum. Through our STEM culture, we have established a rigorous, integrated approach to teaching and learning in all academic areas, not just science and math. Teachers collaborate continually to find interdisciplinary connections between math, reading, language arts, science, and social studies to develop a theme and overarching question for the nine-week quarter. Through the overarching question and connections, students use critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity to research and help solve a real-world problem that our school or community is facing. Problem Based Learning (PBL) is at the forefront of our science curriculum and helps drive the instruction in other academic areas.

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

In social studies, we use Studies Weekly, which supports the integration of language arts and social studies while focusing on the Georgia Standards of Excellent (GSE) to provide student engagement and a balanced literacy approach for all grade levels. Studies Weekly provides a blended technology approach with weekly social studies texts that are in the format of newspapers and online resources that includes primary source materials to support ongoing learning past the pages of the newspaper. Studies Weekly fosters critical thinking skills that help develop students to make informed and responsible decisions. Along with Studies Weekly, teachers follow the scope and sequence developed by Cobb County School District to ensure all GSE are being taught throughout the year. Teachers collaborate within their grade level teams to create common assessments, strategies, and lessons to promote student growth. Many of the social studies standards are taught using literature. Grade levels have common, leveled texts that support not only the GSE in social studies, but also standards in language arts and reading. The interdisciplinary approach to teaching and learning helps our teachers and students build connections to real-world issues that face them each day.

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

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

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

Sope Creek operates on an eight-day specials rotation where all grade levels visit physical education (PE), music, art and Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) class. Students participate in PE class every other day with music, art and STEM occurring in-between. Each specialist focuses on mastery of the grade level standards for their area of specialty.

Physical education class is orchestrated by two teachers who are passionate about the relationship between exercise and increased academic performance. Our PE coaches teach the standards required for each grade level by incorporating basic and fine motor movements, physical fitness, nutrition, good sportsmanship and teamwork during class. Our students set and reach their own personal goals throughout the year. The PE coaches have conducted research showing the correlation between the speed a student runs the mile compared to test scores. Research has shown students with a faster mile equates to an increase in test scores. Students' mile times are posted, and students are encouraged to decrease their time. Because of this knowledge, the PE coaches have altered the specialist rotation to increase the number of times students attend PE. To give students even more opportunities the PE coaches offer physical activities each morning. Students participate in Zumba or station running. On Fridays, our coaches offer Atlanta 500. In this

program, students keep track of their mileage with the goal of reaching the different cities in Georgia. Mileage for each class is totaled and are posted showing how far students have “traveled” around Georgia. Sope Creek PE coaches also develop the activities for Field Day each year. Students are challenged with balancing, speed, and agility skills along with positive team building exercises. Field Day is a favorite day for the students at Sope Creek!

The music teacher at Sope Creek aligns lessons to the state standards for music as well as the general education curriculum. All grade levels receive music instruction at Sope Creek every eight days. Students are given an opportunity to explore different instruments each year including the recorder, drums, xylophone and many more. The cross-curricular connection to music has allowed our students to see how a relationship between music and other subject areas. For example, our fourth graders study sound in the general education curriculum. Students must understand pitch and vibration. Our music teacher collaborates with our fourth-grade teachers during this unit, so students are seeing the connection between instruments and pitch and vibration. Our fourth-grade students also have Pioneer Day where our students are fully immersed in what it is like to live during the Pioneer days. Our music teacher takes this opportunity to teach our students how to square dance. Another musical opportunity for our students is to join chorus. Interested students in second through fifth grade meet once a week to practice songs which are performed in several different venues including the Atlanta Hawks arena, the Braves stadium, school performances, Veteran’s Day and the Harlem Globetrotters game. Our chorus consists of over 100 students who are eager to learn more about singing and performing. This year our chorus received a perfect score in the state-wide choral competition.

Art class at Sope Creek sparks an interest and appreciation of the different types of art. Students can explore a wide variety of artists, learn about the elements and principles of design and artists throughout history. Students are instructed using the state required standards for each grade level which are then incorporated with general education grade level standards. Our art teacher works collaboratively with each grade level to develop inter-disciplinary connections across the curriculum. Students can use technology to experiment with graphic design as well. Each year, our students are part of an Art Show at our school. Students choose their favorite piece of art to be framed and displayed for our community to view.

Sope Creek also has two STEM classes where all students are fully engaged in STEM activities. Students go through the Engineering Design Process (EDP) throughout the year. 21st century skills such as coding, 3D printing, Stop Motion videos, drones and SeeSaw are taught and used in the STEM classroom. STEM teachers collaborate with each grade level, so students are making connections, meets with grade levels on a quarterly basis.

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

Our instructional methods at Sope Creek are based on the belief that all students deserve an outstanding educational experience. Teachers are trained in the workshop model, guided reading, guided math, problem-based and inquiry-based learning, and balanced literacy approaches to teaching. Our teachers continuously adapt and adjust their classroom lessons, based on data, to meet the needs of their students’ and are constantly collaborating with each other to better serve our students.

Instruction is always based on best practices, standards, and ongoing data. Daily lessons are sequenced intentionally to maximize learning opportunities for our students. Learning targets are clear and concise to ensure that students understand what they are learning and why. Our teachers use a variety of resources to meet the needs of our students. For example, in math, teachers are responsible for having a small mini-lesson, followed by teacher guided work, independent practice, and group projects. In writing, our teachers follow a similar pattern with providing instruction with a mini lesson and independent writing to follow. Writing conferences are embedded into daily writing lessons to ensure our students receive a personalized opportunity to gain feedback and instruction on their writing pieces.

Our teachers collaborate in weekly PLCs to look at data that informs instruction. Teachers examine the standards, lessons, and assessments being used to see where achievement gaps are and where students are excelling. Once an achievement gap is identified, teachers work together to develop an action plan to help

those students that need remediation. Each grade level develops their own plan, so it looks slightly different throughout the building. In the upper grades, students work once a week with a specific teacher who addresses the gaps and reteaches the materials in a different way. Students are then assessed again to track progress. In the lower grades, each teacher works within their classrooms to pull small groups of students that need additional support. Similarly, teachers work in the same fashion to excel students that need more of a challenge. Each classroom teacher uses researched-based differentiation strategies to meet the needs of each student in their classroom.

Sope Creek is historically a high performing school which also includes our special populations including our students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELL). Our students with disabilities require specialized instruction that our highly qualified special education teachers provide. We pride ourselves on having a special education co-teacher setting in first through fifth grade classrooms. In this setting, there is a general education teacher, as well as a special education teacher to support students with disabilities from bell to bell. The co-teaching model is inclusive meaning the makeup of the classroom includes both students with and without an Individual Education Plan (IEP). Students are pulled into small groups, based on student need, to gain valuable intensive subject area instruction. Our ELL students receive intensive instruction from a specialized teacher who helps them acquire English vocabulary by pulling students into small groups and by supporting the classroom teacher in the classroom.

Using the Reading and Math Inventory, students are identified as on, below, or above grade level in the areas of reading and math. Teachers use this data to drive instruction in the classroom. Students who are identified in reading receive intensive, personalized instruction in reading and language arts once a week through an in-school tutoring program that supports grade level standards and areas of needed growth.

Ultimately, we want all our students to be actively engaged in their learning each day. We strive to meet the needs of all our students by providing individualized instruction daily that supports their need for growth and progress.

## PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

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### 1. School Climate/Culture:

Sope Creek has a wonderfully positive and academically challenging learning environment built on the power of relationships and unity on a shared vision. The key at Sope Creek is that everyone is pulling on the same proverbial rope and that every member of our learning community is truly valued and fully invested in our quest to grow our students into tomorrow’s stewards, citizens and leaders. Those three words are very important to our school community because we know that in order to successfully accomplish our mission we have to foster the whole child. We continue to see so much growth in our students socially, emotionally, and academically because of the connectedness of the social, emotional and academic elements to our belief in what it means to be thoughtful stewards, kind citizens, and global leaders. That mission binds us all together and keeps our efforts focused. Every activity that we do and every decision we make is filtered through the lens of stewardship, citizenship, and leadership.

To that end, each of our grade levels develop a service-project aimed at helping our school, community, city, or environment. Our kindergarten students collect supplies to help stock our clinic and support our school nurse. Our first grade students collect school supplies for surrounding Title I schools. Second grade students help beautify our school grounds by planting tulip beds at the entrance of our building. In third grade, students collaborate to help our school environment by collecting and discarding trash from our campus. Our fourth grade students visit local nursing homes through our Senior Buddies Program. While there, students interact with residents by reading, crafting, and socializing. In fifth grade students collect supplies to send to our troops overseas through Project: Mail Call.

A cornerstone of our school climate and culture is centered on our Soaring Eagle Expectations. We have four expectations birthed from our mission that help operationalize for our students what it means to be a Soaring Eagle.

High Expectations  
Time on Task  
Safe and Orderly School  
Respect All People and Their Property

Our teachers love to be the models of these expectations and have a fun time working with our students to create an environment of rich learning in a safe, engaging atmosphere. The rewards are rich too, not only in the wonderful environment created, but in the support of our families and administration. Every Friday during our morning announcements teachers and classes are awarded the “Golden Lego” award for demonstrating a culture or best practice that supports our mission. Further, our wonderful PTA provides awards and incentives during each faculty meeting to support our teachers for nurturing our Soaring Eagles.

Ultimately, the word that would sum up the culture of Sope Creek is community. We are a community of students, teachers, and parents that have built up an incredibly strong relationship together and that believe in the bright futures of students that are living in the world being thoughtful stewards, kind citizens, and global leaders.

### 2. Engaging Families and Community:

Sope Creek Elementary has an enormous level of involvement from our community. We feel family and community support are vital to the success of our students, staff and school. Our teachers and staff members encourage families to be involved through many volunteer opportunities including story parent, class parent, center parent and much more. Sope Creek is continually buzzing with parental involvement throughout the day.

Parents are invited to events during the day as well as the evening. Family engagement activities include Family Fun Nights, STEAM Night, International Night, Science Fair, chorus concerts, grade level

performances, PTA and Foundation meetings, Open House, Meet and Greet, Veteran's Day and Volunteer Appreciation Week. During Family Fun Nights, families come to the school to enjoy food, fun and community building on our playgrounds. During STEAM Night, students are given an opportunity to show their parents different STEM projects they have completed during the year and challenge the parents to problem solve. Our Art Show is also the same night which brings our community in to see the art pieces each child has produced during the year. International Night has continued to grow each year at Sope Creek. Families bring food and other items from their native country to share with families. Students display their dancing skills to model their native dance. This is an extremely popular event at Sope Creek. Science Fair allows our 5th graders to share their Science Fair project with the community.

Our PTA and Foundation are two organizations who are actively involved in our school. Both organizations raise money to support our school. These two organizations are generous by listening to the needs of our school and providing the finances and volunteers to fulfill our needs. Our PTA and Foundation work together to send teachers to many trainings, increase technology in our school, purchase supplies needed for school, provide special extension days, such as Art Day, Georgia Day, and Pioneer Day for each grade level and donate money to families in need. This partnership is unwavering and necessary to have Sope Creek run smoothly and give our students as many opportunities as possible.

Sope Creek embraces community involvement and looks for ways to increase the bond between the school and the community. Regular communication occurs between the school and families through several different modes of communication. Sope Creek has a Twitter page and a blog to keep parents informed. Teachers inform parents through posts on their personal blog and emails. All our grade levels have online report cards which keeps parents abreast of their child's progress. Teachers send home weekly information to parents; however, parents are also able to check the online report to see their child's progress. Our goal is to keep our community informed and knowledgeable about the activities at Sope Creek.

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

Sope Creek Elementary teachers engage in relevant and student-centered professional development. Our professional development is continuous, integrated and a vital part of our school culture and success. During the 2017-2018 school year, our schoolwide professional development was focused on the advancement of our Professional Learning Communities (PLC). We focused on building the foundation for a collaborative culture that is student centered and data driven. Our teachers and building leaders established norms and began to employ the PLC framework developed by Richard Dufour. The collaborative nature of our professional learning communities blended perfectly with our initiative to improve writing scores across grade levels. To achieve this goal, our teachers participated in extensive training using Lucy Calkins Units of Study in Writing. One of the greatest benefits of this endeavor was establishing consistency with the workshop model for writing instruction. Moreover, we were able to develop a common language to discuss student work and specific writing strategies to increase student achievement. As a result of this emphasis on teacher collaboration and writing instruction, schoolwide proficiency in writing increased drastically.

Throughout the 2018-2019 school year, we continued with our focus on professional learning communities, but shifted our attention to an interdisciplinary approach to STEM instruction. Our teachers began to explore ways to connect STEM learning across the curriculum as a way to deepen student understanding. Furthermore, our teachers identified local, relevant problem-based learning opportunities that provide our students with a real-world context to apply their learning. Our endeavors have positively impacted our school culture, student engagement, as well as achievement.

The Sope Creek staff is committed to being lifelong learners, which is modeled in numerous ways. We are committed to improving our programs and teaching effectiveness by studying curricular standards and their efficacy in the classroom, while also achieving individual goals of professional development. At Sope Creek, we understand that teacher development and collaboration are at the heart of our students' success.

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

Leadership is a critical component of our school culture. In fact, one of the pillars of our mission statement is to prepare our students for the future that awaits them by teaching them how to be global leaders. We have several leadership teams/organizations in place to help run our very large school of nearly 1,200 students.

Sope Creek's administrative team consists of the principal, two assistant principals, a school leadership intern, and a special education student services administrator. Known as the A-team, they formally meet as a PLC every Monday morning, informally every day at lunch, and after school. The A-team takes great delight in focusing on ensuring quality instruction, safety and security, and meeting student and teacher needs.

Our principal's leadership philosophy is to trust the knowledge and experience at every level, in every position within the school, by equipping and empowering individuals to contribute to the mission of our school. This includes trusting the power of student leadership, as well as faculty leadership.

Our building leadership team consists of a team leader from each grade level kindergarten through fifth grade, as well as a representative from special education, specials, our learning commons, front office, paraprofessionals, our counseling department and our ESOL department. Each team leader conducts a weekly PLC meeting with their team where they focus on our STEM initiatives as well as gathering data and making instructional decisions on our schoolwide academic goals.

We have a wonderful base of student leadership as well. Our student council executive board is made up of a president, vice-president, secretary, and treasurer. They meet monthly with elected student room representatives from our 51 classrooms. Their efforts have resulted in tremendous improvements around Sope Creek in direct alignment with our mission, such as new environmentally friendly water fountains throughout the school and new recycling efforts aimed at reducing the use of plastic and minimizing food waste.

Each leadership organization within Sope Creek works incredibly well together with the aim being that a clear line can be drawn from the Superintendent's initiatives to how that looks in Sope Creek as a building, to how that looks in each classroom, to how that looks in the actions and achievements of each student. There are a lot of moving parts, but at the core and all the way through, student achievement and student social and emotional well-being are the focal points, and proudly, our students excel in these areas.

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

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Although Sope Creek is known for its many innovative ideas, our most influential practice has been the implementation of professional learning communities (PLC). During weekly PLCs, teachers aim to hone their understanding of standards, ascertain an awareness of the variety of resources and manipulatives available to reinforce and extend learning, utilize data to drive instructional next steps, and gain confidence to differentiate and adapt instruction to meet the diverse learning needs demonstrated by their students. This is accomplished through answering four essential PLC questions.

What do we expect our students to learn? Question one focuses on unpacking the essential priority standards each quarter. Teachers collaborate to translate each standard into student friendly language for better understanding. Priority standards are chosen through the R.E.A.L. approach. Our teachers use readiness to determine if students need this skill to be ready for next semester, quarter or next school year. Endurance measures whether this skill/strategy extends beyond one test or is this a skill that is needed beyond this test. Assessment measures when and how the standard is assessed. Finally, leverage determines if the skill/strategy is used across content areas.

How will we know when students have learned the material? As teachers move onto question two, the focus is interdisciplinary collaborative planning. Using the priority standards, teachers develop meaningful problem-based learning opportunities for their students. Collaborative planning involves incorporating rigor, choice, challenge, and engagement. Common assessments and lessons, which include questions ranging across the four levels of Depth of Knowledge (DOK), blossom from the collaboration and discourse.

How do we respond when students do not learn the material? How do we respond when students already know the material? Teachers then take the time to discuss both question three and four which concentrate on students who are struggling with the concept taught and students who need to be accelerated past the general education standards. Highly qualified teachers bring together a wealth of knowledge to share amongst each other to ensure all students are reaching their highest potential.

A critical objective of our PLCs is to develop interdisciplinary connections between subject matter. Teachers visually display standards for each quarter and then collaborate to discuss commonalities and connections between standards. A common theme and overarching question emerge through the dialogue between teacher teams. Teachers and students use the overarching question to continuously make interdisciplinary connections throughout each school day and beyond, throughout the quarter. Two examples of overarching questions are, “What are the implications and consequences of change?” and “How does conflict impact change?” Teachers tie all content areas and ancillary curriculum to these questions.

Not only is it the seamless implementation of PLCs, but it is the profound effect on our student and teacher growth that makes this the one model practice that we are most proud of. Sope Creek continually produces high achieving students year after year such that our College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI) score continues to grow and has remained above 90 for the past four years.