U.S. Department of Education
2019 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

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

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

School Mailing Address 942 Southgate Road
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

Knoxville   TN   37919-7699
City   State   Zip Code+4 (9 digits total)

County Knox

Telephone (865) 594-1360   Fax (865) 594-1137
Web site/URL
            https://www.knoxschools.org/sequo
yahes   E-mail   alisha.hinton@knoxschools.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. Bob Thomas   E-mail
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)   superintendent@knoxschools.org

District Name Knox County School District   Tel.   (865) 594-1800
I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

_____Date_____
(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board
President/Chairperson Mrs. Susan Horn
(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

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

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):

   <u>51</u> Elementary schools (includes K-8)
   <u>16</u> Middle/Junior high schools
   <u>16</u> High schools
   <u>0</u> K-12 schools

   <u>83</u> 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
   [X] 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	0	0	0
K	42	43	85
1	49	36	85
2	50	45	95
3	46	43	89
4	48	46	94
5	43	34	77
6	0	0	0
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	278	247	525

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

4. Racial/ethnic composition of   1 % American Indian or Alaska Native
   the school (if unknown, estimate):   5 % Asian
                                        2 % Black or African American
                                        4 % Hispanic or Latino
                                        1 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
                                        87 % White
                                        0 % Two or more races
                                        100 % Total

(Only these seven standard categories should be used to report the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.)

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2017 – 2018 school year: 9%

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

This rate should be calculated using the grid below. The answer to (6) is the mobility rate.

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred *to* the school after October 1, 2017 until the end of the 2017-2018 school year	27
(2) Number of students who transferred *from* the school after October 1, 2017 until the end of the 2017-2018 school year	16
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	43
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2017	493
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.09
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	9

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 4 %
                                                    21 Total number ELL

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 2 %
   Total number students who qualify: 10

8. Students receiving special education services: 6 %
                                                     31 Total number of students served

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

   6 Autism   3 Multiple Disabilities

   0 Deafness   0 Orthopedic Impairment

   0 Deaf-Blindness   6 Other Health Impaired

   0 Developmental Delay   4 Specific Learning Disability

   1 Emotional Disturbance   14 Speech or Language Impairment

   0 Hearing Impairment   0 Traumatic Brain Injury

   0 Intellectual Disability   0 Visual Impairment Including Blindness

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 5

10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school
    staff in each of the categories below:

	Number of Staff
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	25
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	8
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	4
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	2

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the
    school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1   21:1

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

Required Information	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014
Daily student attendance	97%	97%	97%	96%	97%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

13. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**
Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2018.

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

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.
Yes ___   No X

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.

Sequoyah Elementary School strives to prepare responsible, productive citizens by providing a strong educational program that fosters academic growth within a safe learning environment.

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

Sequoyah Elementary School is a public school nestled in an upper-middle-class neighborhood in Knoxville, Tennessee. When Sequoyah School opened in September 1929, there were four classrooms and an office to house ninety-eight students and five members of the faculty. Now celebrating our 90th anniversary, the school continues to grow in enrollment while maintaining the expectation and tradition of high academic levels for over five hundred students. The students and families served within our school reflect the community in which the school resides. Our student population consists of 87% White, 5% Asian, 4% Hispanic, and 2% Black or African-American. Due to our proximity to the University of Tennessee, we continue to maintain a healthy ELL program which brings unique diversity to our campus.

The history of our school dates back to the planned development of Sequoyah Hills neighborhood in 1925, situated west of downtown Knoxville. With the development of the new neighborhood came the promise of a community school. It was during this time that a special relationship began between the Sequoyah Hills neighborhood and Sequoyah School. This relationship would help create the foundation of our community school and the close collaboration our school continues to enjoy with our neighbors. Throughout our school's history, school staff, parents and community members have worked together to support the development and commitment to the school's mission; preparing responsible, productive citizens by providing a strong educational program that fosters academic growth within a safe learning environment.

The 50th anniversary of Sequoyah School was celebrated on May 15, 1980. It was during that celebration that the distinct beginnings of our school were first documented for future generations. Through the historical records, pictures, and stories shared over the last 40 years, the history of Sequoyah School continues to live on within the hallways, classrooms, and playgrounds of our historical school. The celebration of our school's 90th anniversary will take place in August 2019. This will be a special time to recognize and celebrate the outstanding traditions and unique history of our special school.

Tradition at Sequoyah Elementary continues to be founded in the connection found among the school community, families, and neighborhood. These important support systems are recognized as essential to our school's success in developing outstanding citizens. Each grade level (K-5) is committed to developing opportunities in which our students can learn, understand, and support the needs within our community. For students this means community outreach and volunteer support. Each grade level partners together to sponsor a specific community project each year. These opportunities have included supporting the Knoxville Ronald McDonald House, volunteering at Second Harvest Food Bank, performing holiday songs for seniors at a community church, and so much more. As a school family, we work together each year to support a school-wide initiative which will give back to our school, community, and/or world. These projects include; Hope for Haiti water project, Smoky Mountain fire relief, University of Tennessee Medical Center Cancer Institute "Sequoyah Cancer Walk" and fundraiser, and financial support for the Knoxville Police Department.

While it is an essential belief that the education of our students extends beyond the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic, we are committed to strengthening our instructional strategies and learning opportunities for our students. Most recently, this includes the commitment to teacher collaboration and pedagogical growth through the Teaching Peer Excellence Group strategy. This unique professional development strategy allows teachers to collaboratively develop lessons and student assessments which are then presented and refined over time and following implementation. Teachers discuss opportunities to improve the lesson or assessment so that the final strategy supports standard-aligned instruction which improves overall student academic success.

Through the support of the Sequoyah Elementary Foundation and Sequoyah Elementary Parent Teacher Organization, the school has been able to fund additional instructional positions. These funded teacher roles include Science Lab, Technology Lab, small group teachers, and teaching assistants. By supplementing Knox County Schools and State of Tennessee funding, we are able to provide additional enrichment opportunities to our students. This includes the creation of a MakerSpace and STEM class which collaborates with the literacy lessons offered in our library. It is our goal to create learning connections

which allow our students to apply everyday learning to real-world challenges.

While we are proud of the history of outstanding academic excellence, as documented in our end-of-year testing scores, the true success we value is in the opportunity and challenge to create successful students who will enjoy purposeful careers, a meaningful life, and a commitment to loving their community. The consistent dedication to community and educational excellence which has been noted over our school's 90 years continues to be the foundation on which our student success and growth is anchored.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

1a. Reading/English language arts:

In order to meet the rigorous academic expectations set forth in the State of Tennessee instructional standards, the approaches to Reading/ELA instruction at Sequoyah Elementary strive to set the foundation for students to develop skills in critical reading and effective communication. English/Language Arts teachers at Sequoyah implement a comprehensive, research-based approach to literacy instruction. Our local curriculum is collaboratively developed by teachers for teachers and is aligned with the Tennessee State Standards for English Language Arts.

By the time our students "graduate" from 5th grade and transition to the next phase in middle school, our goal is to have students reading widely and deeply from a range of high-quality, increasingly challenging fiction and nonfiction from diverse cultures and time periods. Our teachers collaborate with instructional coaches to develop project-based learning opportunities for our students. Students are able to formulate ideas about subjects through research projects and responding analytically to literary and informational sources. Students in all grades are provided instructional supports to develop writing strategies which are developmentally appropriate and build on the previous year's learning. By devoting significant time and effort to producing numerous written pieces over short and extended timeframes throughout the year, students will develop and refine skills related to conventions of grammar, usage, and punctuation as well as learn ways to make himself or herself understood.

In order to assess student learning and plan for future ELA instruction, teachers at Sequoyah utilize AimsWeb fluency and comprehension data. These data help guide teachers in the development of ELA small groups, RTI groups, and enrichment grouping for any areas which are requiring attention. Teachers also utilize common state and local writing rubrics to guide writing instruction, drafting, and editing. Students are even given the opportunity to self-assess and refine their own work throughout the school year.

1b. Mathematics:

Mathematics instruction at Sequoyah Elementary incorporates Tennessee State Standards and math practices that provide clarity and specificity to stress conceptual understanding of key ideas. The sequence of topics covered from kindergarten through 5th grade was developed through researched-based learning progressions. The knowledge and skills students need to be prepared for mathematics in college, career, and life are woven throughout our mathematics curriculum.

Beginning in the primary grades, teachers stress the importance of developing a solid foundation for algebra, as well as laying the groundwork for calculus and other postsecondary mathematics coursework. Students are given the opportunity to discuss, manipulate, and express numerical understanding through hands-on lessons within the whole and small group instruction. By the time our students reach 5th grade we want them to be prepared to manipulate and engage with mathematics in a way which will develop into a more formal study of algebra in middle school. To be ready for algebra, students must have an understanding of fractional arithmetic, in part because even simple equations cannot be solved without fractions.

In order to assess student learning and plan for future mathematics instruction, teachers at Sequoyah utilize AimsWeb math fluency data. These data help guide teachers in the development of math small groups, RTI groups, and enrichment grouping for any areas which are requiring attention. Teachers also utilize common assessments which help to guide small group reteaching within a series of lessons. Students are given multiple opportunities to explore math concepts and experience various methods which can be used to solve problems. The use of math discourse is another essential instructional strategy which allows students to hear one another's thinking, teacher thinking and prompt the refinement of their understanding.

1c. Science:

Sequoyah teachers strive to provide educational experiences within science which develop the skills, knowledge, and attitudes students will need to be successful in our dynamic and changing world. Our approach to providing education must be constantly reviewed and adapted to ensure we are providing our students with skills they will require to meet the challenges of tomorrow. Ultimately, our goal within science instruction is to empower students to search, solve and succeed in order to improve and contribute to our complex world.

We recognize that elementary school is where the foundation of science is built. Each child that enters into kindergarten and exits fifth grade will have opportunities for hands-on, minds-on learning. The elementary science classroom is about building experiences and exploring the basic science in the natural world. Science standards and instructional focuses complement our English language arts and mathematics standards, enabling classroom instruction to reflect a clearer picture of the real world, where solving problems requires skills and knowledge from multiple disciplines.

Each year students should be able to demonstrate a greater capacity for connecting knowledge across and between the physical sciences, life sciences, earth and space sciences, and engineering design. During grades K-2, students begin to form connections between concepts and skills such as understanding relationships between objects, planning and carrying out investigations, and constructing explanations. During grades 3-5, students begin to form deeper connections between concepts and skills previously learned in grades K-2, such as evaluating methods for collecting data, revising models based on evidence, and analyzing data to make sense of phenomena.

Teachers utilize various assessments methods to determine students' progression to mastery. These assessments include project-based learning, quick writes, and multi-select questions. Data collected following each assessment guides teachers in making future connections within lessons and also small group determination for reteaching.

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

Teachers of social studies at Sequoyah utilize research-based instructional strategies and cross-curricular connections to empower students with the skills and knowledge necessary to become competent, active, career and/or college ready citizens within a global society. We want our students to develop a respect for their rights and the rights of others while developing the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will foster responsible, global citizenship. By the time our students complete fifth grade, they will develop the skills necessary to adapt to an ever-changing society. They will understand how society establishes governing institutions and distributes power and authority. Students will study, analyze, and interpret data in order to develop a historical perspective to assist in making informed choices and decisions for the present.

The Tennessee Social Studies Standards are embedded in the curriculum guide used by teachers and are organized by Modules. Each module provides the opportunity for students to engage in project-based learning options and quick writes to determine progression for mastery.

1e. For secondary schools:

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

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Other curriculum areas at Sequoyah Elementary include physical education, music, art, library, science and STEM. Each of these areas is embedded into the weekly routine for all students so that each child has the opportunity to explore and develop skills related to each area.

Physical education is provided to all students in order to educate them on the development of healthy lifestyle choices. Our physical education teacher strives to help students develop into well-adjusted individuals: physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially. Through the curriculum of the program, the teacher provides challenging and satisfying experiences in meaningful movement, self-expression and health and wellness to promote life-long healthy choices. Our PE program motivates all students to be lifelong movers who understand and participate in a variety of activities, games, and sports.

Students at Sequoyah experience and make music in an atmosphere of play. It is clear that the elementary school years provide the best opportunities for artistic growth in the lives of children. The music teacher strives to provide students with a solid foundation as they transition from elementary school into middle school. Music at the elementary level is designed to engage students in many musical roles.

Sequoyah Science Lab offers students a variety of experiences giving them the opportunity to be curious about the world around them, ask questions, and experiment to find out answers even when they think they already know what will happen. Students get to observe what they think is ordinary to them and then discover it to be extraordinary. Changing the way students observe their world is the ultimate goal.
Art is everything at Sequoyah Elementary School. The art teacher strives to make big connections and guide students to learn about our world. The goal in art class is to use as many materials, processes, and techniques between kindergarten and 5th grade as possible as students create new and interesting projects.

In STEM students are provided opportunities to solve problems by exploring science, technology, engineering, and math. Students learn by using hands-on manipulatives in our MakerSpace. All grades, K-5, participate when they come to the library during their encore rotation. While in the Library and Media Center the teacher strives to create the hub of collaborative learning that strengthens creative minds, builds critical thinking skills, and instills an appreciation of literature in our students.

3. **Special Populations:**

At Sequoyah Elementary, the use of the response to intervention process is an essential support for our students at the 25th percentile or below in reading and in math. While the number of students in Tier 2 and Tier 3 is limited, our teachers and staff work together to review benchmark data and determine the best plan of intervention. During RTI2 meetings, we discuss each child requiring interventions in depth; social, emotional, attendance, and academics. We consider progress monitoring data reports as well as classroom teacher observation and data. These data are then used to select the best research-based intervention for the student. Classroom teachers or teaching assistants provide the intervention in a daily 30-45 minute session. Students are progress monitored every two weeks and data reviewed monthly. We communicate any updates or changes to parents in a timely and purposeful manner so that we can partner with their work at home. In addition to the discussion of students at Tier 2 or Tier 3, we service many students within enrichment grouping during our core extension period. We discuss students who need enrichment in each subject area and how to best utilize our Enrichment specialists and Gifted Talked coaches.

For students requiring support in English as a second language, our school provides a full-time ESL teacher who works with each language group for up to 1 hour per day. Groups are formed based on skill level and language needs which are targeted for each group. The ESL teacher works closely with the classroom teacher to align instructional goals and content topics so that these students are provided with pre-taught skills and reinforced as needed through small group instruction. The ESL teacher serves as another partner with parents as we bridge the home and school divide. Often, the ESL teacher will coordinate parent meetings or support-team meetings to show strategies and supports which parents can continue at home.

We also have a district-funded Asian Family Liaison who assists our new families as they enter the public school system. This part-time liaison is essential to onboarding new families and ensuring that they have the correct paperwork and understand the processes aligned with our school functioning. She also serves as a translator during parent conferences, support team meetings, or school programs.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. **School Climate/Culture:**

Sequoyah Elementary School culture is anchored in the power of positive relationships. It is through relationships between parents, parents to teachers, teachers to students, administration to teachers, administration to students, and administration to parents that our strength is found. The culture found within Sequoyah Elementary is empathetic and positive among students, teachers, and parents. From school culture survey data, students, parents, and staff feel very strongly that our school is a positive place to work and learn.

Over the last nine years, we have developed a school-wide positive culture program called "Go Golden." The origins of Go Golden were founded in the adoption of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program. Over time, our administration, school counselor, teachers, and parents have worked together to craft a program which supports the social-emotional needs of our students while strengthening the relationships within our campus. Through Go Golden yearly themes, class meetings, and Social-Emotional classes, we are recognizing an extremely positive impact on student interactions with each other and with adults.

We also recognize the importance of setting clear behavioral expectations for our students while also celebrating the competence and growth of appropriate behaviors. Through the adoption of positive behavioral interventions and supports, our faculty has been able to better define campus-wide common expectations for our students. All Sequoyah students are able to develop and learn social, emotional, and behavioral competence, supporting their academic engagement. Our teachers are also able to develop positive, predictable, and safe environments that promote strong interpersonal relationships with students through teaching, modeling, and encouragement.

The school administration partners with parents and students to create events and structures which celebrate, encourage, and recognize Sequoyah Elementary teachers. As the expectations placed on educators increases and our students' home lives become more challenging, it is essential to support the positive impact our teachers make on the lives of our students each day. Through monthly staff appreciation luncheons, social media recognition, notes of encouragement and appreciation, and professional courtesy shown by the administration, the staff at Sequoyah Elementary is provided both support and appreciation in a manner which strengthens our school culture.

2. **Engaging Families and Community:**

Parents and families are engaged in the support and development of Sequoyah Elementary School through both the Sequoyah Elementary Foundation and Parent Teacher Organization. The Executive Boards of these two school support organizations meet on a monthly basis. School administration provides monthly updates related to the school plan areas of focus and leads discussion around academic planning at these executive team meetings. Additionally, PTO hosts numerous family events throughout the school year. We also have Parent Meet and Greet at the beginning of the school year, Parent Nights for each grade level to update school year goals and expectations, parent conference weeks, Grandparents Day, and Kindergarten Parent Preview. All events and programs are aligned with areas of focus on the school plan which is updated each school year.

Through a collaborative effort with school families, we are able to meet students at their point of need and work with teachers and parents to help our children continue to develop a strong sense of social/emotional health. The majority of our family population are highly engaged in school events, homeroom class support and maintain high expectations for academics within their own home dynamic. The culture found within our school, along with our family dynamics, allow for a collaborative partnership as we support student academic, social, and emotional growth. This development and partnership directly impact our overall culture and climate at Sequoyah Elementary.

Throughout the year, parents receive updates on student learning through report cards, common assessment

data, and benchmarking data in Reading and Math. It is important for our school to keep lines of communication open with parents as they strive to support and encourage their children as learners at home.

In collaboration with SEF and PTO, Sequoyah administration creates opportunities throughout the year when parents can collaborate, connect, and grow together. Parent book studies, parent expert panels, and grade level meetings are just some of the ways we invite parents to learn more about K-5 education on our campus and how they can support their child from home.

3. Professional Development:

At Sequoyah, we use the Teaching Peer Excellent Group (TPEG) model as a way to strengthen teacher effectiveness and knowledge. We utilize Teacher Peer Excellence Groups in place of the traditional Professional Learning Community structure. However, the major components of PLCs are captured in TPEG, such as planning lessons and evaluating data. Our teachers meet together and plan a lesson, observe the lesson taught by a grade level colleague, and give feedback based on the outcome of the instruction. This is done in a two-week cycle. This is our primary professional development for Sequoyah teachers. We have seen growth within observed instructional areas as our teachers see the strengths and weaknesses within each lesson. The lessons are based on teacher/student needs for each grade level and are also directly tied to the TEAM instructional rubric.

Additional professional development opportunities have been conducted for the staff as a whole and are based on specific needs to address, including the instructional indicators of Standards and Objectives and Presenting Instructional Content. We have also incorporated Assessment for Learning on a monthly basis in conjunction with our TPEG meetings. This focus was to ensure assessment aligned to standards and objectives and that we truly knew where our students were mastering content. This was well received by faculty as it was implemented across the grade levels.

Additionally, we increased our focus on reading with our teachers in the Knox County Schools Year-Long Reading Course. All of our K-2 teachers participated in this professional learning opportunity. RLA teachers who are new to Sequoyah or Knox County Schools participate in the KCS Yearlong Reading Course. Sequoyah Elementary Instructional Coach plans follow-up sessions to the Yearlong Reading Course in conjunction with our TPEG sessions. We also plan integrated reading lessons within our TPEG structure, to combine efforts in our staff professional learning.

Another structure in which our teachers are provided professional learning and opportunity for growth is within our vertical content team structure. Each teacher serves on a vertical content team which collaborates once a month. Each team sets goals to discuss, create, and refine instructional strategies and expectations within a K-5 strand of each content or subject. Vertical teams are defined for Science, Math, STEM, and Reading/Language Arts.

4. School Leadership:

It is a common belief at Sequoyah Elementary that all stakeholders - students, parents, teacher, staff, and administration - serve as leaders for our school. Leadership is not seen as a singular position or title, but a responsibility we all have to continue developing our program to the benefit of our school and students. That belief impacts the overall structure of our school Leadership Team, Vertical Teams, Go Golden Team, grade level teams, PTO, SEF, Student Council, and Student and Parent Ambassadors. Each of these groups have defined roles and responsibilities which strengthen an identified segment of our school culture and program.

Student leadership is an essential opportunity we feel should be structured into our program. Students in second through fifth grades can serve on Student Council. Once elected by their peers, students work together and with a staff sponsor to make school-wide decisions which impact their peers. This could be the purchase of new playground equipment or fundraising for flood victims. Students also serve as Student Ambassadors as we host and welcome visitors to our campus.

Teacher leaders are also essential to the Sequoyah program. Through a shared voice and vision, teacher input is collected and used to guide our campus goals and initiatives to support teaching and learning. Teachers serve on vertical content teams, school leadership team, and grade level teams to develop a cohesive perspective of our work.

Parents help lead our school as well through their work with PTO and SEF. As an extension of the classroom, parent leaders are able to support our students in ways in which teachers may be inhibited. The strength and wisdom found within our school families is a great resource to the enrichment and extension of our curriculum offerings and programming.

With each of these groups - students, teachers, and families - it is the philosophy of the school principal to navigate, communicate, connect, empower, and educate each of these groups for the overall benefit of our school. Through a committed and clear focus on creating a learning environment where all students are respected and offered unique learning opportunities, the principal is able to collaboratively create the goal in which we set out to succeed in each year.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Beginning in 2013, Sequoyah Elementary School was invited to partner with Peabody College at Vanderbilt University as they sought to develop a new structure for teacher professional development. Through this collaboration with professors at Vanderbilt and colleagues in Shanghai, China, Sequoyah teachers and administration were able to help pilot what would later become Teaching Peer Excellence Groups (TPEG). Over the last six years, TPEG has continued to be an integral structure within the yearly routine of our school's professional learning plan.

The essence of TPEG is that grade level teams collaboratively determine an instructional area in which they would like to grow their pedagogical knowledge. This targeted area aligns with the TEAM instructional rubric in which teacher evaluations are completed. Once the team has determined an indicator of focus, the teachers then select a lesson to co-plan through the lens of that one indicator. Following the collaborative planning session, one teacher presents the lesson to students while all other teachers on that team observe the implementation. The following week, the team provides reflection and refinement recommendations according to the observation and alignment to the TEAM rubric. The goal is to continue refining instructional strategies until the teacher team gains confidence and expertise within that content and indicator.

At the end of the first year of TPEG implementation, teacher teams which embraced the collaboration and transparency of this model showed great pedagogical growth. The trust and positive relationship development with those teams was extraordinary. Some teams struggled with this professional development model because of the open dialogue and honesty which was required. Over time, administration and instructional coaches committed themselves to support each team in the way they needed. Each team was given the space and grace to develop honesty and openness in the manner which fit their team.

Years later, we have continued to refine the model to fit the needs of our staff. While we can see the ongoing social and relational benefits of opening our classrooms to observe peers' instruction, we also know that professional learning models must be dynamic; ever changing with the needs of our teams. We have now transitioned to focus more on student work expectations and how assessments align with the learning targets identified by each team. Teachers are continuing to discuss instructional strategies and methods, along with new ideas to engage students and broaden the opportunities for students to show progression in content mastery.