

***U.S. Department of Education***  
***2020 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program***

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[ ] Public or [X] Non-public

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

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

Official School Name Cornerstone Christian Academy  
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 5295 Triangle Parkway  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Norcross State GA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 30092-2537

County Gwinnett

Telephone (770) 441-9222 Fax \_\_\_\_\_

Web site/URL https://www.cornerstonecougars.org/ E-mail ccreel@cornerstonecougars.net

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. Colin Creel E-mail ccreel@cornerstonecougars.net  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Private School in Gwinnett County Tel. (770) 441-9222

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. Greg Schlicht  
(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 2020 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 2014 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: 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, or 2019.
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 (2019-2020) unless otherwise stated.

**DISTRICT** (Question 1 is not applicable to non-public schools)

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

**SCHOOL** (To be completed by all schools)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located. If unsure, refer to NCES database for correct category: <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/> (Find your school and check “Locale”)

- Urban (city or town)
- Suburban
- Rural

3. Number of students as of October 1, 2019 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent at the school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	13	24	37
1	13	30	43
2	21	19	40
3	18	16	34
4	21	24	45
5	20	20	40
6	30	24	54
7	23	31	54
8	15	16	31
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
<b>Total Students</b>	174	204	378

\*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
  - 3.7 % Asian
  - 3.16 % Black or African American
  - 2.6 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 82.9 % White
  - 7.65 % 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 2018 - 2019 school year: 1%

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, 2018 until the end of the 2018-2019 school year	2
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2018 until the end of the 2018-2019 school year	2
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	4
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2018	349
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.01
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	1

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

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 0 %

Total number students who qualify: 0

8. Students receiving special education services: 10 %

39 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>0</u> Autism                  | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>0</u> Other Health Impaired                 |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>36</u> Specific Learning Disability         |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>3</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: 7

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

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	11
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	30
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	6
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	2
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	0

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 13:1

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

<b>Required Information</b>	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014-2015
Daily student attendance	98%	97%	98%	98%	98%
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 2019.

<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.

Cornerstone Christian Academy will partner with parents to provide a quality academic education designed to develop students who will follow Christ, embrace biblical truth and live lives that glorify God.

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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Nestled in beautiful Peachtree Corners, Georgia (a suburb of Atlanta), Cornerstone Christian Academy (K-8) is the perfect combination of rigor and love. The vast majority of students come from dual working families. Forty-five percent of the students live in Peachtree Corners, and the remainder pulls from nineteen neighboring zip codes. Although Cornerstone is not inexpensive, compared to other Atlanta private schools, it is considered a bargain. Historically, over 20% of the students receive some form of aid and approximately 17% of the student body would be considered diverse. Cornerstone Christian Academy was founded with eight students in 2001 as a ministry of Peachtree Corners Baptist Church. Today, the school has its own 501(c)3 with a distinct governing board and serves 379 students in kindergarten through eighth grade. Cornerstone remains dedicated to a small school size and low teacher-to-student ratio with 14 children in each kindergarten class and no more than 18 students in first through eighth grade classes. It varies from year to year, but typically 60% of Cornerstone's graduates will matriculate to public high schools while the remainder chooses private schools.

Cornerstone Christian Academy is a “high value school with high values,” graduating students who are confident in their faith and well prepared to succeed in high school and beyond. Cornerstone is accredited by the Southern Association of Independent Schools (SAIS) and is a member of the Council for Educational Standards and Accountability (CESA). Cornerstone attracts skilled and passionate faculty. On average, teachers have more than ten years of teaching experience, and over 40% hold master’s degrees. Cornerstone's educators are energetic and enthusiastic about their work and regularly attend conferences and workshops to foster their professional development. Cornerstone’s skilled teachers integrate best practices in instruction techniques throughout all grade levels and subjects. Technology, such as iPads, Chromebooks and SMART boards, are used to engage and educate all students, and Middle School students combine critical thinking with real-life application of STEM skills through the robotics program. Lower School teachers employ the Orton-Gillingham method to teach reading - this multi-sensory approach meets the needs of all types of learners by instructing through visual, auditory and kinesthetic teaching techniques. Cornerstone students are challenged every day to employ higher-order thinking skills by looking at topics and lessons from different perspectives.

Cornerstone’s approach is holistic, but four programs that make Cornerstone particularly unique are the writing, House, sports and arts programs. In Lower School, making writing a lifelong habit is a priority with the Writer’s Workshop experience. The weekly lessons to produce fluent writers include a mini-lesson, independent writing, conferencing, and sharing. A writing specialist works with the students multiple times a week and gives them an opportunity to write in a variety of genres. The writing specialist is able to meet students at their specific skill level and help foster a love for writing. In Middle School, in addition to English class, students take a separate writing class as well. While Lower School writing lessons focus more on creative writing, Middle School writing instruction shifts to more academic writing. Students consistently move into high school at a level well beyond their peers at other schools.

Cornerstone has always been known for its close-knit community. In 2016, Cornerstone launched a House program in the Middle School to further entrench the aspect of community into the fiber of our school. Each new student to the Middle School is randomly selected into one of four Houses named for biblical mountains (Ararat, Sinai, Carmel, and Zion). The four Houses compete throughout the school year, according to a point system that rewards group and individual effort. The primary goal of the points is to focus on fellowship and camaraderie through competition. Students earn points for various activities, ranging from academics to sports to group trivia games. Through the House program, there are countless leadership and service opportunities. Through this effort, the student population has seen consistent growth in taking initiative and ownership of their community.

In an era where children are pressured to specialize in one sport at increasingly younger ages, Cornerstone offers interscholastic competition in cross country, boys and girls volleyball, flag football, basketball, swimming, cheer, dodgeball, bowling, chess, golf, baseball, soccer, tennis, track, and Ultimate Frisbee. Cornerstone strongly believes that Middle School students should participate in a variety of sports so they can find their niche. In addition, there are countless lessons learned while participating in sports that are

difficult to duplicate anywhere else. In an educational culture that often sees large budget cuts affecting the arts, the Fine Arts program at Cornerstone Christian Academy is thriving. Cornerstone has seen tremendous growth in its student population, and Fine Arts opportunities have multiplied exponentially. Over 94% of Cornerstone students are involved in Fine Arts classes and extracurricular activities which include general music and art classes, Lower School class plays, after school clubs, chorus, Middle School art, drama, music and video production electives, applied piano and voice lessons, talent shows, Chapel Band, Broadway, Jr. and Disney, Jr. productions and several school-wide performances.

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

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### **1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.**

**1a.** Overall approach, which may include overarching philosophy or approaches common across subject areas

Cornerstone’s coursework is designed to meet the state and national standards. One of Cornerstone’s core values is to challenge all students to seek God’s plan for their lives and reach their full, God-given potential. This goal is achieved by treating each child as an individual learner and providing leveled experiences to help them develop at an equitable, more individualized pace. Cornerstone promotes active involvement of students in the learning process, including opportunities to explore application of higher order thinking skills and investigate new strategies to apply their learning.

The school uses instructional strategies, learning activities and technology practices in classrooms that are research based. Ongoing training and external workshops are provided for continual staff instructional improvement. In addition, students attend special classes in foreign language, writing, technology, art, music, library and physical education to ensure a variety of educational experiences. The entire school has access to in-class and lab technology where students explore new approaches to learning beyond the textbook. This technology, including Smartboards, iPads, iPad minis, Chromebooks and Macbook Airs, provides additional interactive instructional tools, creates more interest and motivation among students, and provides instructional opportunities that cater to all learning styles.

Cornerstone utilizes a clearly defined and documented curricular review process to determine school-wide and subject specific curricular goals, objectives, and outcomes. The curriculum is revised on a cyclical basis with a predetermined timeline of no more than five years. The school utilizes the ATLAS Curriculum Management System to systematically map and align the curriculum with state and national standards. Each year the faculty revises the maps to ensure that they match current curriculum and class instruction. These maps include a multi-grade scope and sequence with well-defined student expected outcomes for each grade level.

Cornerstone uses assessment data for making decisions for the continuous improvement of teaching and learning processes. Pre and post-test results are used to identify instructional content needs. The CTP5 results are evaluated for trend data that can be applied to improve instruction. Teachers and administration meet to discuss test results and plan for appropriate interventions and changes for individual students as well.

### **1b.** Reading/English language arts

Beginning in kindergarten, students are immersed in exciting works of literature through which they experience the rhythm of language, enrich their vocabulary and engage the creative side of their brain. Lower School teachers use individualized conferences and reading groups, in correlation with the Recipe for Reading Curriculum and the Orton-Gillingham methodology, to develop a life-long approach to reading that will improve students’ comprehension skills. Through these curriculum approaches students learn phonics rules and develop phonemic awareness, which facilitates the move from inventive spelling to conventional spelling. Daily, students participate in the four main components of language (listening, speaking, reading and writing) to develop a strong language arts foundation. This allows for a smooth transition to reading for meaning and pleasure rather than reading solely to acquire information.

As students progress through the Lower School, they develop an appreciation of literature by reading a variety of literary forms. They explore the essential strategies needed to become good readers. Instruction focuses on reading with accuracy and fluency to support comprehension. Students learn reading strategies and skills including making connections, asking questions, visualizing, inferring information, determining author’s purpose and summarizing texts. As students mature in their literary understanding, they progress to critically analyzing literature for important elements including theme, plot, character development and figurative language. Vocabulary development is emphasized with the goal of being able to use words in

context and with a focus on acquiring a solid basis of common Greek and Latin root words.

In the Lower School, making writing a lifelong habit is a priority with the Writer's Workshop experience. The weekly lessons used to create fluent writers include a mini-lesson, independent writing, conferencing, and sharing. The teachers and writing specialists give the students opportunities to write in a variety of genres including narrative, expository and fictional pieces. The students learn to find the right topic, word choice, voice, and sentence fluency. The teachers use personalized conferences to meet students at their specific skill level and help foster a love for writing.

As students progress through Middle School, vocabulary development, literary devices and clear written expression of thought are prioritized. They learn to develop well-written paragraphs, essays and research papers. Emphasis is placed on solid paragraph development, including strong topic sentences and strong supporting details. Teachers use direct grammar instruction through traditional methods including diagramming, to develop mastery of parts of speech, punctuation and sentence components. Cornerstone's goal is to develop a love for reading and writing that lasts a lifetime.

### **1c. Mathematics**

Cornerstone utilizes differentiated instruction in all math classes, kindergarten through eighth grade, to promote a deep understanding of mathematical concepts. Students are placed in flexible groups based on overall performance, grades, the Comprehensive Testing Program (CTP5) standardized test results, and teacher observation to ensure that they receive the support necessary not only to understand concepts, but also to be able to apply these concepts to problem solve and understand the world around them.

In the Lower School, fact memorization is emphasized. A firm foundation in number sense is laid by the math curriculum, Math in Focus and supporting resources. Students explore time, money, place value, and other important mathematical concepts using a real-world approach. A conceptual understanding is built through concrete experiences that gradually transition to abstract representations. Manipulatives are utilized to help students grasp abstract concepts.

Hands-on mathematical experiences are emphasized, giving students real world examples of adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing. These experiences make math more relevant to their lives. Problem solving is at the heart of all Lower School mathematics classes. Kindergarten students begin problem solving through the use of pictures and manipulatives and progress to using numbers and words. The focus is on developing skills and communicating ideas for problem solving and critical thinking using mathematical language.

In Middle School, students are taught in a way that uses the number sense and math facts learned in Lower School as the basis for more complex problem solving, as well as a more confident and sophisticated understanding of mathematical concepts. Math is the only subject in Middle School in which students are assigned to class based on ability level. Grades five through seven each have standard and advanced math sections. Eighth grade has standard math, advanced math, and honors level math sections. Students are assigned to the appropriate math level based on teacher observations of class performance, CTP standardized test scores, and consultation with parents. Leveling math classes in this way, combined with a low teacher/student ratio, allows for precisely tailored instruction, and for individualized attention for each student.

In this context of small class size ( $\cong 18$ ) grouped by ability, teachers are able to use the whole gamut of instructional techniques appropriate for math, from group projects to individual instruction and tutoring. Cornerstone provides excellent resources, including 1-to-1 Chromebooks for classroom use, Smartboards for whole group instruction, and traditional textbooks. The curriculum and instructional delivery of the math program in Middle School is designed so that eighth grade graduates who complete standard level math are ready to thrive in challenging high school mathematics, and those who complete honors level math are prepared to begin with Algebra 2 in ninth grade.

careful reviews of outcomes. This is done formally through analysis of CTP5 data at the student level, grade level, and school level. Additionally, Cornerstone regularly reviews state standards, and curricular standards of the high schools attended by most of the graduates.

#### **1d. Science**

Students begin their scientific educational journey with an eye towards discovery. Cornerstone's inquiry-based science program is designed to ignite a passion for learning and scientific exploration. Teachers take an experiential approach to instruction by incorporating scientific concepts with biblical integration to form a well rounded foundation.

Lower School students explore the components of the scientific method by participating in a variety of hands-on experiments. Each year they explore important physical science, earth science and life science topics and use science tools to aid in this discovery. They learn to observe, record, organize, interpret, write and present the results of scientific investigations clearly and accurately.

Technology is a key component of this scientific exploration. Students utilize safe search Internet sites to research and explore advanced scientific concepts as they grow. Middle School students use advanced scientific tools to aid discovery and research content. Students are asked to apply their scientific knowledge to solve real world, challenging problems in their school and the world around them. They start by defining a problem and designing a solution that reflects specified criteria for success and constraints on materials, time and cost. They learn to generate and compare multiple possible solutions to a problem based on how well each is likely to meet the criteria and constraints of the problem. Finally, they plan and carry out fair tests in which variables are controlled and failure points are considered to identify aspects of a model or prototype that can be improved. Within this framework, students explore pertinent topics such as the effects of pollution and creating solutions to protect the Earth's resources and environment.

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

Cornerstone teachers prepare students to accept the challenge of becoming thoughtful, independent citizens. They are encouraged to expand their cognitive abilities through analytical tasks such as comparing and contrasting, differentiating, hypothesizing and synthesizing. Students are encouraged to consider the world around them through these lenses of thought. Additionally, they are taught how to engage in open discourse about their worldview and their beliefs.

Lower School students begin their journey into history by exploring the principles of needs, wants and choices. They develop an understanding of the basic principles that provide the foundation of government. As young students, they begin to understand the rights and responsibilities that come along with citizenship. Students explore these concepts by reading high quality nonfiction literature and taking experiential trips to places like Stone Mountain and The Atlanta History Center.

Middle School students dive deeper into social studies topics by looking at and discussing the roles and impact that religion, geography and leadership have played in shaping our country. Students are asked to independently research historical events and figures in order to present findings to the class in a clear manner in order to gain a deeper understanding of significant historical events. Examples of this include the staging of a wax museum that features famous Americans and recreating a memorable recreation of the immigration process at Ellis Island.

Students research important historical events to write succinct paragraphs in response to critical thinking questions regarding historical events. As students progress through the middle school years, paragraph length and complexity increase as factual knowledge is paired with critical thinking skills.

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

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

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

All art courses are designed to show God as the artful, ultimate Creator that He is. Students are taught about His works and encouraged to reflect on His beautiful creations and thus be inspired to create unique artwork themselves. Included in the art curriculum are various creative and challenging projects which teach students the formal elements (i.e. line, shape, form, texture, value and color) and principles (i.e. emphasis, balance, harmony, movement, rhythm, proportions and unity) of art. With each project, students are exposed to biblical correlations, art history, art criticism and a wide selection of art mediums.

The performing arts program at Cornerstone Christian Academy offers tremendous opportunities for students to share and refine their God-given gifts and talents. Students have opportunities to explore music history and a wide variety of music media in the Fine Arts classroom. Cornerstone believes that each child is uniquely and wonderfully created in God's image and fosters and encourages the development of these talents through participation in the many offerings through the Fine Arts program. One of these programs is the Middle School Chorus.

In Chorus, students hone their musical talents and performance skills. Students focus on sight-reading, proper vocal and Chorus technique, 2- and 3-part singing and effective communication through a variety of musical styles and genres. The Chorus performs in several concerts throughout the year. Students also have the opportunity to shine on stage by taking a drama class in their fifth and sixth grade years. They are offered an introduction to improvisation, characterization, the stage, and acting techniques. Students have fun while developing self confidence in a theatrical art form.

Physical education at Cornerstone is designed to build a foundation and appreciation for healthy living and to provide students with a variety of activities to stay mobile and fit. Through the study of movement and learning the importance of taking care of their bodies, students not only gain a basic understanding of the responsibility we have to maintain our overall well-being, but more importantly, they have the opportunity to honor God by sustaining His temple (their bodies).

It is the mission of the Spanish program at Cornerstone Christian Academy to introduce students to a wide variety of Spanish vocabulary and culture. The development of a second world language reinforces cognitive skills. Through an emphasis on performance in the target language, students become well-rounded learners who possess a lens through which they will experience the diversities of the world around them.

All students, K-8 utilize the library on a regular basis. Cornerstone's library has many print and non-print materials to support the school's mission and curriculum. The library is staffed by teachers who assist students and faculty with the selection of instructional materials.

Through a diverse collection of enrichment classes, Middle School students are able to explore a wide variety of learning experiences and engage in the expressive aspects of their lives. Class choices like STEM, art, video production, study skills and more serve as a vehicle to develop creative comprehension. All elective disciplines are integral parts of our effort to help develop well-rounded students.

The focus of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) is designed to get students to think outside the box and use their God-given talents to solve real world problems. The activities students explore demand innovative, team based solutions. Students are provided challenging problems that they solve using their own ideas and designs.

In the video production elective, students learn the basics of script writing, filming, directing and editing. The course requires a hands-on approach as students create short films from start to finish that will be used in Chapel services throughout the year. The class uses high definition cameras for filming and iMovie '11 for editing. This course is designed to be fun, interactive and relevant for each student.

S.O.A.R. is a course that focuses on learning strategies and study skills. Topics like time management, note taking, test preparation, test-taking techniques and more are addressed to assist students with their transition

to middle school life. Developing study skills reduces the friction between student potential and the execution of tasks.

### **3. Academic Supports:**

#### **3a. Students performing below grade level**

Cornerstone supports students that are performing below grade level by providing differentiated instruction. All teachers have received training on differentiated instruction and provide this tiered level of support in a variety of ways. One way that has been particularly beneficial for students is flexible mathematical leveling. Students are placed in leveled math classes beginning in second grade and this continues through middle school. Teachers use summative and formative assessments in combination with observational data to place students. These groups are flexible and change based on the mathematical topic being presented. This leveling for math continues through middle school.

In addition, students receive individualized reading instruction beginning in kindergarten. Students are assessed quarterly using a DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment) and are provided instruction based on their assessment results/level.

#### **3b. Students performing above grade level**

Cornerstone serves a high number of above grade level students. A large percentage of our Middle School students are Duke TIP qualified. To address their specific learning needs, Cornerstone offers differentiated instruction including math leveling and individualized reading instruction. Teachers receive ongoing instruction (which includes guest speakers and in-house training) on teaching the advanced learner. Strategies such as questioning, grouping, tiering and choice menus are used in every classroom, beginning in kindergarten and extending through eighth grade.

#### **3c. Special education**

Cornerstone does not offer a special education program. If a child needs remediation or support, in addition to what the school provides, parents privately contract with outside tutors or therapists. Cornerstone has four tutoring rooms available for therapists to use during the school day.

#### **3d. ELLs, if a special program or intervention is offered**

Cornerstone does not offer an ELL program.

#### **3e. Other populations (e.g., migrant), if a special program or intervention is offered**

Cornerstone does not offer any special programs or interventions.

## **PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE**

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### **1. Engaging Students:**

Cornerstone’s high engagement of students begins with the hiring process of the teaching staff; a great deal of time and energy is spent choosing the right teachers for Cornerstone. All administrators feel their staff is the “best,” but over the years Cornerstone has developed a system that not only identifies but retains the top talent. Due to the size of the school, students and teachers share a unique relationship; they are known.

Daily schedules are designed with students in mind and scheduling is driven by what is best for the students. Schedules allow for time where students may work independently at desks, periods where they have the opportunity to move about freely, periods where they work collaboratively (all of which include indoor and outdoor time), and time for physical and artistic growth.

Cornerstone offers a wide range of extra-curricular activities. Lower School students are able to engage in clubs after school (i.e. 3-D printing, cooking, chess) as well as participate in school plays. Not surprisingly, there are even more after school offerings in Middle School. As noted earlier, Cornerstone offers a wide array of sports, plays and clubs (such as chess and the Helen Ruffin Reading Bowl). Service is also a big part of the fabric of Cornerstone. Cornerstone’s design for service in our communities is unique because each student is deeply involved in service as they work with only one organization each year. By the time they graduate, they will have worked with a wide array of organizations. Lower School students serve in areas that they can developmentally understand (i.e. working with senior citizens and providing food for people in need), while Middle School students step out into areas requiring a more advanced developmental level (i.e. serving in homeless shelters and providing basic supplies for foster care children, members of the armed forces, etc.).

Throughout the school year, there are countless ways Cornerstone’s students are celebrated. There are traditional celebrations over fine arts, athletics, and academics, and birthdays are also celebrated. The most treasured celebrations occur each spring in the Lower School when teachers pick a Bible verse and corresponding character trait for each child which is shared in Ebenezer ceremonies. These celebrations highlight in a very tangible way that each child is known on a very personal level. Finally, a great deal of time is spent instructing students on soft skills (i.e. making eye contact and being courteous and respectful when interacting with others). In Lower School, this is accomplished through “The Cornerstone Way”, and in Middle School through “House Habits”.

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

A portion of Cornerstone’s mission statement states, “Cornerstone Christian Academy will partner with parents to provide a quality academic education.” That partnership serves as one of the pillars and successful traits of the school. One-hundred percent of parents are members of the Parent Teacher Fellowship (PTF). Due to its importance, this membership is included in our enrollment contract. Our PTF supports countless school events throughout the school year (i.e. Fall Family Fun Night, Spirit Nights, dances). In addition, the PTF promotes school spirit by running the Corner Store. Financially, parents have reached 100% Annual Fund participation for the last nine years. Cornerstone has complete buy-in from the parent community.

Cornerstone fosters this partnership by keeping the communication channels open. Every teacher sends weekly emails to parents on Fridays. Room parents provide Sunday afternoon emails, and the school offers school-wide communication every Friday afternoon through a digital Cougar Connection newsletter. Communication is also shared through various social media platforms and print articles. In addition, parent programs serve as excellent vehicles to share Cornerstone’s expertise (or outsourced expertise) with parents. The Lower School principal spearheads grade level specific parent nights every fall, such as kindergarten - school routine, first grade - phonics, second grade - math, third grade - responsibility/homework. In Middle School, Cornerstone facilitates parent meetings around topics such as discipline and cyber safety. Both school divisions offer various parent coffees as well as follow up meetings regarding standardized testing results.

As a K-8 school, Cornerstone partners with parents all the way until students are handed off to their respective high schools. Much like high schools have college fairs, Cornerstone offers a high school fair every fall. These fairs allow the families opportunities to ask questions in a familiar environment. Prior to these fairs, appropriate interview skills are reinforced through the House program. Later in the fall, Cornerstone hosts school tours of both public and private schools in the area. There are continual conversations with various high schools regarding curriculum and the various ways Cornerstone can collaborate in order to prepare students for the next level. Finally, the partnership extends outside the property lines as well. Cornerstone routinely participates in city parades, the chorus performs at community events and the school financially supports local swim teams and baseball teams through sponsorships. Cornerstone desires to partner with the community as well as the families.

### **3. Creating Professional Culture:**

Cornerstone's teachers are one of the school's greatest assets and they thrive in an environment where they feel valued and supported by intentional professional development, attractive compensation packages, parent partnership, manageable workloads and a consistent voice.

Professional development begins the minute a teacher is hired. There is a Lower School and Middle School Mentor Coordinator who oversees the mentoring program. In addition, each teacher is assigned a grade level (LS) or subject (MS) mentor as well. One percent of the school's operating budget is set aside for staff development. During new teacher orientation, the head of school stresses that Cornerstone desires for teachers to pursue professional development and that the goal the professional development is improvement of the academic program outcomes. Ongoing training and external workshops are provided for continual staff instructional improvement. Two professional development days are facilitated each year with guest speakers who emphasize relevant and research based practices. Outside national conferences are utilized to stay abreast of the current research and best practices in independent schools. In addition, teacher professional learning time and monthly meetings educate teachers on the integration of Cornerstone's values, beliefs, and mission throughout the curriculum content areas. Principals observe staff informally and formally as well.

Although Cornerstone's teachers are not the highest paid teachers in the area, the school focuses on total compensation in order to stay competitive. Cornerstone uses benchmarking to maintain competitive salaries. In addition, Cornerstone continues to offer 100% health care premium coverage to employees (which is increasingly rare), as well a matching 403(b) retirement program and incentives for years of service. The school focuses on a work/life balance by ensuring class sizes and workloads are manageable, as well as extracurricular duties. For those teachers who coach or lead after school activities, free childcare is available if applicable. The parent community highly values the staff in multiple ways as well. Throughout the year the parent-led STAR committee provides numerous services for the teachers, but the two most significant are providing catered lunches for teacher appreciation events, and wrapping Christmas presents for teachers around the holidays. The teachers absolutely love bringing in all of their unwrapped gifts to be beautifully wrapped by parent volunteers. Finally, the staff feels as though they have a voice through numerous surveys. For example, when discussing the annual calendar, the administration will often survey the staff and offer them a choice before making a decision.

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

Cornerstone has a governing board which formally and informally delegates the daily operation of the school to the head of school who supervises the administrative team, faculty and staff. The board has by-laws, found in the Trustee Handbook, and 501(c)(3) papers. The by-laws are reviewed annually. In addition to fiduciary duties, the board's primary role is to keep the school in line with its mission and manage their one employee, the head of school. The head of school's role is to manage the daily operations of the school which includes carrying out the board adopted strategic plan. The strategic plan is vital to continually moving the school forward by constantly self-reflecting on how to enhance the student experience.

While the head of school oversees the day-to-day operations, the directors (division principals, admissions, NBRS 2020

arts, athletics, finance, technology) and the parent teacher fellowship (PTF) are the boots on the ground. Due to the intimate size and nature of Cornerstone, the head of school interacts with all directors on a daily basis. Cornerstone has two division principals, Lower School and Middle School. Each principal is responsible for the needs and well-being of the students and teachers in their respective divisions. The division principals, the Director of Admissions and the head of school meet formally bi-weekly while the directors meet monthly. During these meetings, high level as well as day-to-day operations are discussed and evaluated based on how they align with the school's mission and what is best for students.

As part of Cornerstone's mission, students are evaluated in a variety of ways. One of these ways is through standardized testing. The standardized testing coordinator works with the division principals to analyze CTP5 data for both formative and summative purposes. These data points are used to improve curriculum and instructional methods at both the classroom and division levels. The student leadership and House system coordinator designs and implements systems that provide for the social, emotional, and spiritual growth of Cornerstone students. Through these systems, students are given increasing levels of opportunity and responsibility for planning and implementing House system activities. These student-led systems encourage a culture of cooperation and unity among the student body.

## **PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

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Cornerstone's success is directly tied to the ability to remain consistent to the mission of the school. The mission: Cornerstone Christian Academy will partner with parents to provide a quality academic education designed to develop students who will follow Christ, embrace biblical truth and live lives that glorify God.

Breaking down the mission statement, the school partners with parents through a variety of ways. Intentional communication at Cornerstone serves as a bedrock of the partnership with parents. Weekly emails that contain curriculum highlights and important reminders go home to parents in kindergarten through fourth grade every Friday. A live grade book and digital agenda are used at the middle school level to provide weekly communication. In addition, a full school news blast is sent weekly in the form of a digital newsletter called the Cougar Connection. The school website is the primary vehicle used for communication to former, potential, and future stakeholders of Cornerstone. In addition, the school partners with parents by fostering a culture of community and collaboration with stakeholders through a number of opportunities that include, but are not limited to, parent coffees, parent-teacher conferences, grade level events, full school events, volunteer activities, and school surveys. Cornerstone's Parent Teacher Fellowship (PTF) is an essential pillar in the school's organization, working to build community among parents and between the Cornerstone staff and school family while being responsible for the coordination and execution of many of the school's events.

As the mission statement reflects, Cornerstone does not believe a high quality academic education and building one's faith are mutually exclusive. In partnership with parents, the goal as a school is to infuse Christ into everything the school does. The biblical worldview integration connects a biblical framework to all aspects of life that leads to understanding and wisdom. The Bible is not just taught in Bible class. Cornerstone takes a holistic approach to education that includes everything from technology classes to competitive sports programs, to providing students ample opportunities to serve in the local community as well as weekly chapel services and discipleship groups. Cornerstone has utilized the ATLAS Curriculum Management System to systematically map and align the curriculum with state and national standards. Each year the faculty revises the maps to ensure that they match current curriculum and class instruction.

## **PART VII - NON-PUBLIC SCHOOL INFORMATION**

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1. Non-public school association(s): Christian

Identify the religious or independent associations, if any, to which the school belongs. Select the primary association first.

2. Does the school have nonprofit, tax-exempt (501(c)(3)) status?      Yes X      No

3. What is the educational cost per student?      \$12483  
(School budget divided by enrollment)

4. What is the average financial aid per student?      \$5674

5. What percentage of the annual budget is devoted to scholarship assistance and/or tuition reduction?      9%

6. What percentage of the student body receives scholarship assistance, including tuition reduction?      25%