

U.S. Department of Education
2020 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. Lynn H. Hamblett
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

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

School Mailing Address 2320 Murdock Road
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Marietta State GA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 30062-4571

County Cobb

Telephone (770) 509-5071 Fax (770) 509-5217

Web site/URL http://www.cobbk12.org/murdock/ E-mail Lynn.Hamblett@cobbk12.org

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

Date _____

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent* Mr. Chris Ragsdale E-mail Chris.Ragsdale@cobbk12.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

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

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

Date _____

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board
President/Chairperson Mr. Brad Wheeler
(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 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

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):
- 68 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 25 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 17 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 110 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	81	73	154
1	87	78	165
2	69	84	153
3	91	89	180
4	69	97	166
5	99	84	183
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	496	505	1001

*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):
- 0.6 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 18.4 % Asian
 - 6.5 % Black or African American
 - 8 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0.1 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 62.9 % White
 - 3.5 % 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: 8%

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 <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2018 until the end of the 2018-2019 school year	39
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2018 until the end of the 2018-2019 school year	42
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	81
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2018	965
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.08
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	8

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

Arabic, Bengali, Bulgarian, Chinese, Dari, Dutch, Farsi, Flemish, French, German, Gujarati, Hebrew, Hindi, Japanese, Korean, Lithuanian, Mandarin, Other African, Other Asian, Other Indian, Persian, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Turkish, Urdu, Vietnamese

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 9 %
87 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 6 %

Total number students who qualify: 65

8. Students receiving special education services: 10 %

99 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>22</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>10</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>12</u> Developmental Delay | <u>27</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>7</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>20</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>0</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>1</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:

	Number of Staff
Administrators	3
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	49
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	16
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	12
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	4

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 20:1

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

Required Information	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014-2015
Daily student attendance	97%	97%	97%	97%	94%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

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

Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2019.

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

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award. 1988

15. In a couple of sentences, provide the school’s mission or vision statement.

Empowering people to work together to learn, serve, and lead with integrity.

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

Murdock Elementary is a 45-year-old school serving approximately 1,000+ students in kindergarten through fifth grade. We are in Marietta, Georgia, 15 miles outside the city of Atlanta. Our mascot is a Mustang which is symbolic of the students we strive to develop - students who are strong, independent learners with great stamina to race into the future and the long journey ahead of them, and equipped to deal with diversity through collaboration skills. The Murdock community is diverse, with a large high socio-economic population. There is strong parent support coupled with high expectations.

We are one of the larger schools in Cobb County. Our student population consists of 496 males and 505 females. Approximately 63% are White, 18% are Asian, 7% are African American or Black, 8% are Hispanic, and 4% are Multi-Racial. We have 9% of our student population participating in the English Language Learners (ELL) program with 27 different languages represented, 7% of our student population is receiving free and reduced lunch, 10% are receiving special education services through an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), 30% of our population are receiving gifted services in a one day a week resource pullout model, and approximately 40% of our fourth and fifth grade students receive advanced content instruction in English Language Arts and/or Math daily.

Our staff is highly competent with over 60% holding advanced degrees. We have one National Board-Certified teacher. Our teachers have expanded their knowledge not only with advanced degrees, but also with teaching endorsements in the area of ESOL, gifted education, reading, math and science. Currently Murdock teachers have a total of 49 certificate endorsements in these five areas.

At Murdock, it is our mission to empower people to work together to learn, serve, and lead with integrity. We believe that all students can make a difference in society as thoughtful, compassionate and strong leaders. Our teachers and staff continually strive to provide a positive learning environment with rigorous, differentiated, and balanced instruction. Teachers use a wide variety of strategies to provide authentic and personalized instruction for all students. For example, Advanced Content courses provide accelerated learning and extended curriculum. The Advanced Learning Program develops students' critical and creative thinking. In addition, students who benefit from extra Reading and phonics remediation are provided support through programs such as IRead, Read 180, and Foundations. Murdock provides an all-inclusive learning environment by meeting individual children where they are and developing them to their fullest potential.

Murdock is dedicated to preparing students for the future. Teachers provide challenge centers in all classrooms, Makerspace in the Media Lab, health and nutrition instruction, and Leader In Me (LIM). From the implementation of LIM in 2014, students have been encouraged to be compassionate leaders. LIM helps develop the whole child and empowers students to take ownership and build life-skills needed to flourish in today's culture. Murdock staff has undergone training in Stephen Covey's 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, combined with the Leader in Me and Speed of Trust. As our population has changed over the years, we realized that we needed professional development in culturally relevant teaching along with cultural diversity awareness and sensitivity development. Teachers are highly skilled at providing an emotionally safe learning environment for every child. Students set personal and grade level goals to facilitate responsibility and promote academics. The music department teaches diversity through music programs such as Fine Arts Day. The Innovation and Technology Lab exposes all students to higher order, critical, and creative thinking while incorporating real-world technology. As a result of these programs and initiatives, teachers collaborate and communicate effectively, and students are creative and critical thinking individuals.

To ensure our students are successful members of society, Murdock encourages community connections. Our partners in education provide opportunities for all students to enhance their education as well as their well-being. Murdock's strong PTA and Foundation support and benefit all our students by providing classroom supplies, enrichment materials, in house field trips, and the Leader in Me program. Our school realizes that what we do within our classrooms has a ripple effect on our community. Therefore, we strive to teach our students that their education within our walls is not only academic but social and emotional. All

students are given the opportunity to participate in community service projects whether as an individual, class, or grade level. Our students support local charities by donating used books, shoes, and their own money. Our upper grades participate in grade level projects that have supported programs such as Crisis Ministries and local Assisted Living Homes. Through these endeavors, Murdock students take the necessary steps to become well rounded individuals who are prepared to impact their respective communities as they make their way in this ever-changing world.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

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

Murdock’s philosophy is that all students learn at different rates and are at different readiness levels. We believe that all student instruction should be tapered to meet individual needs. To ensure effective differentiation, various diagnostic and formative assessments are routinely used by teachers to drive instructional practices. Instruction is rigorous and engaging, stretching each child’s thinking to go above and beyond.

1b. Reading/English language arts

The students at Murdock Elementary receive rigorous instruction driven by standards of excellence and analysis of data. This practice ensures the growth and success of all students.

Murdock Elementary applies a balanced literacy approach through all the English-language arts standards. Students receive explicit instruction in phonics through the Foundations program in the primary grades. In addition, several teachers, kindergarten through fifth grade are Ortin-Gillingham trained. Both provide direct, sequential, and prescriptive approaches to teach phonics. These instructional practices help students learn to become fluent and proficient readers.

Qualified Intermediate students participate in an advanced course that teaches grade level standards and standards a year above grade level at an accelerated pace. All teachers implement Readers and Writers’ Workshop, meeting and extending learning at each child’s level. This model also promotes one-on-one conferencing with students, leading to more personalized instruction. Our teachers use different methods such as, guided reading, independent reading, vocabulary studies, whole group reading, novel studies, interactive read-aloud, and close readings to meet the needs of our students. To ensure effective differentiation, various formative and summative assessments are routinely used by teachers to drive instructional practices. In order to meet the modalities of all students, teachers also implement a variety of instructional strategies, including flexible grouping, hands-on activities, and collaborative learning. Through the Six-Traits writing program students are engaged in meaningful activities that develop their writing skills.

1c. Mathematics

Murdock provides rigorous instruction that meets the individual needs of each student. Our balanced mathematics instruction is focused on building foundational skills where students examine concepts through real-world examples and simulations. The consistent use of manipulatives and technology help to ensure student comprehension of concepts. Teachers have students incorporate explanatory writing, drawing pictures, models, and the use of graphs and tables to justify their reasoning. Students apply critical thinking and problem-solving skills, both individually and collaboratively, to justify mathematical solutions. Murdock utilizes the county text, McGraw-Hill My Math, as well as a variety of other sources to support instruction. My Math provides a text as well as manipulatives to engage students in hands-on experiences to enhance their understanding and application of the skills. Students have access to an on-line platform where they can manipulate activities and quizzes. In addition, the county has a resource bank called CTLS (Cobb Teaching and Learning System) that allows teachers to plan, assess, and track Math. Our teachers use pre-assessments and check-ins routinely to extend and remediate instruction. Murdock began PLC data teams this year, with a focus on discussing data obtained from CTLS. Using these resources and strategies, teachers at Murdock provide an advanced math course for intermediate students who qualify. These students are provided a curriculum that is more challenging, moves at an accelerated pace and is taught by a teacher with a gifted endorsement. Students are pre-assessed and instruction or project-based learning is assigned to meet individual learning needs. The advanced math course teaches both on level and one grade level above math standards.

At Murdock we offer programs such as Math Olympiad to students who are interested and qualify. This program allows students who are passionate about math to extend their critical thinking, evaluative, and problem-solving skills.

1d. Science

At Murdock, we use the county text, HMH Georgia Science. These texts provide materials for students to engage in hands-on activities to further their understanding of scientific concepts. Students have access to the on-line platform provided by HMH. CTLS Teach and CTLS Assess are also used with Cobb County's scope and sequence. Our teachers plan lessons based on the 5E model (Engagement, Exploration, Explanation, Elaboration, and Evaluation) to promote collaborative and active learning through investigations.

Murdock's science curriculum comes alive with the support of the MESF (Murdock Elementary School Foundation). Thousands of dollars in funding support instruction in the lab and classrooms. Murdock's parental support of the science curriculum is exceptional! One critical instructional method includes using a gifted-certified teacher in the science lab to meet the needs of each class through enrichment and differentiation. The science lab gives students hands-on, collaborative experiences that support homeroom teachers and science standards of excellence. It incorporates Argument Driven Inquiry (ADI), a research-based approach whose primary focus is on natural phenomena. It gives students the chance to make claims, analyze and transform data into evidence, and build on the ideas of others. Our teachers cultivate higher order and critical thinking in each classroom with ADI as well as by using the 5E model. The Science Lab and Innovation and Technology Lab teachers work collaboratively to give students opportunities to explore and apply the engineering process. Our teachers find opportunities to integrate and connect science concepts throughout all areas in curriculum.

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

At Murdock Elementary our teachers use an interdisciplinary approach to teach social studies. Through novel studies and leveled readers, students are immersed in rich literature that supports social studies standards of excellence. The consistent use of primary and secondary resources make social studies authentic and help students make real world connections between their lives and the past. Balanced social studies instruction teaches students to raise insightful questions, plan inquiries, and become informed problem-solvers. Our teachers increase student engagement through the county provided Social Studies Weekly. Social Studies Weekly provides a newspaper-style format as well as an on-line platform with access to videos, pictures, and quizzes. Students develop their reading and summarizing skills as a result. Additional strategies such as DBQs (Document Based Question Essays) and PBL (Problem Based Learning) are used to promote higher level thinking, analysis, and evaluation, while supporting the curriculum. Professional Learning Communities within grade levels and vertical team meetings help to ensure consistent student growth. Through balanced social studies instruction teachers cultivate learners who can raise insightful questions, plan inquiries, and become informed problem-solvers.

1f. For secondary schools:

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

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Our PE department consists of one health and fitness teacher, as well as one PE teacher, and one PE paraprofessional. Our students are taught the Georgia Standards through Physical Fitness while building good sportsmanship and teamwork skills. The specialist schedule allows student to have 135 minutes of PE every seven days. The lead PE teacher collaborates with the Cobb County PLC Lead to facilitate best practices. Positive relationships with outside partners such as Marietta Martial Arts expose students to additional content. Our students participate in Golden Shoe, a quarterly activity where students walk or jog to promote a healthy lifestyle. Goals are set, records are broken, and the miles add up as Murdock students "Walk Across America" each school year. Our PE department believes that the correlation between brain

activity and test scores proves movement is critical to higher cognitive ability. Our students are engaged with resources such as Spark Curriculum, Open Physical Ed Curriculum, and SHAPE curriculum. Our PE staff is dedicated to building a foundation giving each student the confidence to be a successful person.

Our library learning commons provides a safe, welcoming environment that supports personalized learning, comfortable seating, and spaces for collaboration and creativity as well as quiet reading. Academic lessons are co-planned using grade level standards. Murdock's library learning commons has been certified since 2019. Programs to promote a culture of reading as a foundational skill, personal growth, and enjoyment such as book fairs, author visits, read alouds with community members, book talks, reading challenges, and 6 Flags Read to Succeed Program are provided all year. Students are given opportunities such as makerspace, green-screen, coding and robotics with Dash and Ozobots, and Office 365 to develop their problem-solving skills, ability to self-regulate behaviors, and work collaboratively. Our students have access to over forty-six online databases and resources such as BrianPop, PebbleGo, and Encyclopedia Britannica.

The Innovation and Technology Lab is new to Murdock Elementary. Students visit the lab for 45 minutes every seven days. The Innovation and Technology Lab is taught by a gifted endorsed teacher and offers enrichment to all Murdock students. The Lab creates opportunities for student engagement in higher order and critical thinking, creative problem solving, and creativity training to foster divergent thinking. The Innovation and Technology Lab is a hybrid model incorporating many strategies to challenge student thinking and innovation, such as the Engineering Process, Design Thinking and Project Based Learning. The Lab is a risk-free environment where students are encouraged to think freely, problem solve, and take chances to innovate new ideas. The Innovation and Technology Lab also teaches students to use various, real-world digital tools to enhance and share their learning.

Music is provided to all students, kindergarten through fifth grade. Students rotate and receive 45 minutes of music instruction every seven days. Lessons are aligned with state standards and incorporate the general education curriculum as well. For example, our music teacher collaborates with the fifth-grade team to reinforce concepts of the Harlem Renaissance and with the fourth-grade teachers to support Science lessons on sound. Murdock's music teacher is Orff - and First Steps - certified. Students explore music through movement and access various instruments such as the recorder, xylophone, and drums. The fourth and fifth grade students are offered an opportunity to participate in the chorus program two days after school. These students perform throughout the year for the community. Through active music making students learn performance skills, analysis and appreciation of a diverse repertoire.

The art department at Murdock is dedicated to fostering the creativity in all students. Students are encouraged to see themselves as artists and creators who can respond to and make connections between art and the world around them. They are taught to recognize and apply the elements and principals of design and to understand the careers that have art components. Students are introduced to and taught to use various tools as they learn about and create 2D and 3D art. The art teacher uses state required standards for each grade level to drive her lessons. Lessons include sewing, ceramics, drawing/color studies, painting, sketching/planning, and incorporating iPads/technology in the art room.

3. Academic Supports:

3a. Students performing below grade level

The overarching philosophy that sets Murdock apart is the belief that building relationships is the foundation for academic success. Teachers are trained in Steven Covey's Leader in Me, Speed of Trust, as well as, Six-Traits, Guided Reading, and Reading and Writing Workshop. Our teachers incorporate social relationship building into morning meetings and academics daily. Teachers participate with Data teams to effectively guide instruction. Students' needs are met daily through the balanced literacy approach.

Our teachers use a variety of resources to engage the students. For example, Math is taught through mini lessons, guided instruction, projects, and enrichment. Reading is also taught through mini lessons, guided groups, and novel studies. Individual conferencing and flexible grouping are utilized to ensure personalized instructions.

Our teachers are involved with several PLCs. Teachers are currently engaged in a journey that began in 2014 with Steven Covey's *Leader in Me*. Students are exposed to lessons in leadership and teachers promote leadership through classroom leadership roles, student council and student led lessons. Our teachers are also part of data teams. Teachers work together to use the CTLS platform to create common assessment, give assessments, and analyze the results. This data is further used in PLCs to develop remediation and extension. Grade level teams collaborate to create their own way to fill in the gaps and provide enrichment to those students who need it.

Our students take the Reading and Math Inventory to provide data on their levels in Math and Reading. Students who score below grade level participate in the Read 180 Program. This program provides direct instruction to help improve Reading comprehension. In addition, students who score below grade level are placed in an EIP classroom and given additional support in the areas of Math and/or Reading. In grades kindergarten and first, all students receive phonics instruction through Foundations. Our teachers use innovative techniques such as compacting and flexible grouping. Each grade level develops its own rotation or grouping on the days that students who attend the Advanced Learning Program are out of class.

3b. Students performing above grade level

Our students who score above grade level are extended and enriched. Teachers provide this through enrichment centers in each classroom. Our teachers collaborate with each other and use flexible grouping to expose students to material to meet their needs. The advanced content courses in 4th and 5th grades provide an accelerated course in ELA and Math. Students qualify for the Accelerated math and/or ELA courses through their scores on the IOWA assessment as well as classroom assessments in Math, Reading and Writing. The Advanced Learning program provides one full day every week where critical thinking, problem solving, and divergent thinking skills are cultivated.

Murdock's mission to create students who can learn, serve, and lead in the future drives teacher learning and instruction. Our teachers work tirelessly to differentiate and meet the needs of every student in our diverse population.

3c. Special education

Special education students at Murdock receive individualized instruction and interventions designed to meet their learning challenges and allow them to access the standards of the curriculum. The primary mode of instruction, intervention, and assessment comes from specialized instruction provided by special education teachers according to each student's needs and service model determined by his/her IEP team. Teachers deliver scaffolded, differentiated lessons in a variety of classroom settings including co-teaching, collaboration, or small group resource. Teachers consistently use data gained from teacher probes, observations, classroom assessments, and standardized assessments like the Reading Inventory or the Math Inventory to guide their instruction and individualize support for each student. Our special education team collaborates regularly with general education colleagues, and related service colleagues including occupational therapists, speech pathologists, school psychologist, social worker, counselor, ELL teachers, and assistive technology specialists. Special education teachers teach differentiated lessons to small groups of students designed to increase the student's skills in social thinking and emotional regulation using the Social Thinking framework.

Teachers use specialized programs for students with special learning needs. In reading, students who attend the small group resource classroom receive phonics instruction through Foundations, a Wilson based phonics program. For digital learning, younger students also use I-read, a HMH reading program with adaptive software. I-read targets phonological and morphological awareness, decoding and fluency. The Foundations teaching framework and the I-read program compliment each other in scaffolding instruction for students with the greatest reading gaps. For students who are older or are closer to reading on grade level, Murdock uses System 44 and Read 180. These are also HMH digital programs with adaptive software. Each of these programs utilizes a trained teacher for small group lessons in addition to the digital work. System 44 targets phonics while Read 180 works primarily on reading comprehension.

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

Our teachers work to support ELL learners in multiple ways. ELL teachers consistently collaborate with classroom teachers to provide standards-based instruction that meets the needs of all learners. Lessons are tailored to the various academic levels with specific emphasis of instructional time devoted to the 4 Domains of Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. Small group lessons are created to focus on ELA skill mastery and individualized lessons are provided for explicit instructional support in reading and writing. Students are provided with software programs such as Imagine Learning (K-5) and IRead (K-2) to assist with skill development in the areas of phonics and grammar. Also the ACCESS test (a standardized test that our ESOL students take every year) allows us to look at the growth and concerns of our students. This data enables us to build lessons and units based on the student needs from the scores the students receive on the ACCESS. Communication with parents regarding student achievement and support programs is ongoing throughout the year with conferences, phone calls, and emails. ELL teachers provide RTI support with goal setting and data collection. The Home-School Partnership is evident through events such as International Night and other PTA/MESF sponsored activities.

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

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

One of our most successful programs at Murdock for engaging students is our Leader in Me program. It allows students to follow the seven habits of a successful person and incorporate these habits in their everyday life. The program has given students opportunities to be leaders in the school with components such as the Lighthouse Leader of the Week, Student Lighthouse Committee, Readers are Leaders week, and daily leadership jobs for each student. The Lighthouse Leader of the Week highlights a student that has exemplified leadership through their actions, academics, or both. Through the Leader in Me program, Murdock has implemented Synergy Squads where every student in the school picks a non-academic hobby or interest group which meets several times during the school year for an hour and is led by a Murdock staff member. Groups are formed that will truly match student passions outside of the structured academic setting, such as Kids Yoga, Sewing, Movie Making, and Drawing.

We also have student council and a variety of clubs whereby students can build on their interests and skills. Each day of the week we offer three to four clubs. These clubs include robotics, STEM, drama, soccer, basketball, creative writing, chess, chorus, and more. We also have our morning news broadcast that is run by the students. The students are the reporters and anchors, and they control the sound and visual boards. The teachers act as the facilitators while the students run the broadcast. We also offer Math Olympiad, Science Olympiad, Science Fair, Writing Club, and Yearbook Club, etc. We strive to have a diverse group of clubs and programs to meet the needs and interests of all our students.

Our counselors offer many small groups and peer groups for students who need help with various social and emotional needs. We offer groups for those who have lost loved ones, how to deal with self-regulation, how to make friends, and students who deal with anxiety. We have a play-based therapy room that offers students a safe and age appropriate place to talk to our counselors. The counselors provide opportunities for students to be engaged in school events such as our Mustang City Market.

Murdock's goal is to build and foster relationships amongst students, teachers, and their community.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Murdock Elementary has a very strong community of parent volunteers. Daily, we see class readers, teacher helpers, media center volunteers, and field trip chaperones. Our parents are committed to helping our staff and students. Murdock students have organized snack and gift card drives for neighboring schools. All Murdock students are welcome to participate in a school-wide Science Fair. We showcase our fourth and fifth graders through Chorus concerts and festivals. Murdock students participate in Science and Math Olympiads as well as participate in the making of our annual yearbook. We believe in and work towards an extremely strong collaborative relationship with our PTA and Murdock Foundation. All three parties work to organize and implement events that bring families together to promote education and community. Murdock's PTA and Foundation have collaborated on International Night and Art Shows featuring student work. Our PTA works with our school to host Screen on the Green and Campout as well as other family-based activities such as New Year Orientation and Fall Festival. They organize Chick Fil A biscuit mornings on every Wednesday and hot cocoa events for each grade level.

Murdock staff appreciates their volunteers and recognizes every one of them in May at Field Day. Our Foundation meets monthly with our administration and teacher liaison to discuss how to further support our community. They hold a raffle each year to raise money for specific needs in our building, pay for additional technology and support trainings for teachers, as well as paraprofessionals. Murdock keeps their families well informed through many social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. A weekly newsletter goes home as well as a communication folder. We support the use of ParentVue, so parents can access their child's grades and we use digital report cards.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

Murdock creates a professional culture where teachers feel valued and supported because the school leadership believes in shared decision-making and site-based management. Teachers are involved in the decisions that impact them on a daily, weekly, and yearly basis. Teachers are empowered to use professional judgement, and this translates into a greater degree of autonomy and creativity in the classroom. Teachers can practice and hone their craft and do so because they desire to be the best they can be. Murdock values long-term planning and goal setting. We typically develop a three to four-year school strategic plan (SSP) and revisit and adjust yearly. We are currently in our second four-year SSP term.

We started seven years ago with a focus on developing authentic professional learning communities (PLC's) to foster collaboration that increases student achievement. The next year, we continued developing PLC's through a book study, *The Speed of Trust* by Stephen Covey and developing common tiered summative assessments. The third year we employed *The Leader in Me* initiative to reinforce our PLC's and establish a school culture where all stakeholders are called to learn, serve, and lead. Each year we continued to build on the prior year and expand. We are looking ahead to implement and strengthen vertical data teams. The goal is to look for gaps in standards and build for continuity across all grade levels.

4. School Leadership:

The leadership team at Murdock has an open-door policy and a democratic leadership approach. The administration believes that decisions for the greater good are decided by key teams. These key teams include the Mustang teams (school leaders in all areas of the school), grade level leads, and subject coordinators. Teachers and other stakeholders have input in most decisions made in the school including student placement, grade level events, grading policy, and more. Administration meets weekly with grade levels to discuss concerns, student data, and next steps.

The administration team consist of the principal, two assistant principals, a Special Education Support Administrator (SSA), and an Instructional support specialist (ISS). The principal works with all grade levels but assigns two grade levels each to the two assistant principals for evaluating and leading the grades. This is also how discipline cases have been distributed as well.

The administration team focuses on student achievement by addressing data and trends of the students. They work closely with the teachers by giving them support and time for collaboration to build lessons that are data driven and student focused. Programs such as Read 180 and system 44, after school tutoring, and teacher Professional development help frame the academic alignment as well as the culture component of each student's success at the school.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

It is very difficult to point to one key factor that is instrumental in the overall success of any organization. Many factors influence the success or failure of a group. At Murdock relationships are the key. Recognizing this lays the groundwork for the leadership within a school because relationships are built on trust. With that in mind, Murdock set out seven years ago to determine how to develop stronger relationships built on trust. We began with a book study by Stephen Covey called the Speed of Trust. This book highlights 13 behaviors that can build or destroy trust in a relationship or organization. It is founded on the principle that four core values (Integrity, Intent, Capabilities and Results) define who we are as individuals and as an organization and the level of character and competence we value.

Murdock is made up of a highly competent staff with strong character, but not everyone had the knowledge or skills to implement the 13 behaviors in a way that improved our relationships. We spent the next several years learning about behaviors that build trust and honing our skills in practicing those behaviors. The result was improved Professional Learning communities (PLC's), greater accountability, and increased teacher empowerment.

Our PLC's focus on four questions that must be answered honestly and without judgment, but with support and collaboration to ensure that all students improve. When teachers implement the knowledge and skills of the 13 behaviors, their collaboration focuses on professionalism and improvement. Each teacher brings different interests, backgrounds, and strengths which allows them to draw support from one another. Teachers come together with a clear vision, they develop a sense of community, they develop norms to guide their open dialogue and work through any challenges, all for the benefit of our students.

The 13 behaviors have increased our accountability to one another as well. We hold each other to the highest standards of excellence. Teachers are accountable for ensuring student progress, and the administrative team is accountable for ensuring that teachers are equipped with appropriate professional learning and the resources they need to do their job. Our teachers have personally accepted their responsibility for each students' success, this is our collective responsibility/accountability.

One of the greatest actions coming out of this professional growth has been teacher empowerment. Our teachers make important school decisions that impact them in and out of the classroom. They are confident in their professional judgment and use it to make decisions that impact instructional practices and student learning. Empowerment has increased every teacher's control, influence and concern over all academic and operational issues. This has allowed Murdock to achieve success not only in student performance, but in student growth as well. Murdock has been recognized by the state of Georgia for being a highest performing, (platinum level) school as well as a greatest growth (bronze level) school.

“Research shows that effective teachers are the most important factor contributing to student achievement. Although curricula, reduced class size, district funding, family and community involvement all contribute to school improvement and student achievement, the most influential factor is the teacher.” (“Hiring the Best Teachers,” Educational Leadership, Volume 60, Number 8, May 2003, pp. 48-52.)

It has been Murdock's goal over the past seven years to grow our teacher capacity. We believe we have accomplished this by honing our relationship skills to increase trust, resulting in truly high achievement for all.