

U.S. Department of Education
2021 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. Tanisha Frazier
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

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

School Mailing Address 175 Mead Road
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Decatur State GA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 30030-3622

County DeKalb

Telephone (404) 370-4470 Fax (404) 370-4467

Web site/URL https://www.csdecatur.net/Oakhurst E-mail tfrazier@csdecatur.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* Dr. Maggie Fehrman E-mail mfehrman@csdecatur.net
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name City Schools of Decatur Tel. (404) 371-3601

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 Ms. Tasha White
(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, leave blank.*

PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION

The electronic signature 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 2021 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 must include one or more of grades K-12. Schools located on the same campus (physical location and mailing address) must apply as an entire school (i.e. K-8; 6-12; K-12 school). Two (or more) schools located on separate campuses, must apply individually even if they have the same principal. A single school located on multiple campuses with one principal must apply as an entire school.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2015 and grades participating in statewide assessments must have been part of the school for at least the three years prior to September 2019.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 or 2020.
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 current school year (2020-2021) unless otherwise stated.

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

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

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools. Only include demographic data for the nominated school, not the district.)

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, 2020 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent at the school. Include all students enrolled, in-person, participating in a hybrid model, or online only. If online schooling or other COVID-19 school issues make this difficult to obtain, provide the most accurate and up-to-date information available:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	46	33	79
1	49	58	107
2	42	58	100
3	0	0	0
4	0	0	0
5	0	0	0
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	137	149	286

*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
 - 6 % Asian
 - 14 % Black or African American
 - 5 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 70 % White
 - 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 2019 - 2020 school year: 2%

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, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	5
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	1
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	6
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	317
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.02
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	2

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

Eritrean, Mandarin

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 1 %
2 Total number ELL

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

Total number students who qualify: 0

8. Students receiving special education services: 7 %

20 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. All students receiving special education services should be reflected in the table below. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <u>2</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>7</u> Developmental Delay | <u>3</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>8</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: 3

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. If your current staffing structure has shifted due to COVID-19 impacts and you are uncertain or unable to determine FTEs, provide an estimate.

	Number of Staff
Administrators	1
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	15
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	13
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	9
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 19:1

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

Required Information	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016
Daily student attendance	94%	94%	95%	96%	95%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

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

Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2020.

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.

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

Oakhurst strives to foster a love of learning through authentic, challenging, creative experiences in a supportive and engaging environment. All Oakhurst students become knowledgeable citizens with strong character, ready to serve their communities.

16. Briefly describe how your school has been operating during the current 2020-2021 school year (e.g., open as usual, online only, a hybrid model, etc.)? If different grade levels in your building operate in different ways, include this. If the school began with one model and switched to another partially through the year, include this as well.

We were operating online only from March 2020 until October 2020. In October, we brought back a small number of adaptive special education students to in person learning. Beginning January 19, 2021 we had 144 students online only and 144 students in person. In person students attend 5 days per week for 1/2 day in the building with the other 1/2 day online.

17. **For public schools only**, if the school is a magnet, charter, or choice school, explain how students are chosen to attend.

PART III - SUMMARY

Oakhurst Elementary School is and has been a cornerstone of the Oakhurst neighborhood in Decatur, Georgia, since 1915. Oakhurst is a K-2 school in the City Schools of Decatur, and is sometimes affectionately referred to as “The Best Little School in the World.” Within the Oakhurst neighborhood you can find multi-generational families, along with young professionals who have moved to the area based on the reputation of the schools. The neighborhood is increasingly affluent and fast-growing. Oakhurst Elementary is the textbook definition of a “neighborhood school.” Each day, hundreds of families pack the sidewalks traveling to and from school. Before COVID-19, parents, grandparents, and community members volunteered, served as expert visitors, or brought in special treats to spoil the Oakhurst staff. Oakhurst strives to foster a love of learning through authentic, challenging, creative experiences in a supportive and engaging environment. Oakhurst students become knowledgeable citizens with strong character, ready to serve their communities. One of our main approaches to realizing this mission is embracing and fully implementing the EL Education framework and practices. As one of the five K-2 schools in City Schools of Decatur, Oakhurst has a longstanding tradition of excellence.

EL Education practices are interwoven into every detail of our school. The Oakhurst staff and community believe in the framework, and we believe it has been one of the most important factors influencing our success. Our focus is based on three dimensions: (1) mastery of knowledge and skills, (2) character, and (3) high quality work. Mastery of knowledge and skills refers to our intentional effort to ensure all students make academic growth. Because equity is at the center of our work, we approach teaching in a differentiated way, ensuring all students get what they need. Teaching the Georgia Standards of Excellence and differentiating based on our learners' varied needs is important to us. Students receive individualized interventions through our Early Intervention Program (EIP) and our multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) process. Additionally, students who have been identified as gifted participate in our LINKS program. Our teachers are skillful at using technology while creating expeditions and learning activities that are relevant and connected to real-life. Throughout the pandemic, our teachers have been invested in using a variety of technology tools to keep our students engaged in the virtual world. Our character focus is evident in daily Crew meetings, implementation of social-emotional curriculum such as Second Step and SEE-Learning, and other school-wide initiatives. One thing that sets us apart from other schools is our intentional focus on equity during Crew meetings. Committed to anti-racism and racial equity, our team has facilitated deep conversations with our young learners. Crew time is uninterrupted time to pay close attention to our students' social-emotional needs, as well as to teach valuable lessons that will span much further than our classroom walls. Our Crew structure has allowed every member of our instructional staff to be included in classroom Crew meetings each day. This structure has fostered stronger relationships among staff and students. Other means of addressing character and social/emotional learning include traditional school-wide celebrations such as monthly Community Circle, yearly student-led conferences, STEAM night, and Celebrations of Learning. We also use various committees/teams to support our character focus such as an active PTA, School Leadership Team, Staff Wellness Team, Student SEL Team, PBIS Team, and Equity Team. Finally, we focus on high-quality work. This focus is two-fold. As a staff, we ensure the work we do is of high quality. This relates to the work we design for students and the work we do as adults. It also relates to teaching our students to produce quality work. Students learn to create multiple drafts and set goals for themselves in order to produce high-quality work consistently. We embrace this quote from EL Education's President and CEO Scott Hartl: “We believe that when students are done with school and enter adult life, they will be judged for the rest of their lives not by their performance on tests of basic skills, but by the quality of their work and the quality of their character. “

Oakhurst Elementary's tradition of excellence can mostly be attributed to us embracing two main beliefs: EL's mantra that “We are Crew, not passengers” and our PBIS agreements “We are Kind and Responsible.” When you visit our school, these beliefs are evident in everything we do. They're seen in how we collaborate as staff members. They're evident in the culture seen in our classrooms as we teach students. They're seen when you observe student to student interactions. They're also seen in the way in which we work with parents. We believe we all have a job to do each day. We are successful in those jobs by showing kindness and responsibility.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

In the early 2000s, Oakhurst forged a relationship with Expeditionary Learning (now called EL Education), leading to the adoption of an approach to teaching and learning that became the catalyst for Oakhurst's continued academic success. Now, the framework teachers use to design their curricula units, called expeditions, continues to guide and shape how teachers approach curricula - with a focus on learning that goes well beyond success on a state assessment, and holds student character and the quality of the work they produce as prime examples of successful learning. Oakhurst teachers approach the state standards with a holistic and content integrated approach that revolves around three dimensions of student achievement: mastery of knowledge and skills, character, and high quality work. Teachers utilize the Universal Design for Learning format of backward planning - with the driving force being what students should learn, know, and be able to do by the end of the expedition. At the beginning of an expedition, teachers focus on building students' background knowledge and common academic vocabulary related to the standard. This allows students equal access to the language of the learning and helps foster student dialogue and inquiry around the topic. While foundational knowledge is starting to develop, experts in related fields are often invited in to talk with students about how their studies relate to real-world work. Learning opportunities that occur off-site offer students experiences with authentic connections to their classroom learning. As learning progresses, students focus independent investigations on a topic of their choice that relates to the overall expedition focus. This period of "becoming an expert" empowers students to deepen their learning and understanding of the topic as they prepare themselves and their work to be shared with a wider audience.

When our school buildings closed in March 2020, we were thrust toward rethinking all aspects of our instruction. Prior to the pandemic, our in-person classrooms were alive with dialogue and discourse - with students engaged in discussion protocols that are facilitated by the teacher, using math manipulatives and science tools, and collaborating with their peers on small group projects. In response to the need to teach students through distance learning, two major shifts occurred: a shortened school day and purposefully abbreviated instructional segments. As a school, we decide that the length of time for "teacher talk" or direct instruction in the virtual classroom would vary depending on the age of the student. We were especially cognizant of the time students were spending in front of the screen and wanted to ensure every moment was planned, purposeful, and intentional. Within ten to fifteen minutes, teachers deliver a mini-lesson, which is followed by teacher and student practice on the skill together. We call this live instruction in the virtual classroom "synchronous." Following the synchronous instruction, students complete "asynchronous" or offline work created in Google Slides and related to the short lesson. This structure has stayed consistent throughout the school year and continues to be used now that we've transitioned some of our teachers and students back into the school building for in-person instruction. The consistency across classrooms and grade levels has allowed us to maintain a sense of predictability and stability during uncertain times.

Before this school year started, and knowing our school day would be structured differently, our district restructured the pacing guides for kindergarten through second grades to focus on the priority standards for English Language Arts and mathematics, as outlined by Achieve the Core. The priority standards have truly empowered teachers to have a clear purpose and goal when planning and teaching.

Even in the virtual classroom, our teachers have used formative assessments as an authentic and on-going way to evaluate student learning and progress throughout the day and week. Examples include quick and regular check-ins in the form of entry and exit questions, student self-assessments (thumbs up/down or the use of a rubric), teacher observation, anecdotal notes, one-on-one conferences, and examination of student work. Formative assessment data help teachers adjust their instruction to meet their students' needs.

In addition, our summative assessments include more formal data such as the end of unit assessments in mathematics and phonics instruction. There were some adjustments to our summative phonics assessments that have shifted this year, but we will continue to use them beyond this year. In order to improve phonics instruction and assessment, our teachers started to record short audio clips of the sounds/words/sentence and embed them within an assessment created in a Google Form for each student. This way students can replay the audio to hear words or the sounds in words multiple times, without needing to disrupt the class or to ask

the teacher to repeat themselves. This little adjustment is just one example of how reflecting on the effectiveness of an instructional or assessment practice can have a positive impact on all learners.

Assessing student learning in the distance learning environment has not been without its challenges. We recognize that some, if not many, of the assessments students take are completed with the help of an adult at home. In addition, work that used to be completed with paper and pencil is now completed using a keyboard and trackpad. What has not changed is what the assessments are used for and why. Oakhurst teachers continue to examine student mastery level of content, what they know, and where they are ready to go. This information is used in weekly planning with grade level teams and helps us when we look at overall trends in specific content areas. Assessments that are administered as part of our universal screener, such as Renaissance STAR Reading and Early Literacy, help us identify students for early intervention and provide valuable information about overall trends.

Throughout this schooling journey that began in March 2020, Oakhurst has endeavored to stay true to its core beliefs around student engagement in learning and the prioritization of mastery of knowledge and skills, student character, and producing high-quality work. Our biggest, most important lessons have involved acknowledging the importance and impact of connection and teacher/student relationships - these have been created and nurtured through the computer screen and continue to have a positive impact on student learning and academic achievement.

1a. For secondary schools (middle and/or high school grades):

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

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

All students participate in art, music, physical education, media center, Spanish, and guidance lessons daily for 45 minutes daily, attending one special area class per day. Since the school closure, these classes are taught virtually through Google Meet.

The lessons consist of a live mini-lesson led by the specials teacher. Following the live mini-lesson, students are provided an asynchronous assignment/activity. Students sometimes share their work by recording a short video in Flipgrid. Flipgrid allows teachers to assess and provide individualized feedback to students. While each area focuses on its own set of skills, they all integrate topics/standards being taught in core classes or expeditions.

Visual art skills are taught by our art teacher. Students learn various art techniques such as painting, sketching, paper folding, etc. Our art teacher shares student work with families through her Instagram page. At the conclusion of each project, students assess their work using a teacher-developed rubric. This rubric aligns to our belief of students taking ownership of their own learning. At the end of the school year, like artists, students take home a portfolio containing their art projects from the year.

Over the years, performing arts have been addressed through our music class. Students study various musicians, play instruments, and learn many songs. Celebrations of Learning and Moving On Ceremonies have provided opportunities for our students to showcase their performing arts skills. Due to the pandemic, these celebrations are halted. Instead, students perform during their music class.

The overall goal of the physical education program is to lead students to a healthy and active lifestyle. This includes learning about physical fitness through exercises such as yoga, learning calm down strategies through mindfulness, and learning a variety of sports/dancing. Some of the main traditions of PE class are training for the Tour DeCatur 5K, participating in our annual field day, and performing various flash mob routines at Community Circle. Throughout the pandemic, our PE teacher has used YouTube videos to make

her PE lessons fun and relevant.

The district offers Spanish for all K-2 students. Students learn basics such as numbers, colors, family titles, careers, etc.

Media staff includes the media specialist and a media clerk. They teach weekly class lessons based on picture books. They integrate grade level standards into their media lessons. Additionally, students learn technology skills in their general education classrooms. Since the start of the pandemic, students and teachers have grown exponentially in their use of instructional technology using tools such as Google Classroom, NearPod, and Flipgrid.

Character is one of EL Education's three dimensions and is woven into everything we do. Specifically, character building is addressed through our crew lessons and PBIS lessons throughout the year. Our Habits of Character/PBIS agreements are: Be Kind, Be Responsible. Any student at Oakhurst can tell you about our agreements. Classes spend time learning how kindness and responsibility show up in all areas of school. Since going virtual, students have also learned how kindness and responsibility look in the virtual setting.

3. Academic Supports:

Two years ago, we restructured our master schedule to include a dedicated grade-level 45-minute intervention block. This block is one of our main levels of support and allows all students to receive differentiated support. This block creates space for all students to remain in class for core instruction and be pulled for additional supports at a separate time. Additional EIP, ESOL, special education, and gifted services are provided at this time. Students not receiving these services remain with the classroom teacher for enrichment activities.

Students performing below grade level: Students performing below grade level are supported in various ways. We believe differentiated tier 1 instruction in the classroom is vital to ensure success for all students. We use the workshop model to provide core instruction. This model allows for a work period for each subject. Within the work period, teachers pull small groups to meet the needs of all students. Data from various assessments are used to form and inform this small-group instruction, allowing them to provide individualized support to students performing below grade level. Teachers continue to receive professional development to become more skilled at differentiating for their range of learners. Additionally, some of our students qualify for the Early Intervention Program (EIP). These students receive tier 2 and tier 3 instruction from one of our EIP teachers through small group pull-out or push-in services. This layer of support is in addition to the differentiated support already being provided by the classroom teacher. Based on student achievement data, some students are invited to participate in our afternoon tutoring program.

Students performing above grade level: Aside from differentiated tier 1 instruction, many of our students have been identified as gifted and participate in our LINKS program. This enrichment program focuses on problem solving and creativity. Students learn at an accelerated pace and participate in activities such as Problem Based Learning (PBL), STEM, and coding. LINKS teachers also serve as push-in supports for differentiation to our classroom teachers during ELA and Math blocks.

Special education students: We have several students who have identified special education needs. Upon qualification, an Individualized Education Plan is developed for each student that dictates their special education goals and services. Special education teachers serve as case managers and work closely with classroom teachers to provide instruction. Our main model for instruction and support for our special education is inclusion. Therefore, the special educator pushes into the general education class to provide support. Additionally, each year the case managers meet with other Oakhurst staff such as specials' teachers to ensure they understand the IEP for all students.

English Language Learners (ELL): We have a very small population of English Language Learners. They are placed in a general education class with a teacher who is certified in ESOL. The classroom teacher collaborates with the ESOL teacher to co-teach and/or plan for differentiated instruction. In addition, ELLs are pulled during the daily intervention block to receive ESOL services.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

The book "The First Six Weeks of School" serves as a guide for lessons as teachers create positive learning environments. Instead of jumping directly into academics, for the first six weeks of school we prioritize the development of classroom communities where all students feel supported academically, socially, and emotionally. One structure for taking care of students' social and emotional needs is Crew. A staple of EL schools, we begin each day with this 30-minute structured block where two adults serve as Crew leaders, leading the class through lessons focused on building community, social justice, and equity. Other lessons centered around emotional growth and development are taught by our school counselor using the Second Step curriculum.

Aside from these lessons, we use some non-academic structures for taking care of students' social-emotional needs. Our student support team collaborates with our social worker to identify needs and secure resources for students. The school community gathers each week to celebrate. We spotlight students and staff, sing songs, dance, and just have a great time. We call it Community Circle, and it's a long-standing tradition. Our mascot Oakie is a favorite and makes an appearance each time. Oakie's News is another staple and motivator. The daily broadcast allows students to lead the pledge, weather, say our Crew call, and more. They love it!

We foster academic engagement through: yearly student-led conferences, celebrations of learning, and our daily intervention block. Student-led conferences allow students to take ownership for their learning and share their work with adults. Celebrations of Learning occur twice each year and enable students to share their learning from expeditions with parents. This might include a performance and a personal review of their learning binder. Our intervention block ensures each student receives differentiated instruction to meet their learning needs and goals. The MTSS structure and student data helps us to intervene and tailor instruction. Many students participate in special programs such as Early Intervention, Gifted, or Special Education during this block.

Before COVID-19, we used these and other strategies to engage students. With a few modifications, we've been able to maintain many of our strategies and structures. Unfortunately, COVID-19 has forced us to halt some of our traditions such as safety patrols, large in-person gatherings like Celebrations of Learning, and hosting school visitors for student-led conferences or volunteering. However, we are proud of the ways we have engaged our students virtually including virtual crew meetings, virtual community circle, virtual field trips, etc.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

A point of pride for us is the connection we have with families and community members. This partnership is a vital component to ensure students' success and school improvement. Our weekly school newsletter is sent via email and we are dedicated to ensuring our school's website is updated with the most recent information. The community is also engaged through our implementation of EL expeditions. During our expeditions, parents/community members serve as experts by teaching lessons, hosting field trips, and assisting during special learning activities. Examples include local businesses such as The Wylde Center and Matador Cantina. Additionally, the community is involved in our yearly student-led conferences. They serve as audiences as students share their learning progress and academic goals.

Oakhurst also ensures that parents are knowledgeable about our processes/programs/procedures through the use of Coffee Chats. These chats have allowed us to present information such as gifted/EIP services, the EL Education framework, and how to access technology at home. Our School Leadership is a team involved in school improvement plan creation each year. The team consists of parents/community members. Throughout the year we update them on student achievement data and our progress towards our school goals.

The COVID-19 pandemic has somewhat impacted our level of community engagement, as we are not allowed to have visitors within the school. However, we have used our school newsletter and website, COVID Readiness Team, our School Leadership Team (SLT) and our PTA as our main tools for continuing to engage family and community members during this time. We have communicated updated policies/procedures through slideshows, articles, videos, and flyers during this time through our website and weekly emails. Additionally, our COVID Readiness Team was heavily involved in preparing for returning to in-person learning. Our School Leadership Team has continued their work with school improvement and budget planning. They also provide a pulse regarding parents' opinions of the status of virtual learning. Our PTA keeps parents engaged through monthly meetings, a Facebook group page, and special events. A few partnerships have continued/formed during this time.

Oakhurst partnered with DEF (Decatur Education Foundation) to provide childcare support for families during virtual learning. The YMCA worked with City Schools of Decatur to host some learning pods during virtual learning for parents needing to return to work. For fun, the PTA partnered with several local restaurants to host dine out nights. These nights were highly attended and served as fundraisers, while creating some community synergy. They have also hosted a virtual game night for parents and a socially distanced family planting event.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

Oakhurst's prioritization of a shared leadership approach and the belief that we are all learning and growing together are two ways that we maintain an environment where teachers feel supported and valued. School-wide decision making often occurs through the guidance of our Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) to garner feedback from the various instructional and support staff stakeholder groups. In addition to ILT meetings to help get a "read" on teacher/staff needs, all instructional staff meets weekly for collaborative professional learning. These grade level and content specific meetings provide teachers with a consistent time/place for professional learning and collaborative planning.

Oakhurst's approach to professional development is to model the format expected in classroom instruction by differentiating the content to meet the needs of our groups of teachers. Our collective view of teachers as learners was beneficial when we transitioned to remote teaching and learning. With the knowledge that teachers would bring different skill sets to the virtual classroom, we created a digital training platform that provided guided professional learning in the required skill areas necessary for remote teaching and also enabled teachers to learn at their own pace, as well as the opportunity to enhance their skill set by learning additional tools/apps.

The staff and teachers at Oakhurst value and support one another in ways that also go beyond the classroom and instruction. Year after year, support shows up in ways that we are there for one another - be it in rejoicing the graduation of a son or daughter, grieving together over the loss of a loved one, or simply checking in to see how someone is doing - the relationships that exist between the individuals at Oakhurst go beyond just those of a school workplace and help explain why we have such low staff turnover and give a glimpse into what makes our school a wonderful place to learn, work, and grow.

4. School Leadership:

Another point of pride at Oakhurst is our commitment to shared leadership. In CSD, school leadership positions are allocated based on the number of students. With a student population fewer than 400 students, our administrative team consists of the principal and instructional coach. Thus, delegation and collaboration are critical. In addition to school administrators, our school is led by an Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) and School Leadership Team (SLT). Our Instructional Leadership consists of teacher leaders for each grade level and department. Our School Leadership Team consists of the principal, instructional coach, one teacher, and parents. Both teams are instrumental in decision making and providing input to the school administrators.

The ILT helps with decisions related to instruction and school operations. The SLT helps to provide input from the parents' perspective. Both teams are used when it comes to budget creation, resource allocations

and school improvement planning. In preparing for returning to in-person instruction, we created a COVID-19 Readiness Team. This team consisted of school administrators and community/parent members. Many of our members had specialized experience and work in the healthcare field. They were helpful in determining mitigation strategies. Also, they assisted with creating new procedures, communicating with parents, and securing resources. Many daily processes had to be revamped due to the pandemic and this group served as our experts.

Like most school leaders, the pandemic required many of our administrative duties to shift. Instructionally, we were forced to plan and deliver professional learning that would enable our teachers to teach virtually. While we were already proficient with technology, functioning in a completely virtual environment required the use of new tools such as Flipgrid, NearPod, Google Classroom, and much more. We had to reframe our thinking around assessment and feedback as well. Additionally, we shifted our focus to an even greater health and safety focus. Operational school procedures such as arrival/dismissal, serving meals, and cohorting students became a priority to ensure everyone's health and safety. This required more consultation and collaboration with our school nurse, administrative assistant, other area administrators, and district-level staff. Our PTA was instrumental in securing resources such as KN95 masks, hand sanitizer, wipes, and other cleaning supplies. District-level facilities staff helped to restructure classrooms including the removal of unneeded furniture to ensure distancing, adding plexiglass to tables, and adding signage around the building to ensure mask wearing and social distancing.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

Meeting monthly for professional learning to increase their leadership capacity for leading this work with our staff, our equity team has been active for several years. The team consists of the principal and representation from each grade level or department. Each year, the focus or the span of the work looks different. The first years involved educating the staff on cultural responsiveness. This was done through book studies and professional development. The team presented a series of sessions to the entire school staff. This is done through whole staff meetings and in small groups. Some of the topics have been culturally responsive teaching, representation in the curriculum, approaching Black History month differently, etc. Specifically, we studied Glenn Singleton's "Courageous Conversations About Race". The following year, the equity team and staff became familiar with an equity checklist. This checklist highlighted equitable classroom practices that should be present in every classroom. The equity team conducted walkthroughs using the checklist to determine how equitable our classrooms were. The data from these walkthroughs were shared with teachers. Based on their data, teachers established goals for themselves.

Teachers received updated data as we conducted more walkthroughs. In order to maintain a consistent focus on equity, each grade level has a representative on the equity team. One of their goals is to always bring equity to the table as their team is planning lessons and activities. Speaking of lessons, this year the equity team has re-written our Crew lessons to include more of an equity and social justice lens, providing teachers with discussion prompts and notes to help them lead critical conversations with our young learners.

Additionally, we've made efforts to engage our parent community with our equity work. We use our school newsletter to share our Crew focus for the coming week and various other resources such as articles/videos to increase the capacity of our parents. Our PTA created a sub-committee called "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion." They've hosted evening events with authors to address some of the current events/social movements with parents. Finally, we have diversified the books in our media center and in classrooms. We purchased many picture books based on social events and race issues that can be used to broach these topics with young students. The team has included discussion prompts in each book. These books can be checked out by parents or teachers as support to facilitate discussions.

The work of our equity team is ongoing and keeps improving each year. Prior to the pandemic, we were able to host school-wide family events with a focus on cultural awareness, diversity, access, etc. We look forward to getting back to these events.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

The one aspect of Oakhurst that we consider to be foundational, fundamental, and instrumental to our success in educating and supporting young learners is the ability and desire to make and foster connections with students. Making connections is something Oakhurst staff and teachers prioritized long before the pandemic. From the moment students walk through our doors on the first day of school - and many times even before this first day - the teachers and staff at Oakhurst are intentional in their planning, so that they are building in moments to help students learn about one another, to help the teachers learning about their students, while they are learning how to do school. These connections and relationships were fostered in previous years by partnering a non-grade level teacher (e.g. media specialist, art or Spanish teacher, or para educator) with a classroom teacher for morning Crew meetings. By establishing the expectation that all staff would have a relationship with a classroom, we were setting the school up for opportunities to foster years-long relationships and knowledge of children across all classrooms.

Even after the pandemic forced our doors shut for many months, the teachers and staff of Oakhurst continued to take steps to maintain their connections with students through the rest of the school year. As we prepared for a return to school that would look much different than any other previous school year, the primary concern from teachers was “How will I get to know my students through a computer?” With the help of modified Crew morning meeting lesson plans, and new knowledge and skills around how to conduct whole-class online instruction, teachers were able to cultivate the same relationships through the virtual classroom as they were in-person.

By using research-based strategies like dialogue protocols, teachers have been able to get to know their students, and students have been able to get to know one another. Many of the engagement strategies that we use, like dialogue protocols, do not easily translate to the virtual classroom and have required creative thinking to make them happen through a computer. Because of how much our teachers value these strategies, they have been motivated to learn how to use new technologies to adapt some protocols for the online environment. By using online tools such as break-out rooms, Padlet and Flipgrid, teachers have provided students with innumerable opportunities to engage with one another online with recorded video segments or live chatting about a read-aloud they listened to.

Making and fostering connections with students is a fundamental part of what has helped Oakhurst teachers support the academic and social-emotional gains that we’ve seen in our students year after year. Having these strong relationships helps empower teachers to make informed decisions about instructional adjustments and differentiation. Our teachers are able to understand students’ passions and interests and weave them into meaningful and engaging lessons.