

***U.S. Department of Education***  
***2021 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program***

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

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

Official School Name Elite Scholars Academy School  
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 7923 Fielder Road  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Jonesboro State GA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 30236-2611

County Georgia

Telephone (770) 472-2823 Fax (770) 472-2837

Web site/URL https://099.clayton.k12.ga.us E-mail shonda.shaw@clayton.k12.ga.us

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. Morcease Beasley E-mail morcease.beasley@clayton.k12.ga.us  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Clayton County Public School District Tel. (770) 473-2700

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. Jessie Goree  
(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**

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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

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Data should be provided for the current school year (2020-2021) unless otherwise stated.

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

- Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
  - 39 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 16 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 11 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools

66 TOTAL

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

- 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

- 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	0	0	0
1	0	0	0
2	0	0	0
3	0	0	0
4	0	0	0
5	0	0	0
6	48	67	115
7	64	48	112
8	41	69	110
9	34	59	93
10	40	64	104
11	34	58	92
12 or higher	22	51	73
<b>Total Students</b>	283	416	699

\*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
  - 8 % Asian
  - 75 % Black or African American
  - 14 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 0 % White
  - 3 % 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.

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	0
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	14
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	14
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	686
(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):

Spanish and Vietnamese are our most prevalent non-English languages spoken.

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 100 %

Total number students who qualify: 699

8. Students receiving special education services: 0 %  
3 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>1</u> Autism                  | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>1</u> Other Health Impaired                 |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay     | <u>1</u> Specific Learning Disability          |
| <u>0</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>1</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: 11
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.

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	3
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	31
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	4
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	1
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	5

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

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

<b>Required Information</b>	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016
Daily student attendance	98%	98%	98%	98%	98%
High school graduation rate	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

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.

<b>Post-Secondary Status</b>	
Graduating class size	64
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	98%
Enrolled in a community college	0%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	0%
Joined the military or other public service	2%
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. 2014

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

To provide a globally competitive education that empowers students to achieve academic and personal goals while becoming college and career ready, productive, responsible citizens.

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.

Clayton County Public Schools has been virtual since returning from a ten-day district shutdown that began March 13, 2020. Elementary schools are phasing in a return to face to face instruction, but middle and high schools remain virtual at this time. Our transition to online learning was challenging, but our teachers and students had utilized Google Classroom enough before the pandemic to help make the process as smooth as possible. The Elite Scholars Academy instructional framework has remained the same since the inception of virtual classrooms at the beginning of the pandemic, consisting of four synchronous days of instruction and Fridays involving asynchronous time for students to complete work or receive additional assistance from their teachers.

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

CCPS has the same process for all of its magnet programs. A maximum of two choice programs per application may be selected. First and second choices do not have equal chances of being selected. Programs may have limited numbers of available seats and not have any second choice students assigned in the lottery. During Open Enrollment, parents will complete an application and indicate their school and magnet strand choice(s). When the number of applications exceeds the number of spaces available for each magnet strand, the district will conduct a computerized random selection (lottery) process to fill the available spaces in each magnet strand using School Mint software. Selected and wait list students are notified from the district via

email. Once a student is selected for one of his/her choices, he/she is immediately removed from the wait pool for the remaining program on the application. If a student declines his/her second choice assignment, he/she may remain in the wait pool for their first choice. A decline of a second choice lottery assignment will automatically place the student in the wait pool for the first choice. It is possible an applicant may not be selected for either one of his/her choices. If this occurs, the student is placed in a wait pool for the first choice and may be assigned for any openings reported by the school.

Special Education status does not influence students' likelihood of selection at any magnet program. The district is able to accommodate special programs in all programs. Differentiated instruction, cooperative learning, Response to Intervention (RtI), individualized instruction, and tutoring are used to ensure students receive adequate remediation and acceleration support to succeed. These actions serve to eliminate a barrier to access for students who have not attained a minimum level of proficiency in reading and or mathematics on state assessment exams, and who are currently required to take additional classes in which they lack proficiency.

## **PART III - SUMMARY**

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Elite Scholars Academy is a district-wide magnet that affords all fifth through ninth grade students who reside in Clayton County the opportunity to apply to the school. Located just 15 miles south of Georgia's capital city of Atlanta, Clayton County covers 143 square miles and is home to 289,615 residents. Clayton County's December 2019 unemployment rate was 4.9%, compared to 3.6% in the United States, and it has increased dramatically due to COVID-19. The median income of Clayton County households in 2018 was nearly \$13,000 lower than the average median income across the state. Only 19.5% of Clayton County residents hold a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with 31% across the state. CCPS participates in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) meal service for schools and districts in low-income areas. Clayton County Public Schools is eligible for the CEP program because it is one of the nation's highest poverty school districts. For state reporting purposes, all schools are listed at 99.53% Free/Reduced Lunch (F/RL) due to the CEP provision, and all students are eligible to receive free lunches.

CCPS is the fifth largest school district in Georgia serving over 54,000 students: 69% are Black, 22% Hispanic, 3% Asian, 2% Two or more races, 2% White, and approximately 2% other races. Clayton County Public Schools student population speaks over 72 languages where English, Spanish and Vietnamese are the major languages spoken. Twenty-three percent of CCPS students have a primary home language other than English. 10% of the district's total population is considered (ELL). ESA's demographics are similar: 12% Asian, 17% Hispanic and 67% Black. Elite Scholars Academy is one of sixty-six schools in CCPS, and the only 6th grade through 12th grade magnet school in the county.

The key strategies within Elite Scholars Academy that have encouraged and challenged all students to develop their full potential academically, emotionally, physically, socially and culturally are: focusing on high expectations and academic success by providing all students with an all honors, Cambridge, AP, and dual enrollment pathway, building an inclusive, positive rapport and partnership with the school community for student success, and providing a circle of support and wraparound services for students and families including social, emotional learning initiatives and college and career readiness supports. Prior to COVID-19 pandemic, parents were encouraged to donate 20 hours of volunteer service at the school. Also, using financial resources to provide targeted safety nets and interventions for struggling students has been vital as we meet the needs of our diverse student population.

Rigor, relevance, relationships, and results are fundamental beliefs at Elite Scholars. Always striving to reach the next level of academic rigor and continuously exposing students to global competencies and an international education, the Cambridge Assessment International Curriculum has been adopted. We are currently the only high school in the state to utilize their curriculum. The honor of being named a 2014 National Blue Ribbon School served as a beacon in our district and school community. The pride exemplified by the school community has propelled our students to continue to reach higher heights. Our expectations have increased with the rollout of a new curriculum and expansion of our AP course offerings, and an increase in our Dual Enrollment programs. This expansion of AP course offerings includes AP Computer Science Principles as we adjusted to address STEM needs for our students. A grant from Amazon has also afforded us the opportunity to provide middle school courses that lead into the Computer Science AP courses. In addition to AP and STEM expansions to provide global competency, our foreign language department has also added depth and variety in recent years. In addition to the requirement of at least one Latin course for each graduating student, Spanish, French and Chinese are also options for students as they are required to complete four years of foreign language to satisfy graduation standards at Elite Scholars. Elite Scholars is also expanding Cambridge International Spanish courses for the 2021-2022 school year.

Teachers and staff have embraced ongoing professional development in an effort to better engage students, and parental support has been unwavering. Our school and district have been consistent with a continued, clear mission and vision of the school's direction. As we all have experienced challenges due to COVID-19, we have continued to teach and engage our students and community virtually. Our teachers and staff have demonstrated patience, mercy, and grace while providing service and support and navigating through these unprecedented times. We have provided students with asynchronous Fridays as a way to allow them to

unwind and receive additional assistance without new material provided as we align with district and state superintendent's initiatives of "compassion over compliance" in these challenging times.

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

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

Elite Scholars Academy is an early college and global studies magnet. Students are offered an all Honors, Advanced Placement, and Cambridge International curriculum as they work to become globally competent citizens. Students are afforded the opportunity to participate in dual enrollment in grades 10-12. Our recent partnerships include Clayton State University, Truett McConnell University, Atlanta Metropolitan College, and Southern Crescent Technical College. Our students are also exposed to different college campuses and programs beginning in the 6th grade. Each grade level is expected to take several field trips, and trips include college tours whenever possible. For students who do not pursue dual enrollment classes, our high school courses provide globally competitive rigor. This rigor begins in middle school accelerated courses to include Cambridge Assessment International courses. Our eighth grade students earn high school credits in algebra I, physical science, health/PE, and the foreign language of their choice. Our high school math courses also include geometry, algebra II, pre-calculus, and AP statistics. Our high school science courses include honors biology, AP environmental science, AP chemistry, and honors physics. Our English language arts courses have included and are expanding to include Cambridge General Paper (9th grade), Cambridge English Language (10th grade), AP English Language and AP English Literature. Our social studies high school courses are Cambridge Global Perspectives (9th Grade), AP Human Geography AP World History, AP United States History, AP United States Government/Politics, AP Psychology, and AP Macroeconomics.

Through a variety of Cambridge, Advanced Placement, and honors courses, Elite Scholars offers a differentiated and innovative magnet program. This accelerated magnet program fosters relevant and rigorous application to ensure college and career readiness. Elite Scholars requires a rigorous course plan that focuses on acceleration but also offers remediation for students. For the 2020-21 school year, students follow a six period, sixty minute per class daily schedule.

A school-wide philosophy to teaching and learning exists that focuses on delivering instruction using multiple modes of learning aligned to the theme. Our school-wide instructional theme focuses on the premise that all students can excel in advanced and/or honors courses. Although all ESA courses are accelerated, and students receive additional assistance as needed to help them succeed.

Assessments are formative and relate to class learning objectives or targets, drive instruction, and improve achievement. Formative assessments are assessments of learning and are utilized to inform and drive instruction. In addition to quarterly district benchmarks, teachers administer weekly formative assessments in the form of observations, oral questioning, and tickets out the door questions to gauge learning and drive future instruction. This formative data also helps to identify the need for remediation.

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

The Elite Scholars Academy middle and high school curriculum was designed with a heavy focus on helping ensure students would be college and career ready upon graduation. Our graduating seniors complete an honors/Advanced Placement, and Cambridge Assessment International program of study in addition to their four years of foreign language and four years of high school math credit. In addition to the required Latin course, students are able to choose between Chinese, French, and Spanish to complete their foreign language requirements. The AP Computer Science Principles course and Digital Media course offerings address ever-expanding STEM opportunities for students, and the expansion of middle school computer science courses through a grant with Amazon will enhance student opportunities for college and career readiness. Many of our tenth grade students began working toward their Associates Degree in conjunction with their high school diploma by entering into dual enrollment programs, but recent legislative budget cutbacks have limited access by sophomores. Many of our juniors and seniors complete dual enrollment coursework to further provide rigor in areas that interest them.

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

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

Elite Scholars Academy offers a robust variety of connections classes in middle and high school that supplement the required content area curriculum. These expansive course offerings are designed to provide our scholars with essential skills that prepare them to be globally competitive and helps provide students with some clarity about their future courses of study and potential career paths. Students have two exploratory courses during their six period day. These classes meet daily. In middle school, our sixth and seventh grade students change/rotate connections courses each semester after 18 weeks in their course. High school students remain in the same course for the entire school year. Both of the exploratory courses for our eighth graders are for high school credit; therefore, they remain in the course all school year.

Our middle school students begin earning a high school credit in foreign language as 7th graders, choosing from Chinese, French, Latin, and Spanish. Other middle school electives such as Digital Media, Communications (Public Speaking), and Health/PE help students develop essential life skills such as healthy living, interpersonal skills, and development of computer literacy and technology skills. Our middle school students also build a foundation of artistic skills in their middle school visual arts, music appreciation, band, orchestra and chorus classes.

Our high school students are afforded the opportunity to further explore these visual arts, weight training, and other connections classes. Drawing, Painting, Sculpture, Journalism, AP Computer Science Principles, AP Psychology, Photography, and Forensic Science are all high school courses that provide essential skills as they explore areas of personal interest.

These exploratory classes have operated virtually much like they did in person. The weight training and personal fitness classes continue workouts via Zoom. The visual arts, communications, classes, and science labs occur virtually as well in an effort to ensure students are provided as many authentic instructional opportunities and interactions as possible. The Journalism classes have adapted to the digital environment using the Google suite to engage fellow students to gather pictures and information to design a yearbook despite being virtual for the entire school year. Our art students have created digital portfolios to showcase their work. The pandemic has not changed our focus: teaching and learning takes place every day at Elite Scholars Academy. The goal for all of our supplemental curricular classes is to provide students an engaging, relevant learning experience that enhances their repertoire of essential skills as they become global citizens.

## **3. Academic Supports:**

In order to support students who may be struggling, Elite Scholars has safety nets in place. For students who are below the level of mastery, teachers provide daily tutorial sessions. Teachers are available each afternoon (in the virtual environment) from 3:15-3:45 students have a live Zoom session open and students can come by to get additional help. In addition to daily opportunities for reteaching and extra support, teachers contact regularly to inform parents of their child's progress. This parent contact comes via telephone, email and zoom conferences.

Teachers also use programs such as iReady, Achieve3000 and USATest Prep to provide reinforcement of standards and to individualize instruction and support for students struggling with particular standards. The lessons are assigned for specific students to address standards and skills of need. These programs allow teachers to individualize instruction whether a student needs remediation, enrichment or acceleration. Teachers use the information to plan for daily instruction, targeted tutorial sessions and flexible grouping.

During COVID-19/Virtual learning teachers have slowed the pace of instruction, but the goal is still mastery; however, our educators understand we are not in the same place as a traditional school year. This takes into account some struggles students are facing due to social-emotional

crisis due to covid-19. Another way in which teachers have modified instruction due to the pandemic is to provide students with additional time to complete assignments and/or teachers have modified or omitted assignments to meet the needs of all learners.

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

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

It is more imperative, especially in a virtual community, to touch bases with our students more often. Students are accustomed to seeing our faces, even when they are not aware that we are around. For instance, when in the brick and mortar building, students would see the Support Staff in the hallways in between classes, during their lunchtime and after school. In an effort to mimic those occurrences, the Counselors (at the middle and high school level) have incorporated Chew & Chat. At Elite Scholars Academy, the entire school has lunch break from 11:10-12:10. Counselors take 30 minutes to be available during lunch time to “be seen” by the students. At the middle school, students use the time to socialize, both with their peers and the middle school counselor. At the high school level, 9th and 10th graders use the time for social visits, whereas the upperclassmen tend to connect to the Zoom lunch calls to have concerns addressed.

Although students, parents, and staff have the tendency to be “Zoomed Out”, Support Staff have found Zoom or video calling to be more beneficial than simply making an audio call. While it is true that students are on Zoom for 6-7 hours a day, the response to having Zoom meetings with the staff members has been overwhelmingly positive. Faculty members use this time to build students up, letting them know that we miss seeing them in person, but we are glad to have the opportunity to actually “lay eyes on them”, even if it is for a brief period of time.

Small group sessions are run seamlessly with Zoom. Burnout is a reality that we all must acknowledge, but students seem to benefit immensely from being able to associate with fellow students in a small group format. As is the trend nationally, we have seen an increase in the number of students experiencing increased depression and anxiety. While this is difficult for a child/adolescent to deal with, it can also prove challenging for parents as they often do not know how to assist their children through the symptoms associated with these issues. Naturally, the counseling department provides support and counseling to the students who have been identified as having social/emotional challenges, but we also meet with the parents of our students to provide emotional support to them, as we recognize the importance of strong family units to support scholars emotionally and psychologically.

As is stated in our school creed, scholars having the ability to attend the college of their choice is always on our minds. With that being said, our high school scholars have had the opportunity to attend numerous college and university information/recruitment sessions during this period of virtual learning. Utilizing Zoom, college/university recruiters educate our scholars on what their respective institutions have to offer. At the middle school level, our scholars participate in career exploration activities via You Science and Everfi, which affords them the opportunity to discover what industries and careers match their personal interest.

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

With support from the counseling department, one main initiative of Elite Scholars Academy set out to achieve during the pandemic was increase the amount of Parent Universities to be able to provide support for parents. Parent Universities are meetings held with the parents as the focus. Elite Scholars Academy prides itself on being communicative and interacting with our parents because Elite Scholars Academy believes in home and school working together to produce the best scholar possible. Last year we hosted a total of 6 Parent Universities between the two semesters. This school year alone, the counseling department has hosted eight Parent Universities (between middle and high school). The goal is to present twice as many Parent Universities so that parents can feel supported as their role in their child's academic success has shifted due to the pandemic. These Parent University meetings are additional support options designed to supplement parent conferences, PTSA meetings, and other consistent meetings already in place to engage families.

We have also collaborated with ESA’s Behavioral Specialist to produce a Trauma and the Student at Home Parent University, which in effect, provided parents with practical tips for dealing with behaviors that might

be presenting themselves (at home) due to Covid-19 and its subsequent social distancing and safety restrictions.

Elite Scholars Academy also works very closely with the school Social Worker to provide parents and students with outside resources (this includes both social/emotional and physical resources). Our School Social Worker participated in home visits (until Covid-19 protocols diminished this protocol) to check up on students who were not attending class (logging into Zoom) on a regular basis. The Circle of Support team identifies students who needed more wrap-around services and those students and parents were able to have one on one communication with the Behavioral Specialist and/or the School Social Worker. From there, further resources are provided on a case by case basis. In addition, as medical and psychological diagnoses arise for our students, which may hinder the learning of scholars, the counseling department deploys the services of our assigned school psychologist for the implementation of SST, 504 health plans, and testing for possible eligibility for special education services.

In an effort to continue to support our scholars by celebrating their social and academic accomplishment, ESA has conducted drive-thru and virtual award ceremonies that celebrated overall student success, as well as success in individual content areas. Moreover, each grade level has continued to recognize two scholars monthly as students of the month in an effort to ensure student morale is at its highest.

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

Supporting faculty and staff is a task the Elite Scholars Academy administration team takes very seriously. The school has a plan that aligns professional development to the theme and supports the needs of the students. Our current professional development focus is Cambridge International (individual content area training), culturally relevant teaching and social emotional learning. The school employs ongoing, embedded professional development to ensure that all staff, including special area teachers and new hires, have received high-quality, on-going and job-embedded professional development to support understanding and implementation of magnet curriculum and themes. Teachers are given opportunities to attend national/state conferences to develop teacher competencies as well.

The school provides a forum or opportunity for teachers to give reflection and feedback of their professional development to ensure buy-in and contributed leadership. Each year teachers are given a PD needs assessment. This information is used to plan professional learning opportunities for whole faculty, grade level teams and content area departments. The needs assessment also identifies individual teacher needs. Teachers may register for courses through district PD and/or metro RESA (Regional Educational Service Agency) professional learning opportunities.

Professional learning activities are typically scheduled on Wednesdays. Having a set schedule for Wednesdays allows teachers to organize their planning time each week. Teachers expect to meet and plan with their department members each week. In order to maximize time, teachers receive a copy of the meeting agenda prior to each session. This preview allows teachers the opportunity to formulate questions as well as gather any necessary materials. At the conclusion of each meeting, teachers are given the opportunity to share any concerns and to ask questions.

During the transition from traditional to remote learning, teachers participated in a variety of training sessions provided by the school district. These sessions focused on using the Google Classroom platform and its components as well as how to navigate Zoom. This transition was a bit overwhelming, so the administrative team tried to streamline meetings in order to provide teachers time to plan and prepare for virtual instruction. Time to understand, navigate and prepare was essential to teachers making this abrupt transition. Rather than having many professional learning sessions, a shared folder was created and information (videos, articles) for teachers to review at their leisure. Teachers are able to return to this folder and refresh information as much as needed. In addition to these online supports, the administrative team was readily accessible to provide continuous support to individual teachers as needed.

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

Educating young people is a deliberate choice of the heart. The desire to build positive relationships that provide students the best educational opportunities and help to remove barriers that would impede their success is vital to school climate and culture. These efforts are so vital to student success, but they require constant attention and reflection to cultivate these relationships and maintain proper lines of communication. The role of the principal is to set the stage by sharing a clear and consistent mission and vision within the school community and work to lead by example, motivating and inspiring all staff, students, and stakeholders to explore the endless possibilities that a quality education provides. A principal cannot do the work alone but is supported by other school leaders. Assistant Principals play a vital role by providing service and support to carry out the school's mission and vision while supporting students and staff. School leaders work together to establish and sustain a culture of collaboration through ongoing opportunities for dialogue. Administrators support the needs of teachers and students, secure resources necessary for instructional needs, and provide professional development necessary for teachers to enhance instructional strategies. These combined efforts create an environment conducive to teaching and learning. It is always a work in progress to build a culture of home and school working together for student success. We definitely had that established prior to COVID-19 as parents were encouraged to volunteer in the school for twenty hours each school year.

All staff members of the school have a role to play in supporting and enhancing the school culture and climate. While COVID-19 has changed our educational methods, the spirit and expectations attached to our educational methods have not changed. While administrators are not greeting students in the hallways each day, they continue to greet and observe classes daily in the virtual setting. Synchronous instruction is provided four days each week. Due to the district's initiative, one to one devices were provided to each student. Teachers and counselors play a vital role in providing additional social-emotional support to students through daily check-ins and "chew and chat" sessions. Drive-thru honors celebrations and Zoom meeting conferences have allowed programs and relationships to continue to thrive as we maintain essential lines of communication. Educating the whole child aims to ensure that the academic needs as well as the social and emotional needs of each student are met, creating a foundation of continued student success.

## **5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:**

Our school's theme for 2021 is Elite Uknighthed (Royal Knight is our mascot)! We are indeed united. Students are encouraged to embrace and appreciate all cultures. Our community consists of Caucasian, African-American, Hispanic, Asian and multiracial members. Through a concerted effort, students have the opportunity to join a variety of clubs and organizations that speak to our diversity. We have a Hispanic Heritage Club, Asian Heritage Club and African Student Association. Each group holds a school wide assembly each year highlighting the history and accomplishments that their group has made to our nation. We have welcomed student groups from as far away as Korea and China to perform and educate our students about their unique cultures. Elite Scholars Academy also prides itself on a diverse faculty and staff. The students can always see themselves represented amongst the administration, faculty, and support staff as well as seeing evidence of the culturally responsive training that teachers have received.

Because we have been 100% virtual this school year, teachers and counselors complete daily social emotional check-ins with the students. This gives students a forum each day, to share any concerns. Counselors are available before, during and after school to address any concerns. Each day counselors hold "chew and chat" sessions giving students a chance to socialize in this virtual environment.

As a way to encourage parents to participate in school events, teachers are encouraged to utilize Google Translate when sending correspondence in a variety of languages. Also, during meetings (conferences, school wide town hall) interpreters have been included to support parents who are non-native English speakers. The school has established policies and practices for families to communicate with teachers and leadership via phone, email, website, social media, or other

technology. ESA has provided a myriad of ways for parents to stay abreast of school events. Each teacher has a google classroom for students and parents to join and stay current on classroom assignments and events. In addition, the school website is detailed and updated daily. Regular calling posts are distributed to inform parents of events, as well as messages on the marquee provided to distribute important information.

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

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While many factors have played a role in Elite Scholars Academy students' continued success during the pandemic, the longstanding mantra of home and school working together for student success has to be the integral component in this effort. Administrators and teachers have utilized a variety of resources and strategies to maintain engagement and communication with students and parents as everyone remains focused on student success during these unprecedented educational challenges. In addition to the typical school faculty and staff, assigned social workers and school psychologists have also contributed to efforts to support students' academic and social-emotional needs during our virtual learning for the last twelve months. An example of several unique opportunities that students and parents were provided to remain engaged this year include a drive-thru senior pinning ceremony in place of our traditional formal ceremony in the gymnasium, a drive-thru middle school honors assembly to recognize honor roll recipients, a virtual awards ceremony for high school honor roll recipients, and a drive-thru technology professional development faculty meeting for teachers to ensure they received the latest instructional strategies to utilize to engage students in Google Classroom. The counseling department also scheduled monthly virtual Parent University opportunities giving parents an opportunity to further support their student's learning through social-emotional support programs and academic support pathways. The counseling department also scheduled virtual college visits for our high school students to help them remain focused on the importance of their academic success and feel as connected as possible to the options afforded them regarding career pathways. Students have also been encouraged to participate in "chew and chat" sessions with counselors during lunch breaks to provide encouragement and chances to discuss social-emotional needs in a relaxed, non-academic time of reflection. This partnership of home and school working together for student success began with the school's inception as a public charter school, encouraging parents to commit to twenty hours of volunteer service each school year. Twelve years later, this expectation for parents to continue to volunteer at school to remain fully engaged in their child's learning remains constant. While virtual learning and COVID-19 restrictions have prevented on-campus volunteerism, the standard and expectation of parents working alongside teachers and students to ensure student success has remained intact. The high expectations established by the mission and vision of Elite Scholars founders, supported by the actions of administration and faculty, bolstered by accelerated curricular choices, and further solidified by home and school working together has helped Elite Scholars Academy ensure academic success.