

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

[X] Public or [] Non-public

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

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

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

School Mailing Address 401 Hopping Road
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Bishop State GA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 30621-1661

County Oconee County

Telephone (706) 310-1985 Fax (706) 310-1986

Web site/URL https://www.oconeeschools.org/HSES E-mail jwhitaker@oconeeschools.org

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

Date _____

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent* Dr. Jason Branch E-mail jbranch@oconeeschools.org
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Oconee County School District Tel. (706) 769-5130

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. Kim Argo
(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)
 - 2 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 2 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 11 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	59	43	102
1	42	34	76
2	37	31	68
3	44	43	87
4	52	47	99
5	42	38	80
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	276	236	512

*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
 - 1.2 % Asian
 - 1.7 % Black or African American
 - 2.7 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0.2 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 90.5 % White
 - 3.7 % 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: 5%

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	11
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	15
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	26
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	538
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.05
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	5

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

Chinese, Japanese, Spanish, Vietnamese

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

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 9 %

Total number students who qualify: 48

8. Students receiving special education services: 15 %

76 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>7</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>4</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>11</u> Developmental Delay | <u>18</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>3</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>28</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>1</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>4</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: 2

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	2
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	28
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	14
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	14
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	1

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 18:1

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	97%	97%	97%	97%	97%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

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

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

The mission of High Shoals Elementary is to provide an enriching environment where students are guided to reach their full potential.

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.

HSES has operated through an in-person learning model since the first day of school on August 5, 2020. A digital learning option is offered through the school district, however, the majority of HSES students, over 85%, returned to in-person learning in August. Students have been able to switch between in-person and distance learning at nine-week intervals. Currently, HSES has 98% of students participating in in-person learning.

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

High Shoals Elementary School (HSES), home of the Hawks, is a K-5 school located in rural, western Oconee County, Georgia. High Shoals opened its doors in August of 2009 with the motto “High Standards Equal Success.” From its opening, High Shoals has provided a high quality education for K-5 students and has been committed to providing students with opportunities to engage in learning experiences beyond the core academic content areas. Our teachers believe that all children can learn at high levels and that their role is to teach, nurture, and develop the whole child. At High Shoals, our staff places a high priority on creating a positive learning environment through building relationships with students and their families.

High Shoals Elementary School is one of the smaller elementary schools in Oconee County Schools with 520 students. HSES’ student population consists of 283 females and 237 males. Approximately 90% of the student population is White, 3.7% is Multiracial, 2.7% is Hispanic, 1.7% is African-American, 1.2% is Asian, and .5% is Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander. English Learners (EL) comprise 1.75% of our student body. Additionally, 10.39% of students receive free or reduced meal benefits, 14.8% of students receive Special Education services through an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), and 15.4% receive gifted services through a combination of Advanced Content courses, gifted cluster grouping, gifted collaborative services, and a daily resource pull-out model.

Students who require additional academic, emotional, or behavioral support are carefully monitored through the Response to Intervention (RTI) process. The school’s RTI team meets every other week to review progress monitoring data on students who receive additional support. Interventions are determined based on a variety of diagnostic assessments that identify exact areas of weakness.

Kindergarten-2nd grade ELL students are served through an innovative model wherein they are placed with an ESOL endorsed teacher in a print-rich learning environment. Students in grade 3-5 are served through push-in support from an ESOL teacher who supports language acquisition and the development of content vocabulary and academic language.

What sets High Shoals Elementary School apart is our outstanding teachers and staff. Teachers and staff at High Shoals have high academic, social, and behavioral expectations for themselves and their students. Of the certified staff, 78% of teachers hold advanced degrees. Every core content teacher is gifted certified, which is 85% of the total teaching staff. Teachers consistently use real-time formative data to differentiate instruction and scaffold students’ learning. A variety of strategies are utilized to provide rigorous, authentic, and personalized learning for each student. Teachers at HSES view themselves as life-long learners who are committed to growing professionally.

The staff of HSES has always been flexible, adaptable, and consistent, but never more so than on Friday, March 13, 2020. On this date, our school system announced that school would transition to a distance-learning model on Monday, March 16. Teachers worked late into the night preparing devices to go home with students, preparing materials, and gathering supplies for students. They worked tirelessly over the weekend to have digital lessons ready to go for Monday morning. On Monday at 8 a.m., teachers were communicating with parents and providing instruction to their students. Over the next nine weeks, teachers taught remotely from home providing asynchronous and synchronous instruction.

In July 2020, parents at HSES were allowed to choose between returning to in-person learning on August 5 or participating in distance-learning. Eighty-five percent of parents selected in-person learning with COVID-19 mitigation strategies in place. Teachers and staff had to reimagine daily instruction, restructure classrooms to maximize space, and reinvent lessons. Throughout the year, teachers have continually adapted as distance-learners returned to in-person instruction and COVID-19 mitigation strategies were adjusted.

High Shoals Elementary is a family. Staff members have positive relationships with one another and model for students that learning is fun. Successes, whether personal or professional, are celebrated. Administration, teachers, and support staff come alongside one another to offer support and encouragement when challenges arise.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

HSES utilizes the Georgia Standards of Excellence (GSE) as its standards for teaching and learning. District-wide pacing guides enable instructional planning to be both cross-curricular and vertically aligned. Curriculum is taught using student-based learning pedagogy, research-based best practices, and data-driven responses to planning and instruction geared towards individualized student achievement.

In all subjects, teachers use the gradual release model to scaffold learning. This model of instruction allows for the teacher to shift the cognitive load from the adult to the students over time. Lessons begin with a focus or mini-lesson and then move into guided instruction or small group work. While not participating in a small group with the teacher, students work in collaborative groups or on an independent task that is used as a formative assessment.

HSES develops lifelong readers and writers through the use of a balanced literacy approach with whole group read-alouds, shared reading and writing experiences, guided practice in small groups, and independent reading and writing. Each grade level has a minimum of 90 minutes for reading each day and utilizes the Daily 5 framework. Digital resources such as Edmentum Exact Path, RAZ-kids, Epic, Boom Cards, and Storyworks are used during independent work.

Students are assessed using the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System (FPBAS) in order to determine independent and instructional reading levels on a quarterly basis. HSES has a robust leveled library of both fiction and nonfiction leveled readers that provide teachers with access to books that align to each student's instructional reading level. Along with this reading system, teachers use the Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) test to plan differentiated lessons in both reading and writing using Lexile levels and the MAP Learning Continuum to identify areas of strengths and concerns. Kindergarten through 2nd grade also utilizes Foundations, a multi-sensory and systematic phonics, spelling, and handwriting program.

Similar to reading instruction, teachers use a combination of guided/shared writing experiences and mentor texts to teach writing through a workshop model. Mentor texts and mentor sentences are used to explore craft, grammar, and sentence structure. Individual writing conferences allow teachers to personalize and differentiate feedback to students as they progress through narrative, informational, and opinion writing. Teachers use Write Score assessments to help identify areas for growth in writing. Lucy Calkins' Units of Study and Jennifer Seravallo's The Writing Strategies Book are used as resources.

As with ELA, teachers follow the GSE and the district curriculum map and pacing guide for mathematics instruction. Common formative assessments are given within each unit to determine progress toward mastery of the standards. At the end of each unit, students take a common summative assessment.

To encourage students to become problem solvers who persevere, teachers use Cognitively Guided Instruction (CGI). Using skills from CGI, students create solutions and express mathematical understanding through concrete representations, drawings, and oral and written expressions. Teachers build on prior knowledge of math concepts by students' hearing students' thought processes and asking probing questions. Mathematics instruction follows a workshop model that seeks to build conceptual understanding of math through hands-on learning, manipulatives, and visual models. Students receive exposure to and self-select from a variety of mathematical strategies.

Teachers focus on developing strong number sense through the use of daily Number Talks. Differentiated math groups are utilized throughout each week to close learning gaps and expand students' current math skills. Teachers use a variety of data to provide personalized instruction.

In addition to small group instruction, students practice their mathematical thinking through application-based tasks and real-world problem solving scenarios. Online resources such as Reflex Math and Edmentum Exact Path are used to support students with personalized learning opportunities that align with their unique learning needs.

Science instruction at HSES focuses on inquiry and hands-on exploration in the domains of Earth and Space Science, Physical Science, and Life Science. Teachers use the 5 E's to guide science planning and instruction: engage, explore, explain, elaborate, and evaluate. As HSES works towards Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) certification, teaching teams have built interdisciplinary STEM units and project-based learning (PBL) units that give students the opportunity to engage in meaningful real-world projects.

HSES has a well-equipped Science lab that was funded by the school's Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO). The lab is filled with hands-on learning materials, kits of materials that support each grade level's science standards, 3-D printers, robotics, and more.

High Shoals teachers teach social studies through engaging content, real-world connections, and civic opportunities. Teachers use the GSE to provide instruction in historical, geographic, government/civic, and economic understandings. Social Studies Weekly, a newspaper-style resource, provides students with an engaging way to interact with social studies content. Advanced Content classes have begun using document based question essays to integrate reading, writing, and social studies instruction.

At HSES, student involvement in the community is highly valued and encouraged. For instance, while learning about the effects of COVID-19 on our community, 5th grade students initiated a school-wide project to benefit local healthcare and frontline workers.

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:

At HSES, students participate in non-academic classes for 45 minutes every day. These classes engage students in cross-curricular content and provide opportunities for students to learn and express themselves creatively.

HSES' Visual Arts class is collaborative and focused on student choice. When students engage in creative processes during art, they are encouraged to take risks and to practice creative problem-solving. A wide range of materials are provided for the young artists. Students also learn about famous and local artists, while using the characteristics of their art to inspire creations. Classes frequently work together to create collaborative art pieces which are then displayed in the school or at the school district office. Experiences provided in the art room allow students to exercise critical thinking skills and make connections to historical time periods and cultures around the world.

Music instruction at HSES is centered around the Orff-Schulwerk method, which emphasizes learning music through instinctual play. Students experience music through speech, movement, dancing, singing, and playing instruments. Opportunities for creating, composing, and performing music are provided using mallet instruments, handheld percussion instruments, drums, ukuleles, boomwhackers, and recorders. Students learn about composers from world cultures and time periods and how their music made a historical impact. Most importantly, music class is experiential. It provides HSES musicians with a variety of musical experiences where life-long musicians are developed.

During physical education (PE) class, HSES students build teamwork skills and sportsmanship, while emphasizing physical fitness and a healthy lifestyle. In addition to teaching specific sports, P.E. also allows students to practice life skills such as sharing space, caring for equipment, following directions, personal responsibility, and safely participating in group activities. High Shoals students participate each year in the

FitnessGram assessment to measure physical fitness levels. Students also learn how physical activity can improve coordination, balance, heart function, and general health. Overall, students learn to value physical activity for health, enjoyment, challenge, and self-expression.

All students participate in 21st-century skill-building activities through Explorations class. Explorations is a hands-on class that includes skills such as engineering, coding, circuit creating, 3-D printing, problem-solving, and robotics. This class provides real-world learning experiences through STEM challenges, problem solving scenarios, and creative thinking skills exercises.

The HSES Media Center houses an expansive collection providing more than 25 books per student. The library program focuses on intentional read-alouds to expose students to a breadth of children's literature. Regular "think-alouds" support deep reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and cultural understanding. Other resources provided are a Makerspace and a publishing wall for students' writing.

HSES also has a comprehensive school counseling program which includes K-5 classroom lessons, small group and individual counseling, and interventions based on the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) mindsets. Counseling lessons cover topics such as 7 Habits of Happy Kids, emotional regulation, conflict resolution (anti-bullying), digital citizenship, communication, resilience, and diversity. Lessons meet the requirements of the BRIDGE law through career pathways and readiness instruction. Abuse prevention, bullying prevention, and digital citizenship lessons are also provided through the Think First Stay Safe curriculum. Counseling topics also reinforce Positive Behavioral and Interventions and Supports (PBIS) school expectations to be "Responsible, Respectful, and Remarkable."

3. Academic Supports:

Regular assessment allows the school to address individual student needs using data. Students are benchmarked three times per year using NWEA Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment. Additionally, FPBAS assessments are administered three times per year for students in Grades K-3. Common formative and summative assessments are administered to determine if students are meeting core standards. Teachers use these multiple data sources to provide differentiated, small group instruction.

When data shows that students do not meet standards, they are referred to the Response to Intervention (RTI) team. This team uses a multi-tier approach to identify and provide interventions to support students academically, socially, and emotionally. RTI meetings focus on determining specific areas of need and making data-driven decisions to match those student needs with research-based interventions. Regular progress monitoring data is collected to track growth and determine intervention effectiveness.

The majority of gifted students are served through advanced content courses in all curriculum areas. All classroom teachers are gifted certified and seek to grow gifted students in their areas of giftedness through personalized instruction, project-based learning, and creativity. Gifted students not served in advanced content are clustered together and served through a gifted cluster model or a collaborative services model. In many classes, an additional gifted resource teacher co-teaches within an Advanced Content class. This collaboration allows for further differentiation and personalization of learning designed around students' specific needs, learning styles, and interests.

For kindergarten students, additional opportunities are provided for developing thinking skills. Each class meets weekly with a gifted resource teacher to receive instruction in critical and creative thinking. This allows teachers to nurture young learners' creative powers, while also supporting their intellectual development.

Special education and general education teachers work closely to meet the needs of special

education students. Once a student meets eligibility criteria for special education services, special education teachers and paraprofessionals partner with general education teachers to provide instruction and accommodations that allow students to make progress toward their IEP goals and objectives. These students continue to learn alongside their same-aged peers as often as is appropriate. During the daily 45 minute extension segment, special education students receive resource support in separate classes. Instruction during this time aligns with IEP goals. Students who need direct service in reading instruction follow the Wilson Reading System (WRS). Zones of Regulation curriculum is utilized to support students with behavioral needs. This systematic, cognitive-behavioral approach is used to teach students how to regulate their feelings, energy, and sensory needs in order to meet the demands of their environment.

English Learners (EL) are identified through the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) screening process. EL students are served by a half-time English to Speakers of other Languages (ESOL) teacher. EL students in grades K-2 are served through an innovative model where they are placed in a class with an ESOL endorsed teacher. EL students in grades 3-5 receive direct support in content classes through push-in support. Title III funds also pay for digital Reading A to Z accounts for english learners and a summer Science camp for second and third grade English learners. Language Line and contracted bilingual liaisons are used to facilitate communication with EL families.

At HSES, homeless or migrant students are partnered with various community agencies to provide assistance for their families. In the school setting, we ensure free breakfast and lunch. After school and summer tutoring services for academic support are also provided.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

HSES is committed to educational excellence for all students across academic, social, and emotional learning areas. We work to engage, encourage, and provide students with a safe and positive school community through a variety of means. HSES is a Georgia Department of Education PBIS school with an Operational designation and 5 star school climate rating. We engage students, teachers, and parents in following the 3 Rs of HSES: Respectful, Responsible, and Remarkable. By exhibiting these expectations, students can earn “Shoalies”, ClassDojo points, and Super Shoalies as a class or grade level. Each month, a student from each grade level who exemplifies the 3 Rs is selected for the Hawk Hall of Fame.

Beginning in August 2020, HSES began implementing Responsive Classroom strategies to address the social emotional learning (SEL) needs of students. The master schedule provides 15 minutes each morning for teachers to conduct a Morning Meeting. During Morning Meetings, students and teachers make personal, social, and academic connections with each other. On Wednesdays, each classroom has an explicit SEL lesson based on the competencies outlined by the Collaborative for Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL).

In addition to academic excellence, HSES offers many opportunities for students beyond the school day. Extracurricular activities include Beta Club, PE Club, Art Club, Orffestra, Ukulele, Chorus, Robotics, Lego Robotics, and Science Olympiad. At the end of the school year, there are three Club Days where teachers, community members, and parent volunteers teach a club on topics ranging from cooking to mindfulness. Students in 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades can audition for a musical theater production in which students are involved in all aspects from costume and set design, to production, and an all student cast of actors.

At HSES, students are prepared to excel academically, socially, and emotionally in their current and future communities. To do so, there is a school-wide emphasis on building student leaders through various opportunities. For example, Hawk Ambassadors receive training from The University of Georgia’s J.W. Fanning Institute for Leadership Development. These ambassadors serve as student advisors to the principal and are an active part in school-wide initiatives. Fifth grade students apply for job opportunities, which include Flag Corps, School Store, Safety Patrol, Shoalie Team, Positive Postcards, and Reading Buddies.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

An extremely important part of academic success at HSES is the partnerships shared among parents and the community. In addition to the school council that provides feedback on school initiatives, the HSES Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) is an integral part of the school. PTO strengthens the positive school climate through fun events such as Family Movie Nights, Fall Festival, Santa’s Workshop, Sweetheart Dance, Fun Run, and Spirit Nights at local restaurants. The HSES PTO also reinforces the school’s partnerships with local businesses. Business partners support efforts to recognize positive student behavior, attendance, and other teacher recognitions throughout the school year. Parent volunteers donate hundreds of hours to assist with events, field trips, tutoring, and beautification projects.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused HSES to reimagine engagement with parents and families. PTO meetings and parent conferences have been offered virtually which has increased participation in both. HSES partnered with the Georgia Youth Science and Technology Center to offer virtual STEM nights for students. Virtual parent conferences and IEP meetings have been well received by parents.

Due to close proximity to The University of Georgia and The University of North Georgia, HSES has a strong partnership with these institutions to provide student teachers, practicum students, and additional volunteers that work with students. As previously mentioned, HSES is working to become a STEM certified school. Professional learning in how to develop STEM units has been implemented with the help of our Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA) and professors from the University of Georgia.

HSES has a strong mentoring program that partners students with individuals in our community. We have maintained our mentoring program during COVID-19 with precautions such as masks, hand sanitizer, and larger meeting spaces.

To support students with mental health needs, HSES partners with Pathways Transition Programs (PTP). PTP offers a comprehensive array of assessment and therapy services for children and families. Services are both therapeutic and psycho-educational, fostering and supporting change and growth, as well as training and skill development for enhancing coping skills and resiliency. PTP counselors meet with students at school during lunch to provide therapy services.

HSES also partners with Food for Kids. This program bridges the hunger gap for students by providing a bag of nutritious kid-friendly food to children who might not otherwise have enough to eat over the weekend.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

A professional culture is created and cultivated at HSES so that teachers feel supported, valued, and enabled to grow pedagogically and professionally. HSES provides many diverse and enriching professional development opportunities that empower teachers and staff with greater autonomy and the ability to construct creative and innovative learning environments for students. New teachers to HSES, or simply new to teaching, are paired with experienced mentor teachers that provide them with support and guidance.

At HSES, yearly professional development initiatives are targeted and intentional to provide faculty the opportunity to learn instructional practices that increase student achievement and engagement. Our 2020-2021 professional learning opportunities are based on the social and emotional well-being of students. Responsive Classroom and Zones of Regulation professional learning has increased teachers' ability to create a classroom culture that is safe, joyful, and engaging. Teachers at HSES are encouraged to seek advanced certifications. As mentioned, all teachers hold Gifted certification and many are certified in areas such as ESOL, leadership, mathematics, reading, and special education.

Collaboration is important to the professional culture in place at HSES. Teachers are provided with regular opportunities to learn from each other, teachers from other schools in the system, instructional technology support specialists, regional educational service agencies, and by attending professional conferences. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are structured to allow the staff flexibility in meeting times and the meeting agendas to maximize efficiency and productivity. Teachers from each grade level take part in district-wide Action Teams that continually review and evaluate common formative assessments that they have created to monitor the progress of students on specific standards or content areas. The path to STEM certification has allowed HSES and the Oconee River Georgia Youth Science & Technology Center to partner and collaborate to increase the faculty's understanding of STEM programming and application. Grade levels also collaborate in the planning and implementation of grade level or school-wide project-based learning activities.

Distance learning has highlighted the importance of technology-based professional development this year. The Tech Pioneers professional learning initiative encourages faculty members to pursue professional development opportunities geared toward teachers' understanding and ability to utilize digital tools and technologies to aid in student learning while distance learning. The program is differentiated and provides a wide range of professional development opportunities for teachers to pursue.

4. School Leadership:

The success of HSES is the result of years of strong leadership. Since 2009, four different Principals have led HSES, each one unique in his/her skill set and approach, but all forward thinking, innovative, and instructionally sound.

The administration of HSES consists of a full-time principal and assistant principal (AP) who continue to build on the foundation created by their predecessors. They are the lead learners and instructional leaders of NBRS 2021

the school. Both have deep knowledge of standards, curriculum, and best practices for instruction. Relationships with students, teachers, and parents are the bedrock of their work. All decisions made are filtered through the question “what is best for students?” The principal holds high expectations for staff, students, and herself.

Instructional and planning time is protected. The principal sends out a weekly communication on Wednesdays called the “To Inform.” This Google document shares informational items that teachers need to know. This replaces the need to use faculty meeting time to discuss logistical information. Instead, faculty meetings are focused on professional learning or collaborative planning on school-wide initiatives.

The administrative team is highly visible from the start to the end of the school day. The principal greets students each morning in the car rider line and the AP greets bus riders. The principal leads the Pledge of Allegiance and moment of silence each morning and announces student and staff birthdays. Staff and students are then provided a birthday treat which allows the Principal to make a personal connection with each student. The administrative team works together so that each classroom is visited each day by the principal or AP. Both administrators know students by name and make it a point to address students by their names.

The principal and assistant principal collaborate with the School Improvement Team (SIT), which consists of a teacher from each grade level or department. SIT members serve two-year terms. Each summer, the SIT meets for a retreat to build community, get leadership development training, analyze data, identify areas for growth and improvement, and create an action plan to move the school forward. Throughout the year, the SIT monitors data and adapts the school improvement plan as needed to meet the needs of students. Teacher input is valued and solicited regularly from the SIT team and school administration. Teachers are encouraged to give feedback into fiscal and human resource management, procedures, and instructional resources.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

Because the HSES school community is less diverse than most, equity, inclusion, and cooperation is especially important for students. Utilizing the Responsive Classrooms model underpins our work to promote a culturally responsive community at High Shoals. This model gives dedicated time every day for Morning Meetings to explicitly teach social and emotional skills such as self-awareness, valuing differences, and empathy. This time provides an opportunity for students to feel seen and heard by their teachers and classmates. Being seen and heard creates a safe space for students and teachers to share their traditions and beliefs, which may also be challenged in a respectful way. It also gives students the opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings regarding events taking place in our school, our community, our state, and our world. Students are taught how to listen to understand and to respectfully ask questions to better understand the thoughts and feelings of those around them that may differ from their own.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are also broadly supported throughout HSES beyond Responsive Classrooms. For example, the music teacher mindfully features diverse composers, music, and instruments to bring music from around the world to our students. In art class, students study artists and art forms from cultures around the world. The media center and the Title I library both have a diverse collection of children’s literature that reflects a wider world to allow students to see not only themselves, but others, as well. Embedded throughout the counseling lessons is also content to expand students’ knowledge of diversity in many forms: racial, cultural, economical, and familial systems.

Developing culturally responsive teaching practices is ongoing work for HSES staff. We are committed to continuing to heighten cultural diversity lessons in our school so that our students are well prepared to live and work in today’s modern and global society.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

To align with the school district's improvement plan, HSES established a goal to train teachers and develop practices that support students' social and emotional learning (SEL). HSES staff selected Responsive Classroom as the school's SEL framework. The Responsive Classroom model is a set of researched and evidenced-based practices designed to create safe, joyful, and engaging school communities.

In Fall of 2019, a guiding coalition of HSES teachers attended Responsive Classroom training and began to pilot these practices with their students. Each teacher began to implement a daily Morning Meeting composed of the following: a greeting, a sharing opportunity, a group activity, and a morning message.

On March 16, 2020, HSES moved to a distance learning model due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Initially, the closure was slated for two weeks, but lasted for the remainder of the school year. During the closure, HSES staff committed to staying connected to students and nurturing their social-emotional needs during that time. FLEX (Fun, Leisure Learning, Emotional Time and Connections, and xTra Learning and Support) Fridays were initiated to allow all students to participate in an SEL lesson that addressed specific SEL needs in response to school closures and stay-at-home orders. This time also allowed students to make up any incomplete work and to meet one-on-one with teachers as needed.

In July 2020, parents at HSES were allowed to choose between returning to in-person learning on August 5 or participating in distance-learning (DL). On August 5, 2020, 85% of HSES students returned to in-person learning with COVID-19 mitigation protocols in place. As of March 30, 2021, only 9 students remain distance-learners.

In preparation for welcoming students back to school, all staff participated in Responsive Classroom training led by the guiding coalition who received training in Fall 2019. The master schedule was adjusted to allow the first 15 minutes of the school day to be set aside for Morning Meeting. HSES formed an SEL committee composed of a teacher at each grade level, support staff, and school administration. This committee meets monthly to receive additional training, develop Morning Meetings, and plan for continued professional development for all HSES staff. The SEL committee also plans a weekly SEL lesson for each grade level based on the CASEL core competencies. This lesson is taught each Wednesday during Morning Meeting.

Throughout the year, distance learners have participated in Morning Meetings led by the school counselor and media specialist. This provides students learning at home with opportunities to socialize with peers and participate in a community.

Responsive Classroom practices and Morning Meetings provide HSES staff and students a meaningful way to create deep relationships, share their thoughts and feelings, develop SEL competencies, and create a strong and vibrant classroom community.