

***U.S. Department of Education***  
***2022 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program***

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[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

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

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

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

School Mailing Address 2874 Ray Owens Road  
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City Appling State GA Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 30802-2204

County Columbia

Telephone (706) 541-1158 Fax (706) 854-5833

Web site/URL https://northcolumbiaes.ccboe.net/ E-mail tgambrell@ccboe.net

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent\* Dr. Steven Flynt E-mail steven.flynt@ccboe.net  
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Columbia County School District Tel. (706) 541-0650

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board President/Chairperson Mr. David Dekle  
(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 signatures on the first page of this application (cover page) certify that each of the statements below, concerning the school’s eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education and National Blue Ribbon Schools requirements, are true and correct.

1. All nominated public schools must meet the state’s performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
2. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 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 2016 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 or 2021.
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. The nominated school has, or is subject to, a nondiscrimination policy (provide either a link to the policy or submit a text of the policy), is committed to equal opportunity for all students and all staff consistent with applicable law and does not have any outstanding findings of unlawful discrimination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school’s nomination and/or rescind a school’s award if unlawful discrimination is later discovered.

12. 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.

**The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's nomination and/or rescind a school's award if one of these eligibility requirements is later discovered to have not been met or otherwise been violated.**

## PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

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Data should be provided for the current school year (2021-2022) unless otherwise stated.

**DISTRICT** (Question 1 is not applicable to non-public schools. For charter schools: If a charter school is part of the public school system, information should be provided for the public school district. If a charter school is considered its own district or part of a charter district, the information provided should reflect that.)

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

**SCHOOL** (To be completed by all schools. **Only include demographic data for the nominated school, not for 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 in the school as of October 1, 2021 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	26	18	44
K	24	33	57
1	35	24	59
2	38	31	69
3	32	28	60
4	32	38	70
5	35	29	64
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
<b>Total Students</b>	222	201	423

\*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
  - 0 % Asian
  - 5.1 % Black or African American
  - 3.5 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 87.3 % White
  - 4.1 % 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 2020 - 2021 school year: 9%

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, 2020 until the end of the 2020-2021 school year	24
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2020 until the end of the 2020-2021 school year	14
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	38
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2020	409
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.09
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	9

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

None

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

0 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 34 %

Total number students who qualify: 142

8. Students receiving special education services with an IEP or 504: 21 %  
90 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 with an IEP or 504 should be reflected in the table below. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <u>5</u> Autism                  | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>16</u> Other Health Impaired                |
| <u>23</u> Developmental Delay    | <u>8</u> Specific Learning Disability          |
| <u>1</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>48</u> Speech or Language Impairment        |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment      | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>4</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>2</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 6
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	2
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	21
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	12
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	6
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	2

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

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

<b>Required Information</b>	2020-2021	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017
Daily student attendance	95%	96%	97%	96%	96%
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 2021.

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

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.

Yes  No

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

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

At North Columbia, our mission is Empowering and Inspiring ALL Learners to Excel in a Global Society. We work diligently each and every day to ensure students reach individual potential. There is a strong sense of teacher efficacy as we work to help students succeed in all aspects of their lives.

16. Provide a URL link to or text of the school’s nondiscrimination policy.

<https://4.files.edl.io/c22b/02/17/22/191202-8532370d-1ad2-445c-8fcc-00305a5a6107.pdf>

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

## **PART III – SCHOOL OVERVIEW**

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North Columbia Elementary is the oldest, smallest, and most rural school in the Columbia County School District. Nestled on 13 acres within the Appling community, this school continues to serve as a staple by meeting the needs of its stakeholders. Built in 1956, North Columbia has a rich history. It was originally an all-male school, which later consolidated with the all-girl school just two miles away. North Columbia has established a reputation of being Columbia County’s “best-kept secret,” as the primary focus of its faculty and staff is to ignite a passion for lifelong learning in all students. Additionally, North Columbia possesses a close-knit school community with increased family involvement and a high faculty morale. The faculty and staff pride themselves on maintaining strong parent-teacher relationships and providing students with a positive learning environment. Multiple parent engagement events throughout the year are hosted and are well-attended by parents.

The faculty and staff at North Columbia work diligently to meet the academic, emotional, physical, social, and cultural needs of students and help them reach their full potential. With regard to developing the academic needs of students, teachers provide students with a rigorous, integrated, and differentiated curriculum, which support the real-life application of the state standards. Student performance is continually monitored and remediation and enrichment opportunities are implemented to fill in achievement gaps and enhance learning. Regarding social and emotional development, students participate in ongoing lessons with the school counselor, are given real-world scenarios on how to be respectful, responsible, and ready to learn on a live morning show, and earn positive incentives to reinforce these behaviors. The physical development of students is enhanced through the school nutrition and physical education programs. Through a grant opportunity, students receive free breakfast and lunch, regardless of socioeconomic status. Additionally, students participate in engaging activities in physical education that build their cardio, strength, endurance, and flexibility. Classroom teachers also recognize the importance of movement and plan for brain breaks throughout the day. The cultural development of students is also supported through established student-teacher relationships. Teachers at North Columbia invest in the lives of each student. In addition, teachers implement a culturally responsive curriculum, which is inclusive and remains respectful of differences. Finally, the school’s media specialist ensures a culturally responsive book selection in the school’s learning commons.

North Columbia Elementary has implemented a Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math (STEAM) learning program where students participate in an integrated approach to learning, which is driven by exploration to solve real-world problems. In this program, second grade students learn about the life-cycle of chickens through the process of designing, building, and maintaining a chicken coop. Students receive fertilized egg donations from the community, incubate and raise them, and sell the eggs to the community. Other grade level examples include students learning about how to grow plants in a hydroponics system, how to compost and share their rich soil with other grade levels for their planting projects, how to plant vegetables and maintain the garden, and build a greenhouse from upcycled two-liter bottles. Teachers have participated in ongoing training on how to effectively implement STEAM learning. Students use either of two models as they engage in STEAM learning. They use the Engineering Design Process when they have to derive an end product and the Claim Evidence Reasoning model when they need to defend a theory. These engaging and real-life application opportunities make up the STEAM learning program and make learning memorable for the students of North Columbia.

In March 2020, schools in the Columbia County School District transitioned to Learn From Home. During this time students used Google Meet to virtually connect with their teacher(s) and classmates. In addition, the faculty and staff worked effortlessly to maintain positive relationships with students and parents during this challenging time and focused on virtually bridging the gap between home and school. Students were able to participate in a Virtual Family Night where they could participate in a scavenger hunt, math in the kitchen, read alouds, etc. Additionally, faculty and staff distributed sack lunches to students’ homes twice a week if requested by the parents. Laptops were also checked out and loaned to families when necessary for students to be able to continue their learning virtually.

At the beginning of the school year in August 2021, various protocols were implemented to keep students



safe as face-to-face learning resumed. Masks were mandatory, positive cases were tracked, and clear partitions were placed between students in classrooms and the cafeteria. Classrooms, restrooms, and even playground equipment were cleaned with special chemicals periodically throughout the day to minimize germs, and bipolar ionization air purification systems were installed in all classrooms. Unique schedules were created to keep homerooms separated, especially at recess and specials. Finally, a new dismissal process was implemented to have students intermittently walk to buses and the car rider line, rather than all at once.

North Columbia Elementary is such a special place because of these efforts and the commitment of the faculty and staff.

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

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

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

North Columbia's core curriculum is based on the Georgia Standards of Excellence. North Columbia's purpose is to ignite a passion for lifelong learning in all students. The school's direction statement states that stakeholders are "Navigating the course for success, committed to excellence, and engaging all learners daily." Teachers are committed to implementing a curriculum that is based on high expectations and prepares learners for their next levels. All educators implement the curriculum adopted by the Columbia County School District. The school district provides a scope and sequence for each content area. At North Columbia Elementary, instruction is aligned to the standards, and best practices are implemented daily. Teachers incorporate higher-order questioning and implement STEAM into their lessons. Student learning is tracked using a variety of assessment tools. Multi-Tier Systems of Support (MTSS) is utilized in an approach to focus on monitoring and adjusting the needs of learners. Teachers incorporate flexible grouping during What I Need (WIN) time to ensure the individual needs of all students are being met. MTSS meetings are planned in order to discuss students' performance and growth in the program, and discuss possible students who may need additional support based on benchmark data. Grade level teachers participate in data team meetings to discuss their students' performance on grade level posttests. Based on this data, teachers work together to discuss remediation and enrichment opportunities for students. Data is collected and analyzed, and the results are used to evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum to confirm that the learning expectations are met. Student performance is continuously evaluated to ensure they are mastering standards. Career lessons are consistently implemented across grade levels through a STEAM-infused curriculum by classroom teachers and the counselor. These programs are provided to learners to support their educational futures and career planning.

#### **1b. Reading/English language arts curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:**

Houghton Mifflin's Into Reading program is the district-adopted literacy curriculum for grades K-5. This curriculum focuses on phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension to provide a well-balanced approach to teaching literacy. ELA teachers use a variety of strategies during whole group instruction, small group instruction, literacy stations, and Tier II interventions. This curriculum, in tandem with teacher expertise, ensures high levels of literacy instruction. The literacy curriculum exposes students to a variety of topics, which integrate into other content areas. Students are exposed to vocabulary that they carry over into their science, social studies, and mathematics curricula, as well as other genres and reading levels. While teachers adhere to the district curriculum, they are also committed to meeting the needs of all readers and writers. Forty-five minutes of instructional time each day is dedicated to targeting specific skills based on data collected through benchmarks and summative assessments. During this WIN (What I Need) time, students are flexibly grouped based on students' current level of performance. A variety of groups are formed in order to target the needs of each and every student. There are strategic groups that focus on phonemic awareness and phonics. Students needs are also being met in the areas of fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, while others are served in enrichment groups and through the Gifted and Talented program. Throughout all of the intervention groups, the goal is to increase vocabulary acquisition and ability to analyze a variety of texts.

The reading curriculum provides teachers with formative and summative assessments. Teachers use data from these assessments to drive their instruction and strategically meet the needs of their students. The assessments include a variety of questioning techniques, such as multiple choice and constructed response. The curriculum also includes a grammar and writing component. The lessons reflect a gradual release model to include an "I do, we do, and you do" approach. Writing assessments are also provided, which include an extended response prompt with a rubric attached. All components of the reading and writing curriculum work together to enhance knowledge as readers and writers.

Additionally, the media specialist implements Dragon's Quest with students in first through fifth grades to encourage and motivate a love of reading. Students are divided into four different kingdoms and have the opportunity to showcase their understanding of their books such as creating 3D models, writing an author study, or creating a book trailer. Students in each kingdom work together to earn hexagons for the leaderboard. At the end of the year, the kingdom with the most hexagons earns a catered lunch.

Various instructional techniques are used in the classroom to engage students in the learning process. These different techniques meet the needs of visual, kinesthetic, and auditory learners. Teachers actively monitor each student throughout the learning process and provide them with the resources needed to guide them to success. Students are held accountable for their learning by conferencing with teachers, setting personal goals, and listing ways in which they can work towards attaining those goals. Teachers set high expectations for their readers and want to instill a lifelong love for reading in all students.

### **1c. Mathematics curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:**

Columbia County has adopted a math curriculum for students K-8 called i-Ready written by Curriculum Associates. i-Ready Math aligns with the Georgia Standards of Excellence. This program ensures all students are reasoning, practicing procedures, participating in mathematical discourse, and applying their learning to real-world problems. Students make connections, look for patterns, and consider reasonableness. There is an emphasis on flexible thinking and productive struggle woven throughout all mathematical instruction, as strong mathematicians are built through critical thinking, error analysis, and perseverance. Mathematical discourse exposes the students' understanding of mathematical topics. Students engage in active discussion to articulate strategies, listen to their peers to develop new strategies, and consider new perspectives to build understanding.

All teachers use a variety of models in the classroom, including small group, whole group, and just-in-time differentiation. The fourth and fifth grade math teachers are math endorsed instructors, as are a third grade teacher, special education teacher, and instructional specialist. Technology is used to build fact fluency, as well as provide adaptive, personalized instruction for students at all levels of learning. Students build their skills through not just rote practice, but also rigorous tasks from the Georgia Frameworks and Exemplars. These tasks encourage problem solving, while giving students the latitude to choose the best strategy for them. Additionally, students use math in real-world contexts by applying math content through the schoolwide STEAM initiative. North Columbia provides an opportunity for students to see how their math skills can be used outside the classroom through lessons such as building a chicken coop, creating Mondrian-inspired art, constructing Depression-era replicas of Hooverilles, and tracking plant growth over time.

Teachers use formative assessments to continuously monitor student understanding, and summative assessments are used to evaluate mastery. Teachers adapt their instruction according to results, and use Tier II strategies to reteach as needed. Students set personal goals for growth and are able to communicate their progress toward that goal, as it is imperative that students communicate where they are in their learning progression. Teachers meet with a collaborative team monthly to discuss data results and decide next steps. The math team meets quarterly to discuss vertical progression of standards, engage in professional development, and collaborate on best practices in math education. Math students at North Columbia are challenged, high expectations for growth are established for every child, and a passion for mathematical thinking and understanding is created.

### **1d. Science curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:**

North Columbia ensures all students demonstrate mastery of the Georgia Standards of Excellence for science by providing hands-on, inquiry-based learning experiences. Teachers use a focused curriculum called STEMscopes that involves students in the 5E Model: Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, and Evaluate. Using this model for science instruction and engagement, students are exposed to scientific phenomena to ignite their curiosity, make observations, develop good questioning, and increase their problem-solving abilities to improve their overall performance in both the classroom and in the real world. The STEMscopes curriculum has natural connections to technology, engineering, art, and math throughout

each unit for all grade levels. It also provides each grade level with all necessary materials to conduct hands-on activities with each unit of instruction. Students record observations, illustrations, and data, as well as make plans in science journals with the use of graphic organizers. They also use the Claim Evidence Reasoning (CER) model to justify a scientific claim based on their evidence and observations during lessons and research. Then, they explain how their evidence proves the claim is true within their reasonings. In addition to using STEMscopes as a framework for science instruction, several teachers plan collaborative lessons with others in the school such as math, art, or music teachers to integrate learning. In addition, others have collaborated with the Alliance Theater and other drama clubs to incorporate performing arts into their lessons. Finally, field trips are offered to expand the exploration of science standards and have given students experiences to enhance their conceptual understandings of all things science.

#### **1e. Social studies/history/civic learning curriculum content, instruction, and assessment:**

The Georgia Standards of Excellence for social studies are broken into historical, geographical, government/civic, and economic understandings. To develop, broaden, and deepen these understandings, North Columbia teachers utilize diverse literature, digital tools, hands-on materials, and class discussions to create student engagement and exploration of the world around them. Each student receives a Social Studies Weekly newspaper and has access to all the readings, online videos, and activities, which are aligned to the standards. To promote social studies inquiry, students at North Columbia explore primary and secondary sources and extract information from timelines, tables, and photographs. They also distinguish facts from opinions and identify cause-effect relationships. Teachers use appropriate, thought-provoking discussion questions that may or may not have a right or wrong answer. Students are encouraged to use the discussion process to listen to their classmates, think deeply about a topic, and form their own opinions.

Lessons often begin with a photograph or map with relevant questioning techniques. Elements of language arts such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking are then embedded into these lessons and become a natural part of social studies instruction. In addition, teachers invite members of the community to share their expertise. For example, when learning about government or civic rights and duties, fifth graders gain insight from a police officer. In third grade, students participate in a nationally recognized program called Mini-Society. This program is designed to spark the students' individual interests in both economics and entrepreneurship. Mini-Society allows students to learn basic economic concepts by having them create their own micro-economy in their classrooms. Business owners are invited to share personal experiences with balancing a budget to maximize profits. Using the pedagogical practices mentioned above, students are engaged in social studies instruction and have demonstrated their success in the development of their understanding in each area of social studies.

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

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

North Columbia Elementary houses two pre-K classes offered as part of Georgia's Lottery-Funded Pre-K program. The curriculum taught supports the Georgia Early Learning and Developmental Standards. These standards are developed around five specific areas: physical development, social/emotional development, approaches to play and learning, communication, language and literacy, as well as cognitive development. North Columbia's pre-K classrooms offer a high-quality preschool program with literacy-rich environments and many hands-on learning opportunities through a play-based curriculum. Assessment is an ongoing process designed to ensure students are progressing in all areas and to help with early identification of special needs. There is a direct correlation between students who attend North Columbia's pre-K program and the student success rate in the primary grades. Students in the pre-K program exhibit better school readiness skills when they enter kindergarten at the beginning of the school year. North Columbia's pre-K program is designed to create a solid foundation for all students, including at-risk and disadvantaged students. Pre-K students at North Columbia are prepared with a solid foundation in literacy and well-developed social/emotional skills. Reading skills and concepts about print are more refined, which is evident through their performance on the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment at the beginning of the school year.

The kindergarten standards list pre-K standards as a prerequisite; therefore, pre-K teachers and kindergarten teachers conduct vertical planning together to ensure the students are ready and prepared for the kindergarten curriculum. These high expectations and seamless transitions continue throughout the upper grade levels as well.

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

North Columbia's purpose is to create lifelong learning in all students. Teachers and staff believe this begins with academics and extends beyond the general education classroom to areas such as physical education, the Arts, counseling, and library media. All students in grades pre-K through fifth grade have the opportunity to learn valuable skills from teachers in these areas weekly.

All students participate in art and music classes once or twice weekly for 45 minutes each class period. The art teacher teaches a variety of different art skills using the Georgia Performance Standards, which allow each student the opportunity to build a foundation in the arts while fostering creativity. Students are taught how to use different materials such as clay, different types of paint, oil pastels, and more. Student artwork is always displayed throughout the school. Additionally, exceptional artwork is showcased each year at the main public library within the district. The music teacher uses hands-on lessons with instruments to foster a love for music. Students can participate in chorus or the Ukulele Club, which both meet outside of school hours. The students in each grade level have opportunities throughout the year to participate in programs and performances at PTO meetings, the Veterans Day program, the local Christmas festival, and more. In addition to weekly lessons, the art and music teachers plan collaboratively with grade level teachers to support the arts portion of the school's STEAM initiative. Creating songs about genetic traits, building replicas of shanties, and creating galaxy paintings are just a few examples.

All students participate in physical education for 45 minutes, several times a week. Students are taught team building skills, the benefit of daily exercise, and healthy eating habits. A variety of units are taught through the physical education program such as bowling, golf, exercise routines, and basketball. Students also participate in the Jump Rope for Heart initiative, which raises money for the American Heart Association.

Teachers plan collaboratively for 90 minutes every other week. As they are planning, students participate in classes with the counselor and media specialist on a rotating basis. The counselor provides lessons such as character education, study skills, and healthy attitudes. She is available for individuals and provides small group opportunities for counseling as well. Students also participate in lessons with the media specialist. Units on digital citizenship, coding, makerspace, Google tools, and more are provided. A variety of literature is also promoted to students during this time using book hooks, book trailers, and book talks. The counselor and media specialist work closely and plan collaboratively with teachers to assist in classroom lessons or with individual students.

When students are not with the counselor or media specialist for these extended periods, they are given the opportunity to practice technical skills and take advantage of tools provided by the curriculum for supplemental instruction. Teachers, along with the media specialist, work hard to provide opportunities for students to be producers and not just consumers of technology. Students are encouraged through regular classroom instruction to use Google tools, green screen technology, presentation programs such as Adobe Spark, Powtoon, and Flipgrid to express themselves creatively and share new knowledge.

## **3. Academic Supports**

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

North Columbia Elementary uses the framework of Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) to help provide academic strategies for students below grade level. Intervention needs are determined based on individual weaknesses. These weaknesses are identified through a universal screener of all students using district-wide benchmarks, in addition to teacher observation and other formative assessments. District benchmarks are completed three times during the school year. Student support is then determined by following the Pathways implemented by the district. Students scoring below the 16th percentile on district

benchmarks receive 90 minutes of daily intensive reading instruction through a core replacement program until they are able to score above the 16th percentile on a subsequent benchmark. This year, after the winter benchmark, 30% of our intensive students exited the core replacement program.

Students falling between the 16th and 35th percentile in reading receive 45 minutes of strategic instruction in their identified area of weakness. Strategic interventions focus on one or more of the following areas: reading comprehension, vocabulary, phonological awareness, phonics, and high frequency words. Students receive this in addition to their core reading instruction. Additionally, there is ongoing data collection, and student performance is closely monitored and discussed at monthly MTSS meetings. As student needs change, program adjustments are made to ensure the most effective use of instructional time.

In the area of math, weaknesses may be identified in one or more of the following categories: numbers and operations, algebraic thinking, data and measurement, and geometry. Teachers address these weaknesses within the allotted math time through small groups and individualized instruction. If a student scores below the 16th percentile on the benchmark, an individual plan is implemented to ensure the proper support and data collection is put in place for the student's success. This individual plan is monitored by the student support team every four to six weeks. The team problem solves and makes changes as needed in efforts to provide the appropriate support for all students.

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

The faculty and staff at North Columbia Elementary cater instruction to meet the individual learning needs of students. Students performing above grade level may be referred for gifted testing. Students can be recommended for testing by a teacher, by parent request, or automatically qualify from existing test scores. Qualifying students participate in a 45-minute segment during their WIN time with the gifted education teacher. Currently, 10% of the student population is in the gifted program. In this program students experience an integrated approach to learning and participate in tasks that deepen their understanding of grade level standards, promote collaboration and increase their problem-solving abilities, creativity skills, and critical thinking. Students in the gifted program participate in the Future Problem Solving, STEAMIFY, and Perennial Math competitions. In addition, students also learn how to play chess, research and present new knowledge on self-selected topics, and go on engaging field trips that enhance the learning experience. Experiencing a behind-the-scenes tour of the Biltmore Estate in Asheville, NC, the Georgia Aquarium, Riverbanks Zoo, an architectural tour of downtown Augusta, GA, and participation in a virtual trip to the Turtle Hospital in the Florida Keys are examples of how learning experiences are enhanced in the gifted program.

High-achieving students that do not qualify for the gifted program are enriched in their general education classroom. Teachers use data to assess where students are and know which students need enrichment. If students indicate mastery of a standard, the next step is to apply that knowledge in real-world problems and applications. Examples include having students participate in Graham Fletcher's 3-Act Tasks, culminating tasks from the Georgia Frameworks, and Steve Wybourny's Esti-Mysteries.

Catering to students' individual learning needs is of utmost importance to the teachers and staff of North Columbia. Providing enrichment opportunities for higher learners creates memorable experiences, enhances their learning, and deepens their understanding of the Georgia Standards of Excellence.

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

Approximately 20 percent of the students at North Columbia receive special education services through an Individualized Education Program (IEP). A variety of special education models are used to ensure each student receives quality instruction throughout the day at his or her individual learning level. Students who receive services in reading are served in a resource setting using an intensive intervention program if they are reading two grade levels below. Other students are served in co-teaching classrooms where they have access to grade level content with the support of a general education and special education teacher. Typically, students in grades K-5 are most successful using the co-teaching model in mathematics as well, but in some cases, students are pulled out from the general classroom if math deficits are vast.

Early intervention is key to student success. Young learners are assessed in the areas of speech and language development. Deficits in articulation and language are addressed by the speech teacher who serves students in 30-minute sessions once or twice a week.

North Columbia also has two small group segments that meet daily and focus on the direct teaching of social skills to students with behavioral needs. Students excel in this environment. They learn how to react to certain situations and how to interact with one another. In particular, these classes have greatly benefited students with autism and those with emotional behavior disorders. Students are transferring what they learn in the pull-out setting to the classroom. To date, the number of office referrals this year has decreased by 18 percent. Some of this success is attributed to these special education courses.

Students in special education programs find success at North Columbia. Educators work together to give accommodations and modifications to help students flourish.

**3d. English Language Learners, if a special program or intervention is offered:**

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

The academic needs of North Columbia's low socioeconomic and homeless populations are addressed through targeted interventions. However, there are various programs offered to support this population. Each week students in need receive take home meals for the weekend. In this bag are individual snacks, drinks, and microwavable items for lunch or breakfast. These items are provided through a local church. Volunteers work together to purchase the supplies and pack them individually for students. The volunteers also deliver the bags to the school. This program would not be possible without the involvement of the community.

Volunteers built a Blessing Box on the school's campus. Local church members, teachers, students, and local families donate pantry items. Families in need are encouraged to take items from the Blessing Box which is restocked as needed.

At North Columbia, a clothes closet is provided for students. When needed, socks, shoes, pants, and shirts are given to students. Coats and gloves are offered to students in need during the colder months of the year. Backpacks and school supplies are provided to students in need throughout the year as well. Support from individual parents, families, and churches allows these items to be offered.

Due to the variety of needs of low socioeconomic and homeless students, mental health services are offered to students as needed. When indicated, students experiencing trauma or crisis are referred to outside counselors that work with the school and the families to provide services within the school. This partnership with Transitional Family Services benefits families in the school community.

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

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

North Columbia faculty and staff strive to engage, motivate, and provide a positive environment that supports all aspects of student learning. A positive school environment is crucial for successful learning. The first step to building a positive learning environment is developing relationships with families. The small population of students enables every teacher to personally know the students.

At North Columbia, teachers engage students in a variety of ways. The media specialist transforms the Learning Commons into exciting learning environments where students role play and learn through real-world experiences. In this type of setting, students can review and learn new concepts in a more engaging manner. The teacher and media specialist collaborate to prepare lessons that align to the standards and expand student learning. Many fun and engaging room transformations are prepared for all grade levels and are successfully executed throughout the year. Examples include rooms such as the glow room, an operating room, escape room, beach room, and even the star lab.

Teachers and staff are committed to excellence and strive to engage and motivate all students daily. The students are encouraged to always do their best and to ask questions about learning to deepen their understanding. Students are rewarded with PBIS celebrations and reward days in response to meeting all school-wide expectations of being respectful, responsible, and ready to learn. Students are also motivated individually by working toward a positive office referral where a phone call from an administrator is made to the family member of their choice.

Friendly competitions encourage and motivate students to excel. A few examples of these competitions include March Madness, SWAG, and Dragon's Quest. Each semester, students take benchmarks to monitor their learning. Students with the highest achievement gains in growth and performance in each grade level are awarded SWAG tags (Students Who Achievement Gains.) Students are announced on the morning show and their pictures are taken for display.

Students perform better when they know what is expected of them, feel safe and loved and have the motivation to achieve. In order for students to perform in this way, they need to be in school. To encourage perfect attendance, students receive certificates and small trinkets for perfect attendance each nine weeks. In May, students with perfect attendance for the entire year are entered into a drawing for a chance to win a bike. Local businesses and families donate four bikes for the giveaways. Many students are more motivated to attend school knowing they have a chance to win one of these bikes.

Engaging students has always been a focus at North Columbia even during school closings. Even while students were learning from home, they continued to be welcomed each day on a live morning show with daily read alouds followed by virtual instruction and classroom interaction through Google Meets. Daily learning routines were in place to encourage students to participate daily. Teachers surprised students in their class with social distance visits to their homes to take an end-of-year gift or just say goodbye and have a great summer.

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

North Columbia prides itself on the partnerships fostered with families and the surrounding community. The success experienced is largely due to these partnerships. The school has partnered with various businesses and parent experts within the community, including local businesses such as Sanderlin's Nursery and Harlem's Attic Treasures. Some of these businesses solely provide monetary donations for school improvements while others share their expertise with groups of students in the learning environment. Parents with expertise in raising chickens partnered with second grade to help them learn how to care for their chickens, and our Dads on Duty team helped them build a permanent chicken coop that could properly house the animals. Our STEAM initiative has brought about teachers reaching out to more local experts than ever before. Students worked with the regional manager of Atlanta Gas Light who funded the kindergarten



vegetable gardens, as well as the third grade greenhouse project to support their learning of the 3 R's, Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle. Additionally, multiple parent engagement nights are hosted throughout the year at North Columbia to help build parent-teacher relationships. Prior to COVID, Academic Parent Teacher Teams (APTT) were implemented where parents visited each of their children's classrooms and participated in activities that demonstrated what skills were being learned at that time in each grade level. Confidential student data folders were provided that allowed parents to see their child's current level of performance within the grade level and contained academic activities that parents could work on with their child at home to increase student performance. This partnership aided in bridging the gap between home and school.

Parents are invited to volunteer in the school on a regular basis. The range of commitment varies from weekly volunteers that mentor students and assist with clerical tasks to parents that are only able to attend field trips or other special events. All volunteers are greatly appreciated and welcomed by faculty and staff.

Various communication apps are used by teachers to keep parents informed and connected such as Remind and Google Classroom. The school's Instagram, Facebook page, website, and individual teacher websites are used to provide updated information to parents about upcoming events, current activities happening within the school, and contact information for teachers and staff within the building.

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

The faculty and staff at North Columbia take pride in maintaining a strong body of professional knowledge and are in continuous pursuit of best practices for educating students. After gaining teacher input, the administration and leadership team analyze data at a deep level to determine the most meaningful professional development opportunities for the faculty. Experiences are provided which cultivate and improve the leaders within the school community. Teachers are highly valued, respected, supported, and encouraged. Sixty-seven percent of North Columbia's teachers have graduate degrees, including specialist and doctorate degrees.

At North Columbia Elementary, it is considered an obligation to participate in continuing education in order to improve the learning environment, learner achievement, and the institution's effectiveness. This is done through professional development in all areas, including math, reading, visible learning, and STEAM. Out of 32 certified teachers, North Columbia employs sixteen teachers who are gifted endorsed, seven teachers who are reading endorsed, six teachers who are Google certified, five teachers who are math endorsed, and three teachers have their ESOL endorsement. With the incorporation of a new math curriculum, all teachers have participated in professional development of the i-Ready program.

The Columbia County School System has a new teacher induction program designed to ensure all new staff members have the knowledge and skills to improve student performance. Through this program, a North Columbia veteran teacher acts as a mentor, providing guidance and expertise to a new teacher. Peer observations, documented mentoring time, and self-reflections are also a component of this mentoring program. Growth and improvements in student learning and professional practice are evaluated through the Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES) observations and student data.

North Columbia Elementary attracts and retains qualified personnel who support its purpose and direction. Through strong leadership, a culture of commitment, dedication, and loyalty has been established. Teacher input is collected through surveys, email correspondence, and leadership committee discussions. Administration values this input and always considers it when making decisions. Data is collected annually through the TKES and parent surveys to determine the effectiveness of teachers. Teacher morale is a priority for administration at North Columbia. Administrators look for the opportunity to celebrate teachers and their dedication. This is evident through the tremendous years of consistent employment in the school.

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

Leadership at North Columbia Elementary is a true partnership. It is a belief that NCE operates as one and it takes all parts to ensure the social, behavioral, and academic success of all students. This starts at the top

with the principal who is a servant leader. She models the values, beliefs, and behaviors that influence others to strive for excellence, while also ensuring that everyone is treated with fairness, dignity, and respect. Working together, for the betterment of students, is a defining characteristic of North Columbia.

Teachers are valued and respected for their knowledge and experience and serve as leaders through committees based on areas of expertise and interest. The leadership team at North Columbia is composed of one teacher from each grade level, the instructional specialist, school counselor, special education teacher, and administrators. This team is collaborative, and data-driven in an effort to create and monitor school improvement goals. Team members disseminate information to faculty and staff, facilitate professional development, and serve as the voice for their department. Math and reading vertical teams meet to analyze student performance and focus on curriculum alignment to ensure a smooth transition from one grade to the next. Grade-level data teams, along with administrators and the instructional specialist meet bimonthly to analyze data, plan for next steps, and acknowledge successes. Collaborating is at the center of each committee's meetings to determine effective strategies, programs, and resources, therefore utilizing one another's strengths to positively affect student achievement.

At North Columbia, one of the goals is to help students navigate the course for success. Teachers do this by establishing their independence and helping students take ownership and responsibility for academic and personal success. Students are leaders of their learning through goal setting. After each benchmark, module, and unit assessment, classes celebrate successes, and each student is encouraged to set attainable goals based on performance. Students of the month are recognized for being role models and leaders in following school-wide expectations, inspiring others to do the same. Experience leads to responsibility, and as such, North Columbia invests in students as leaders. Fifth graders serve as leaders by serving on safety patrol, raising and lowering the flag daily, and helping produce the morning show on a daily basis. In doing so, they are building independence and developing responsibility. Fifth graders also participate in 4H and can be inducted into Junior Beta Club, both of which cultivate community involvement and service to others.

The leadership structure at North Columbia empowers all to share their voice and use strengths to build a positive place for students to learn and thrive.

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

At North Columbia Elementary, the faculty and staff strive to meet the needs of all learners on a daily basis regardless of background. All students are valued and treated equally. When students are loved and respected, they work hard in school and strive to meet personal goals. At North Columbia, it is believed that all students can learn and achieve excellence, and therefore, students are currently attaining goals at high levels.

While ethnic diversity is not abundant at North Columbia, students are taught about various cultures and backgrounds focusing on the importance of getting along with others and being able to see circumstances from other viewpoints. Respect for all is a key component within the school community. Parents, teachers, and other stakeholders commonly work together to make sure every child in the school has whatever is needed to be successful academically, socially, and emotionally. Families compliment school employees regularly on going above and beyond to meet the needs of all learners. Administrators, counselors, and social workers consistently work together to provide resources for North Columbia families in need.

A growing population within the school currently is students being raised by his/her grandparents. This quickly growing subgroup has required administrators and counselors to develop plans to work with these students in homes that have changed. The school has served as a liaison with home issues, lack of technology, and general concerns that occur when students must leave their parents and are uprooted to another location. Counseling services and mentors are available to students as needed.

In addition to working with individual families, all students embrace Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) practices. These center around the School-Wide Expectation that "Dragons Dare to Be Respectful, Responsible, and Ready to Learn." Specific criteria are taught to students about how these expectations look in every aspect of the school. Students are held accountable for their actions as PBIS is

implemented school-wide and all faculty and staff members are trained to encourage students to follow these expectations in becoming well-rounded citizens.

At North Columbia, NCE's Essential 50, a set of expectations adapted from Ron Clark's Essential 55, are implemented. School expectations teach children to respect one another, embrace differences, and to get along with others in general.

As teachers work diligently each day to educate students for a bright future, they understand the importance of not only ensuring each child is prepared academically, but also socially and mentally prepared for the world ahead.

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

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North Columbia Elementary's success is rooted in building strong relationships among students, parents, and staff. These relational roots provide strength and ground the school's community in a shared vision. From the time students arrive at school, it is North Columbia's mission to ensure they feel seen, loved, and supported. Every student is greeted daily in the lobby upon arrival by administrators, the counselor, and other faculty members. Faculty and staff set students up for success by making them feel welcomed and accepted. The importance of teaching the whole child is a primary focus. The entire staff at North Columbia care deeply about the students' lives in and outside of the school building. From calling each family within the first two weeks of school to attending their extracurricular activities, teachers go the extra mile to show students their value. This translates to students' success because they are now willing to take risks and go the extra mile for their teachers.

Building healthy relationships allows teachers to include students in curricular decisions, where appropriate, to provide the most relevant, meaningful lessons in which students are eager to engage. Students will then develop conceptual understandings and apply their knowledge, not just memorize facts. Young learners develop a strong sense of buy-in, are able to make connections, and think deeply about topics based on teachers' use of interest and student input.

The relationships with stakeholders and community members are also very important. Experts in the community are invited into the classroom to share their expertise through STEAM initiatives. This provides the appropriate amount of rigor and relevance, and increases teacher efficacy as they build effective practices and partnerships to empower students to think critically about learning topics. Families are truly invested in the well-being of the school at all levels. This is displayed through their willingness to mentor, volunteer, and provide any resources needed to enhance the learning experience.

Making and fostering connections with students is a fundamental part of what has helped North Columbia staff support the academic and social-emotional gains observed in students year after year. Having these strong relationships helps empower teachers to make informed decisions about instructional adjustments and differentiation. Teachers are able to understand students' passions and interests and weave them into meaningful and engaging lessons. Relationships are the key to student success at North Columbia Elementary.